

Culture and Birth-Control Practices Among Couples in Gwagwalada Area Council, Abuja Nigeria: Implications for Counselling and Family Wellbeing

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Abstract

This study was designed to understand the influence of culture on birth-control practices and acceptability to selected respondents for their family wellbeing. It was hypothesized that culture does not play significant role in the acceptability and practices of family planning. The descriptive survey design was used as well as random sampling of 384 couples as respondents. A modified version of the Family Planning Practices Questionnaire (FPPQ) by Agbakuribe (2011) was administered to the respondents. The findings showed that there was no significant difference in the family planning practices and acceptability among couples in Gwagwalada Area Council of the Federal Capital Territory on the basis of their culture. It can therefore be concluded that culture is waning in its influence over family planning methods and practices. Sociological changes such as migration from rural to urban centres, influence of technological advancements among other factors may have played a significant role in this regard. It is therefore recommended that intensified effort should be made by policy makers to create more awareness on family planning by involving counselling psychologists to provide appropriate counselling to married men and women in order to improve their birth-control practices for their family wellbeing.

Key words: Birth-control; Culture; Counselling; Family wellbeing

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INTRODUCTION

Rapid population growth is as a result of improved control over deaths that has not been matched by controlled births. This imbalance has created a ratio of growth that will double the current world population of 3½ billion by the end of the century (Okomma, 2008).

With the consideration of the above assertion and its consequences, the promotion of birth-control by sensitizing families of such countries on the nation's population problems and their implications remains the solution to effectively reduce population explosion.

Wada (2012) explains birth-control or family planning as "a fertility regulation process mutually agreed and embarked upon by a man and his wife for the purpose of building a healthy and happy home". Owing to this assertion, family planning is a conscious and deliberate effort to determine family size by controlling pregnancy so that child birth occurs by choice and not by chance.

In spite of the lofty objectives of introducing family planning, the impact of the programme in Nigerian society has not been much. Even after over twenty-eight years of the development of organized community support for family planning, it is observed that the family planning activities in the country have been beset with many problems like cultural resistance.(Ottong, 1981; Orji, 2006).

Over three (3) decades ago, family planning was seen as foreign and taboo in Nigeria with many other African countries inclusive as children were seen as gifts from God and any attempt at birth control was considered

sinful. Irrespective of the opposition to family planning, contraceptives have been used even in the traditional societies. The abstinence usually was for the female folk. Also when the desire of the husband and wife for more children conflicted, the husband's wishes were more likely to prevail. This advantage on the part of the man is attributed to some socio-cultural influences. It is for this reason that the researcher sought to find out the influence of culture on birth-control practices and acceptability to couples in Gwagwalada Area Council of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study was built on the concept of culture as it influences birth-control practices. Studies reveal that every individual influences his culture in one way or the other, thus contributing to social change as is expected in family planning. There are many cultural or traditional factors that affect high fertility in most developing countries including Nigeria. These cultural factors include:

Desire for Children

This is a general issue in Nigeria. For instance, in an agricultural dominant area, children help in food production especially in rural areas thus serving as social security to parents during old age. They are also seen as yard-sticks for affluence.

Heredity of Widows

The practice of inheriting widows is a repugnant practice in most parts of Nigeria today. This in no small measure has contributed to indiscriminate procreation.

CULTURALLY-MOTIVATED MARRIAGES

In some developing societies, marriages are culturally-motivated either post-humously or prematurely on the female side. The African tradition has much regard for lineage continuity thus women are married to procreate on behalf of the dead while some barren widows marry their fellow women to have off-springs for their late husbands. On the other hand, early marriages are socially approved in most African countries especially in Nigeria.

STATUS OF WOMEN

In most cases, women are made to be seen and not to be heard especially in issues of decision making. This can be linked to the inherent beliefs of the society which portray women as minors who should always be under their husbands and concur to their decisions at all times. In countries where the status of women is low, women have no say about anything concerning the family issues. The

religions of the world in which women's status seems very low for example Africa, the Arab countries and Muslim countries in Southern Asia have higher fertility levels than other areas (Boserup, 1985, in Maisamari, 2000).

MEANING OF CULTURE

Read in Maisamari (2000) opined that culture is "a pattern of behaviour and method of earning a living, forms of law and government, kingship and family structure, modes of thought and values, attitudes and systems inherent in any people's way of living". Simply put, culture can be defined as the people's way of life which forms the basis for their values which may be positive or negative. This is evident in the "Ewu Ukwu" title giving to women who were able to bear as much as 10 children and above in the Mbaise area of Imo State, Nigeria. (Eke & Eke, 2012). Apart from its economic implications, this type of culture also affects the health of the mother and child as they stand morbidity and mortality risks. This is in harmony with the result of the assessment of the factors militating against family planning programme in selected local government areas of Jos in Plateau State (Longchi, 1989, in Maisamari, 2000). The study reveals that illiterate rural dwellers shun family planning because they are of the view that it can reduce their chances of being pregnant when desired and many families reject family planning due to the preference of a particular sex. This calls for an intensified effort by the stake-holders in family planning matters to reach every nook and cranny of the society.

COUNSELLING FOR BIRTH-CONTROL PRACTICES AND ACCEPTABILITY

Okon (2001) has proposed methods which can help people solve problems that involve birth-control practices and acceptability through counseling as a helping relationship which enables the client to overcome his/her concern by having psychotherapeutic dialogues with the helper/counselor. Some of the methods include; brainstorming, by simply pouring out ideas about family planning problems married people face and how they can resolve them for the betterment of their families. This method allows couples to interact with one another in decision making regarding family planning practices and cultural influences. In another way, the counsellor may employ the interview technique using checklist. In all these approaches, the counselor requires some inter-personal and psycho-social skills to be effective.

FAMILY WELLBEING

According to Behnke and Macdermid (2004) family wellbeing is the sum of its parts as the unit of analysis is really the individual. This is because conclusions

about the family are drawn based on data from or about individuals and their experiences. By implication, if an individual from a family displays or reports positive wellbeing, the wellbeing of the family will be considered high. This may not be so with individuals from large families where there are so many mouths to be fed as they are likely to be faced with physical, psychological, social, economic or general challenges which may have marred their happiness and wellbeing.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Nigerian culture has respect for the human family. The size of the family in the Nigerian cultural set-up is of importance to the community because of some of its advantages. For instance, the African tradition have much regard for lineage continuity; thus, women are married to procreate on behalf of the dead as barrenness is viewed as a curse.

In spite of the importance of population growth to the society, cultural resistance to child-spacing has brought about numerous social problems like indiscriminate child bearing, unwanted pregnancies, high rate of infant and maternal deaths / morbidity, drop-out from schools and the low standard of living which has been on the increase with poverty also contributing to the incidence where families continue to reproduce uncontrollably because of the belief that, it is a taboo to regulate fertility or determine the number of children one should have as procreation and provision are up to God; thus, the more children they have the more opportunity they might have in life, due to such children could be used as sources of labour such as scavenging, street hawking and begging as well as other practices which in itself constitute serious abuse of children's right.

With the recognition and consideration of the consequences of population explosion, it is obvious that birth-control remains the only acceptable and practicable option for the reduction of incessant population growth. Therefore, it is against this background that this research was conceived to investigate the influence of culture on birth-control as it concerns couples in Gwagwalada Area Council of the Federal Capital Territory.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study was designed to find out the influence of culture on birth-control among married men and women in Gwagwalada Area Council of F.C.T. Specifically, the objective includes:

To understudy the differences in the birth-control practices and acceptability to married men and women in Gwagwalada Area Council on the basis of their culture.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What is the difference in the birth-control practices and acceptability to married men and women in Gwagwalada Area Council on the basis of their culture.

Significance of the study

This study is significant as it will expose the influence of culture on the birth-control practices and acceptability among married couples in Nigeria thus, enabling the stakeholders to re-strategize the orientation of the society towards the acceptance of positive family planning practices for a better standard of living.

NULL HYPOTHESIS

In order to subject the data collected to statistical testing, one null hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance:

H_{01} : There is no significant difference in the family planning practices and acceptability to married men and women in Gwagwalada Area Council on the basis of their culture.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The main design adopted for this study is a descriptive survey design because it has the advantage of wide coverage as a great deal of information can be obtained from a large population. It is in view of this reason that the researchers considered the survey method as appropriate for this study.

The researchers had a total population of the married men and women in the ten (10) wards of the area council. Five (5) wards were however used for the study with a target population of 118 and 742 married men and women respectively. A sample size of 384 married couples was randomly selected to represent the population.

A family planning questionnaire was adapted and edited from Agbakuribe's (2011) 60 items family planning practices questionnaire. Section A sought personal information about the respondents. Section B focused on family planning practices of respondents while Section C explored the acceptability of family planning to the respondents. Items in Section B and C were constructed along a four -point Likert-type scale to elicit the opinion of the respondents as regards family planning practices and acceptability.

Furthermore, the instrument was pilot tested using test-retest method of reliability. The Pearson's Product Moment Correlation co-efficient was used to correlate the responses of the two tests. The reliability index value was 0.82. This indicated that the instrument was reliable for use.

The researchers directly administered the questionnaire. However, out of the 384 copies of the

questionnaire that were distributed only 351 were found usable. The analysis is therefore based on the sample size of 351 respondents.

This study made use of frequencies, mean scores, and one-way ANOVA which helped in the data organization, analysis and interpretation. The results of the analysis have been presented in the tables below.

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

In this section, respondents' data are presented according to their ethnic groups in the table below.

Table 1
Respondents by Ethnic Group

Ethnic group	Frequency	Percentage
Hausa	62	17.7
Yoruba	51	14.5
Igbo	57	16.2
Gbagi	63	17.9
Others	118	33.6
Total	351	100.0

Table 2
Birth-Control Practices used by Couples in Gwagwalada Area Council

S/No.	Items	Mean scores
11	Birth-control is the decision of controlling the number of children one can cater for.	3.08
12	I know about traditional methods of family planning.	2.63
13	I know about modern methods of family planning.	2.90
14	I know about traditional and modern methods of family planning	2.60
15	I prefer natural family planning methods to others.	2.49
16	Prolonged breastfeeding enables me space my children.	2.29
17	I prefer condom to other birth control measures.	2.07
18	I use oral contraceptives for child spacing.	1.75
19	I prefer withdrawal method to other family planning practices.	1.95
20	I use Intra-uterine Device (IUD) for birth control.	1.72
21	I prefer padlock and key method to modern method.	1.62
22	I use circle bead to prevent pregnancy.	1.85
23	Abstinence is the cheapest method of family planning I have ever used.	2.64
24	Hormonal injection makes it possible for me to plan my family with ease.	1.62
25	I prefer ring method for child spacing.	1.81
26	The use of talisman makes child's spacing easier for me.	1.63
27	Foaming tablet is the best method I have ever used for child spacing.	1.62
28	I prefer cap method to other modern methods of family planning.	1.67
29	I use herbs to delay pregnancy.	2.09
30	I use lime and gin to prevent conception.	1.71
Sectional Mean		2.09

In Table 1 above, the distribution of respondents among the various ethnic groups are presented. It shows that 62 respondents (17.7%) were of the Hausa extraction while 51 respondents (14.5%) were Yorubas. It is also indicated on the table that 57 respondents were Igbos representing 16.2% while 63 respondents (17.9%) were Gbagis. The other respondents drawn from a variety of other ethnic groups were 118 in number representing 33.6% of the total number of respondents.

RESULTS

The research question pertaining to birth-control practices and acceptability to couples in the Area Council were answered in table two and three.

RESEARCH QUESTION ONE

What are the birth-control practices used by couples in Gwagwalada Area Council?

The table above provides the mean scores of responses of couples in Gwagwalada Area Council on birth-control practices used. The sectional mean score of 2.09 suggests that more respondents tend to disagree with the use of the birth-control practices listed in the research instrument.

It can also be seen from the table on the basis of the mean scores that the highest mean score (3.09) is assigned to the assertion that “birth-control is the decision of

controlling and having the number of children one can cater for.” It suggests that respondents tend to agree with the above assertion to a high degree.

On the other hand, the lowest mean score (1.62) is assigned to items 20 and 26 which have the assertions that “I use Intra-uterine Device (IUD) for birth control and The use of talisman makes child’s spacing easier for me.” respectively.

RESEARCH QUESTION TWO

Is birth-control acceptable to couples in Gwagwalada Area Council?

Table 3
Acceptability of Birth-control to Couples in Gwagwalada Area Council

S/No.	Items	Mean scores
31	Birth-control gives me enough time to work.	2.77
32	Family planning enables me to have the number of children I can cater for.	3.07
33	Child spacing allows one to live a comfortable life by saving a good income.	2.77
34	Family planning makes it possible for me to enjoy sex without the fear of pregnancy.	3.07
35	I practice family planning to reduce the suffering of child birth.	2.69
36	Family planning improves ones standard of living.	2.57
37	Birth-control helps a mother to regain her strength before her next baby.	3.35
38	Family planning protects the health of mothers and children.	2.84
39	Birth control allows me enjoy my spouses’ company.	2.54
40	Family planning centres are far from my community.	2.36
41	Modern family planning methods are expensive.	2.81
42	Family planning facilities and services in my community are inadequate.	2.88
43	My beliefs are totally against family planning,	2.54
44	Family planning prevents couples from having enough children who will take care of them at old age.	2.81
45	Family planning is against my religion.	2.89
46	Family planning opposes God’s determination on the number of children one can have.	2.79
47	Family planning promotes promiscuity.	2.20
48	Family planning is the murder of the unborn.	2.24
49	Family planning terminates God’s gift and plan.	2.86
50	Birth-control is unnecessary.	1.85
51	Birth control causes barrenness when one desires to have children later.	2.49
52	Family planning causes loss of confidence between husbands and wives.	2.18
53	Family planning is associated with a lot of health hazards.	2.53
54	Wives who practice family planning will be abandoned by their husbands.	2.05
55	Childs’ spacing is against my culture.	2.78
56	Family planning is against lineage continuity by inheritance of widows.	2.48
57	Family planning reduces ones opportunity of giving birth to a desired sex.	2.47
58	Information about family planning cannot be easily obtained in my community.	2.62
59	The dignity of any family depends on the number of children they have.	2.70
60	In my community women do not have a say in procreation issues.	2.82
Sectional Mean		2.63

The table above clearly shows the acceptability of birth-control to respondents. The sectional mean of 2.63 shows that birth-control is acceptable to the respondents in this study.

It can be seen that the highest mean score of 3.35 is assigned to item 37 which states that “Birth-control helps a mother to regain her strength before her next baby”. This shows the extent of acceptability of birth-control practice to respondents for the purpose of allowing the mother to regain her strength.

However the lowest mean score (1.85) is assigned to the assertion that birth-control is unnecessary. This indicates high level of disagreement with this statement and indicates conversely the level of acceptability of birth-control to the respondents.

TEST OF NULL HYPOTHESIS

There is no significant difference in the birth-control practices and acceptability to married men and women in Gwagwalada Area Council on the basis of their culture.

Table 4
One-way ANOVA for Test of Difference in the Practices and Acceptability of Birth-Control Among Married Men and Women

Groupings	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.	Decision
Between Groups	0.802	4	.200			
Within Groups	44.127	346	.128	1.572	.181	Accepted
Total	44.929	350				

The table above reveals that there is no significant difference between the groups (.181). The null hypothesis is therefore accepted because there is no significant difference between the practice and acceptability of birth-control with reference to the ethnic groups of respondents. One can infer from the analysis above that the culture of respondents does not play a significant role in the practice and acceptability of birth-control.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

That married men and women in Gwagwalada Area Council practice birth-control.

That birth-control is acceptable to married men and women in Gwagwalada Area Council.

DISCUSSION

The finding in this study that there is no significant difference in the birth-control practices and acceptability to married men and women in Gwagwalada Area Council on the basis of their culture could be traced to the appreciation of education among the married men and women. Perhaps, if it were in the days when some people paid less attention to education, the findings would have been different. But today, most people have realized the importance of acquisition of education which has gone a long way to influencing their understanding of the benefits of family planning.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has made very significant observation as a good number of respondents indicated that they used modern methods while some instances of traditional types of birth-control techniques were adopted by the

rural women such as padlock and keys, talisman, rings and intake of substances like lime juice, salt, herbs and local gin which may have contributed to large family size as a result of their unreliability. The study has also found that in terms of decision making on family planning, the task is usually a male’s job and it has also been observed that culture is waning in its influence over birth-control methods and practices. This may not be unconnected with the change in traditional mode of behavior as a result of rural-urban migration, technological advancement and other factors.

The following recommendations are made on the basis of the findings of the research:

- Aggressive educational measure must be adopted to improve teaching and counselling techniques for the purpose of sensitizing married men and women to improve their value systems by avoiding the use of substances which may be harmful to their health and embracing the modern family planning methods which are more reliable and efficacious.

- It is recommended that family planning counselors should team up with family planning doctors, midwives and nurses at hospitals/clinics during family planning clinic sessions so that fears and myths which have been cultivated by people about modern family planning could be reduced.

- Family planning clinics should be established in each ward of Gwagwalada Area Council to handle cases of clients needing information and counseling on contraceptives choice and usage.

- The researchers recommend that in addition to a nation wide family planning campaign, religious leaders and traditional rulers should join hands with other forces in the society to persuade couples to utilize available and suitable contraceptive methods and also educate husbands on the relevance of involving their wives in family decision making as they are not slaves but help-mates.

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