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Socio-Cultural Variables and Attitude of Couples Toward Family Planning in Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This research study was designed to examine the socio-cultural variables and attitude of couples toward family planning in Cross River State, Nigeria. In order to effectively carry out the study, two research hypothesis were formulated to guide the study. These hypotheses states: that religion cannot significantly influence attitude of couples toward family planning; traditional belief cannot significantly influence attitude of couples toward family planning. To test the hypotheses and direct the study focally, questionnaire were designed to solicit information from respondents in the study area. The data obtained were subjected to statistical computations using One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and simple linear regression analysis. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach alpha reliability method and the coefficients ranged between .79 and .89. One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Simple Linear Regression analysis were used for data analysis. The result revealed that religion, traditional belief, gender roles, mass media, family culture and education have significant influence on attitude of couples toward family planning. It was recommended that government should design adequate awareness programmes targeted at religious leaders in the state on family planning, design community education programmes to educate community members of certain traditional belief and embrace modernization

	and develop a platform through which public health workers can interact with couples and advise them on the importance of family planning and why they should allow their wives to use the modern methods. These will improve the attitude of couples toward family planning in Cross River State.

Introduction and background

Population explosion is an undesirable situation in any society. This is because it has an incremental adverse effect on all areas of societal life. Uncontrolled population growth appears to have more social, economic, environmental, and educational consequences in developing countries including Nigeria. Every second, on average, four or five children are born on the earth. In that same second, two other people die.

Overpopulation is the state whereby the human population rises to an extent exceeding the carrying capacity of the ecological setting. In an overpopulated environment, the number of people might be more than the available essential materials for survival such as transport, water, shelter, food or social amenities. This regularly contributes to environmental deterioration, worsening in the quality of life, or even the disintegration of the population. Due to immigration, the decline in mortality rates, medical breakthroughs, and increased birth rates, populations will always increase and eventually gives rise to overpopulation.

To help temper this wildly unsustainable situation, we need to understand what's contributing to overpopulation and overconsumption and how these trends are affecting everything from climate change to sociopolitical unrest. Many people worry that overpopulation will cause or perhaps already is causing resource depletion and environmental degradation that threaten the ecological life-support systems on which we all depend. These fears often lead to demands for immediate, worldwide birth-control programs to reduce fertility rates and to eventually stabilize or even shrink the total number of humans.

A larger population means a larger workforce, more geniuses, and more ideas about what to do. Along with every new mouth comes a pair of hands. Family planning and birth control are essential for stabilizing populations. The number of children a couple decides to have and the methods they use to regulate fertility, however, are strongly influenced by religion, traditional belief, gender roles, mass media, family culture and education.

Between 1989 and 1993, the Federal Ministry of Health, developed and rolled out a National Information, Education and Communication (IEC) campaign to promote family planning services in Nigeria. This was a calculated attempt to increase the awareness, adoption and use of contraceptives among Nigerian citizens, with the underlying objective of reducing the

population growth rate and maintaining a manageable population size that can enable the country to maximize its socio-economic potentials as other developing countries.

Similarly, it was observed that some communities in Cross River State, that some couples have more than five children and are still counting. Some couples have many children with less than a year birth spacing margin. This is critically more serious in some rural communities in the State where some men have more than two wives and each wife has more than four children. Apart from this, the rate of teenage pregnancy is also alarming in rural communities of the state, a situation that has caused many teenagers to dropout of schools. During interaction with some couples in some communities in the State, some were very bold to say that they cannot do family planning because they need more children and excessive quest for male or female children, as being the reason why they have many children.

The use of modern family planning methods among couples may not also be unconnected with their thinking and feelings about family planning. This means that the attitude of couples toward family planning is a determinant factor of their acceptance and practice of family planning.

Couples attitude toward the use of family planning is a mental state, a value, belief, or feeling, and a predisposition to behavior or action (Altmann, 2008).

It is a psychological tendency or disposition, expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor (Bohner & Dickel, 2011; Eagly & Chaiken, 2007). Attitude is the degree of favourableness or unfavourableness of a person with regard to a psychological object which may be a person, a group, an idea, a symbol, or anything with regard to which people could harbor positive or negative feelings (Buhagiar & Sammut, 2020). This implies that attitude of couples towards family planning is their mental evaluative disposition about family planning, the belief they have about contraceptive use, the value they place on family planning practice and their subjective feelings about family planning methods. It could also be seen as the expression of acceptance or rejection of contraceptive use by couples.

Attitude of couples towards family planning is a psychological construct that can only be observed through behavioral manifestations of the couples towards the practice or use of contraceptives. Thus, their acceptance of family planning, use of contraceptives, preference for birth spacing, and willingness to have more children, can be used to measure the attitude of couples toward family planning. Couples with positive attitude to family planning will always be willing to use contraceptives, space their children, delay conception, listen to family planning messages on television and radios, and visit health centers to receive proper reproductive health services (Mustafa, Azmat, Hameed, Ali, Ishaque, Hussain, Ahmed & Munroe, 2015).

On the other hand, couples who display negative attitude to family planning, when they are not willing to control their reproductive life; space their children, take any form of contraceptive,

listen to family planning broadcast, and are not willing to visit any healthcare facility for professional guidance on healthy reproductive living.

However, the tendency to accept or reject the use of contraceptives by couples may be influenced by several factors within their environment. Similarly, traditional belief can also determine the disposition of couples toward family planning acceptance. Traditional belief is a cultural variable that depicts the ancestral custom, belief, methods, and practice of people handed down from generation to generation. Every traditional society has a traditional belief system that shapes the way people within that traditional or cultural enclave think or feel about social events ideas, and activities of other people.

Religious affiliation and practices of different set of people in the society can influence their attitude towards family planning in any society. For instance, as sited by Barrett, DaVanzo, Ellison & Grammich, (2014) Roman Catholic doctrine is completely against the use of artificial method contraception based on their perception that it encourages infidelity, increases the chances of sexual activities among people and leads to loss of respect for women.

Srikanthan and Reid (2008) noted that among the factors that post significant barriers to the use and application of contraceptive are personal beliefs and values that are shaped by both culture and religion. Research has also shown that the control of women's bodies and sexuality in the name of religion is common to all forms of fundamentalisms which view women's attempts to exercise bodily autonomy as a sinful transgression against family and society, as ordained by religion (Salam, 2017).

Salam (2017) also explained that in Northern Nigeria which has a larger Muslim population, contraception usage is low than amongst Christian groups. This implies that, religious practices of different set of people in society can determine how couples in those settings view family planning.

Sundararajan, Yoder, Kihunrwa, Kalluvya, Downs, Mwakisole and Downs (2019) carried out a study to examine how religion impacted the uptake of family planning in Northwestern Tanzania. The researchers explained that prior studies have demonstrated the complex and variable relationship between religious faith and beliefs about family planning in sub-Saharan Africa, but the emphasis of the present study was to identify the major reason for the poor uptake of family planning in Tanzania where women and their partners were uncertain about whether pregnancy prevention is compatible with their religious beliefs.

Twenty-four focus group discussions with 206 participants were conducted in Mwanza, Tanzania between 2016 and 2017. Six groups were among Christian men, six among Christian women, six among Muslim men, and six among Muslim women. Among Christians, 98% were

Protestants. Focus groups were also divided by gender and religion to facilitate discussion about gender-specific and religion-specific factors influencing family planning utilization.

Qualitative data were analyzed using a thematic, phenomenological approach. Major findings revealed that family planning was experienced differently based on gender, and that male authority conflicts with female embodied knowledge, leading to negotiation or covert contraceptive use. Secondly, the study showed that religious acceptability of family planning methods was of central importance, though participants differed in their interpretations of their religion's stance on this question.

Most who found family planning incompatible with their faith affirmed their responsibility to give birth to as many children as God would bless them. Others found family planning to be acceptable given their moral responsibility to care for and protect their children by limiting the family size. It was concluded that both religious tradition and gender dynamics strongly influence the uptake of family planning, with a wide range of interpretations of religious traditions affecting the perceived acceptability of family planning.

Gueye, Speizer, Corroon and Okigbo (2015) studied belief in family planning myths at the individual and community levels and modern contraceptive use in urban Africa. The researchers submitted that negative myths and misconceptions about family planning are a barrier to modern contraceptive use, and that most research on the subject has focused on individual beliefs about contraception. This made it necessary to examine how the prevalence of negative myths in a community affected the aggregate level of method use. Baseline data collected in 2010–2011 by the Measurement, Learning & Evaluation project on women aged 15–49 living in selected cities in Kenya, Nigeria and Senegal were used.

Mosha, Ruben and Kakoko (2013) explained that in Nigeria, knowledge of family planning is generally high, but use remains low, and the main reasons for this lack of family planning use include fear of complications, lack of understanding of methods and fear of opposition from the husband. This implies that gender roles have implication on the family planning behaviour couples.

Methodology

The research design adopted for the study was descriptive survey design. Descriptive Survey research design according to (Isangedigi,2012) is a research approach that attempts to systematically collect data about a group of individuals (sample) who have similar characteristics, through the use of written or oral data collection instruments: interviews, questionnaires, telephone interview, mails, and internet, concerning participants' responses on facts, opinions, and attitudes, to enable the researcher to study the group (population) of which the researcher has no control over the independent and dependent variables and the phenomenon is studied in its raw form as it is happening. This design was chosen because this research is designed to explore the nature of the statistical contribution of socio-cultural

variables and attitude of couples towards family planning in Cross River State within the period of this study.

The population of this study comprised of all registered couples in each LGAs councils marriage registry in Cross River State. Information obtained from National Bureau of Statistics, 2020 reveals that there are four hundred and thirteen thousand three hundred and twenty one (413,321) registered couples spread across the three Education Zones in Cross River State of Cross River State. This made the total population of the study to be four hundred and thirteen thousand three hundred and twenty one (413,321) subjects.

The sampling techniques adopted for this study was multi-stage sampling. Multistage sampling is a sampling procedure that involves a combination of different sampling techniques based on the peculiarity of the population. Accidental and stratified sampling techniques were used for this study. Accidental sampling also known as grab sampling, convenience sampling, or opportunity sampling is a type of non-probability sampling that involves the sample being drawn from that part of the population that is close to hand. Stratified sampling is a probability sampling technique wherein the researcher divides the entire population into different subgroups or strata, then randomly selects the final subjects proportionally from the different strata.

The research instrument used for the study was questionnaire. The questionnaire is divided into three sections: Section A of the questionnaire contained background information. Section B sought information on the variables such as gender roles, mass media, traditional belief, and family culture, section C designed to measure the attitude of couples toward family planning in Cross River State. The questionnaire was administered on selected registered couples in LGA council's marriage registry in Cross River State.SVATFPQ had 44 items (5 for section A, 24 for section B and 20 for section C) on a modified 4-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (DA) and Strongly Disagree (SD).

The structured questionnaire was subject to face and content validity and it was given to research experts for scrutiny and modification before they were used. To test for reliability of the instruments, Cronbach alpha reliability method was used. The instrument was administered once to 50 married couples in communities in Cross River State which were not part of the communities selected for the main study. After the instrument was administered and retrieved from the respondents, they were coded, and the data subjected to statistical analysis using Cronbach alpha reliability scale. The reliability coefficient estimates realized from the result were within the range of .79 to .89. This indicated that the instrument is fit for the study. The questionnaire were administered personally to respondents in the communities, copies of the questionnaire that were correctly filled and retrieved, was used for data analysis in the study. However, out of the 1988 copies administered, 1440 were collected and analyzed.

Results

Ho:1

The null hypothesis states that Religion cannot significantly influence attitude of couples toward family planning. This hypothesis was tested using One-way Analysis of variance (ANOVA).

Table 1: One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) on the influence of religion on attitude of couples toward family planning in Cross River State.

Group	N		Mean	Std. Dev.		Std. Error	
Christian	768		56.19	8.299		.299	
Traditionalist	576		55.33	10.299		.429	
Muslim	96		57.50	4.524		.462	
Total	1440		55.93	8.988		.237	
Source of variation	Sum of Squares	df_{cal}	Mean Square	F_{cal}	Sig.	df_{crit}	F_{crit}
Between Groups	492.600	2	246.300	3.058	.047	2: 1437	2.995
Within Groups	115757.000	1437	80.555				
Total	116249.600	1439					
Group	Christian (N=768)		Traditionalist (N= 576)			Muslim (N= 96)	
Christian	56.19a		.854b			-1.312b	
Traditionalist	1.898c		55.33a			-2.167b	
Muslim	1.349c		2.191c*			57.50a	

*P <.05

a. Group means are placed on the principal diagonal.
b. Difference between the group means are placed above the diagonal
c. Fisher's LSD t-value are placed below the diagonal.

The result revealed a calculated F-ratio of 3.058 ($p < .05$), which is statistically significant at .05 probability level with critical F-ratio of 2.995 and 1:1480 degrees of freedom. The result indicated that the F-ratio is statistically significant at .05 probability level because it is greater than the critical F-ratio of 2.993. On the strength of this result, therefore the null hypothesis stands rejected.

Ho:2

The null hypothesis posits that Traditional belief cannot significantly influence attitude of couples towards family planning. This hypothesis was tested using Simple Linear Regression analysis.

Table 2: Summary of simple linear regression analysis for the influence of traditional belief on attitude of couples toward family planning in Cross River State

Model	R	R^2	Adj. R^2	SE	ΔR^2	ΔF	df_1	df_2	pΔF
1	.675[a]	.456	.455	6.634	.456	1203.730	1	1438	.000
Source	SS	Df	MS	F-ratio	Sig.	β	t	SE	P
Regression	52970.260	1	52970.260	1203.730	.000[b]	-3.475	-34.695	.100	.000
Residual	63279.340	1438	44.005						
Total	116249.600	1439							

a. Criterion: Attitude of couples towards family planning
b. Predictors: (Constant), traditional belief

The result in Table 2 shows a t-value of -34.695 ($p < .05$). This implies that traditional belief contributed significantly to the variation in the attitude of couples towards family planning in Cross River State. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Discussions

The analysis in the hypothesis one observed that religion cannot significantly influence attitude of couples toward family planning in Cross River State, revealed that religion significantly influenced attitude of couples toward family planning in Cross River State. This implies that different practices among religions groups in the State have implications for the way couples see and adopt modern family panning in the State. This result suggests that couples in different religious groups behave differently towards the acceptance, adoption and use of family planning. The direction of this result is quite obvious. Different religious groups have their belief system which determines their teachings about family planning. Therefore, it is natural that Christian couples, traditional couples and Muslim couples to think differently about family planning. This will further manifest in their level of acceptance, adoption and use of contraceptives or any other modern family planning approaches to control childbearing. This result agrees with the position of Srikanthan and Reid (2008) who noted that among the factors that post significant barriers to the use and application of contraceptive are personal beliefs.

The analysis of the second null hypothesis revealed a significant relationship between traditional belief and attitude of couples towards family planning in Cross River State. This implies that traditional beliefs held by different communities in Cross River Stage have implications for the way couples see and adopt modern family panning in the State. This result suggests that couples in different communities behave differently towards the acceptance, adoption and use of family planning. The direction of this result is not far from reality. Different communities have their traditional belief system which determines what they hold as value and those they hold as taboo.

Therefore, it is natural that couples from different communities will think differently about family planning. This will further manifest in their level of acceptance, adoption and use of contraceptives or any other modern family planning approaches to control childbearing. This result agrees with the opinion of Palo, Samal, Behera and Pati (2020) submitted that a large

number of tribal societies follow their traditional customs of sexual behavior and child rearing practices, thereby making them further vulnerable for unhygienic and risky reproductive practices.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made;

1. Government as well as NGOs should design adequate awareness programmes targeted at religious leaders in the State on family planning. This will help to change their negative perception about family planning and encourage their members to adopt family planning methods in the State.
2. Since traditional belief is found to have negative influence on couples' attitude to family planning, government as well as NGOs should design community education programmes aimed at educating community members of the need to change certain traditional belief and embrace modernization. This can promote the use of family planning methods among couples.

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