

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND FAMILY PLANNING PRACTICES OF MARRIED WOMEN IN ZONE 5, POLICE BARRACKS IN NIGERIA.

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Abstract: The aim of the study was to examine the relationship between religious beliefs and family planning practices of married women in zone 5 barracks of the Nigeria Police, comprising Edo, Delta and Bayelsa State Commands. The population for the study was 5,579, which comprised all married women aged 15-49 years in zone 5 barracks of the Nigeria Police. The correlational research design was used for the study. The simple random sampling technique employing the ballot method with replacement was used to select the 18 barracks for the study, while the systematic sampling technique was used to select 558 respondents from the barracks. The instrument used was a self-structured questionnaire. Responses from each respondent were converted to points, coded and subjected to statistical compilation using simple regression analysis procedure to test the only hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The hypothesis tested was statistically significant and was therefore rejected. In sum, the study has confirmed the existence of relationship between religious beliefs and family planning practices of married women in these barracks contrary to commonly held assumptions particularly among policy makers, programme managers and programme providers in family planning, the findings of the study revealed that attitudinal factor such as the strong religious desire for more children in accordance with the religious injunction of “be fruitful and multiply” and “religion demands it” are at least as important as cost and access in deterring married women in these barracks from using family planning. Based on the finding from this study, recommendations which focused on how to lower religious attitudinal barriers and increasing family planning demand and usage were proffered.

Keywords: Religious Beliefs, Family Planning Practices, Married women, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Large family size norms have a propensity to persist even after the economic and social conditions responsible for them have changed. Such cultural indolence is often sustained by religious values even when there are no specific proscriptions against birth control. The Old Testament injunction to “be fruitful and multiply” has its counterpart in the teachings of several religions predominantly throughout Sub-Saharan African Countries, Nigeria inclusive (Obermeyer, 1994; Iwu, 1999). Although family planning is widely promoted in Nigeria, it is not without ethical issue, unfortunately in many religions, there is an opposition to human intervention in the reproductive process.

This is as a result of the beliefs that procreation is sacred and any interference with it would bring down the wrath of God (Osula, 2002). Sharing same view, Igbudu, Oshodin and Egenegbe (2007) observed that the desire by most individuals and couples for a large family size is as a result of the positive value which the Nigeria society attached to marriage, family life and procreation. It is a deep-seated traditional value which is supported by the dominant religious beliefs of Christianity, Islam and Traditional religions to the extent that all religions abhor barrenness. Some religious practices (e.g Islamic) support a man marrying up to four wives with so many children (Igbudu, et.al., 2007; Sai 1995; Sen & Snow 1994).

According to Ani, (1999) most religions in Nigeria believe that having many children is an advantage and a blessing from God, whether the family is buoyant or not. Some individuals and couples believe that it is sin to control birth, so the whole idea of population reduction is view with suspicion. This calls for intervention. The focus of the present study is to obtain empirical evidence on the relationship between religious beliefs and family planning practices of married women in zone 5 Barracks of the Nigeria Police.

RESEARCH QUESTION

To successfully do this, one research question was raised to guide the study, “would there be any relationship between religious beliefs and family planning practices of married women in zone 5 barracks of the Nigeria Police?”

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

One hypothesis was formulated from the research question and tested for the study, “there will be no significant relationship between Religious Beliefs and family planning practices of married women in zone 5 barracks of the Nigeria Police.”

MATERIALS AND METHOD

Research Design

The correlational research design was employed in carrying out this study. This because, correlational research design is one of the best available designs that can be used in an attempt to estimate the extent of relationship

between variables. Correlational design, investigate the extent to which variations in one factor or subject correspond with variation in one or more other factors based on the correlation co-efficient. It is concerned with assessing relationships between two or more phenomena for the purpose of making predictions about relationships. The relationship that is measured is a statement about the degree of association between the variable of interest. Correlational design does not indicate causation. That is correlational studies only imply degree of relationship and not cause effect relationship, hence correlational research design was considered most appropriate for the study.

The study location

The research was carried out in zone 5 barracks of the Nigeria Police, comprising Edo, Delta and Bayelsa State Commands. These states are located at the south-south geo-political zone in Nigeria. Zone 5 police Headquarters is located in Benin City, Edo State.

The Nigeria police is divided into 12 Zones and each Zone covers about three (3) state commands. Zone 5 barracks was chosen because the researchers are conversant with the zone and the high fertility rate in these barracks.

Population of the study

The target population for the study comprised all married women aged 15-49 years in zone 5 barracks of the Nigeria Police. The population of family units in zone 5 police barracks was 5,579 (police Report 2006). The unmarried police women, single parent, those below 15years and those above 49 years residing in these barracks were not included in the above number, because this study was delimited to only married women in the age bracket (15-49 years). Again this age bracket (15-49years) was chosen because this is the reproductive period for most women. For these reasons, those who do not fall within this age bracket (15-49years) and the unmarried police women were excluded from the study.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample size of 558 of the population of 5,579 participated in the study. The sample size was chosen using the simple random sampling technique, employing the ballot method with replacement to select the 18 barracks for the study. While the systematic sampling techniques was used to select the respondents from the barracks.

Research Instrument

The instrument for data collection was a self-designed questionnaire. It was used to elicit information from every married woman in zone 5 barracks of the Nigeria Police. The items in the instrument were structured to address the only hypothesis raised. The items contained statements of Likert type's format. Response to each statement was weighted on a four point scoring scale. The data collected were subjected to statistical computation using simple regression analysis procedure at 0.05 level of significance. The SPSS computer programme was used for the data analyses.

Validity of the Instrument

The validity of the instrument used for the study was ascertained by the researchers and five other experts drawn from the Department of Physical and Health Education and other allied fields such as Sociology, Educational Psychology and Educational Test and Measurement Departments. The comments of these experts helped so much in eliminating ambiguity in the items. Based on their observations, corrections were effected before the final draft of the questionnaire was produced. This was to ensure face and content validity of the instrument.

Reliability of the Instrument

The reliability of the instrument was established through a pilot study, using the test-retest method. A first administration of the instrument was administered to 30 respondents (married women) outside the barracks of the study (zone II Akure, Ondo State). After an interval of two weeks, the same exercise was repeated with the same respondents. The scores from the first and second administration were computed, using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r). A reliability coefficient of 0.74 was obtain which indicated that the instrument was reliable for use.

Administration of the Instrument

The researchers personally visited the barracks to administer the research instrument with eleven (11) trained research assistants. The questionnaire took approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. The questionnaire contained a statement that filling out the questionnaire constituted voluntary participants in the study. No identifying information was collected on participants in the study as they were asked not to write their names. The instrument was administered within two weeks. The completed copies of the questionnaire were collected on the spot. A total of 558 self administer questionnaire forms were distributed. Of these 558, a total of 552 were filled out and returned, thus resulting in a 99% response rate. Of these 552, a total of 15women were removed from the analysis, because they were above the age of 49 years. This resulted in 537 eligible participants that were included in the study.

Results

The results of the data analysis are shown in table 1.

Hypothesis

There is no significant relationship between early marriage and family planning practices of married women in zone 5 barracks of the Nigeria Police.

Table 1: Summary of Regression analysis for Religious Beliefs and Family Planning practices of married women in zone 5 Police Barracks.

(Parameter Estimates)					
Variables	B	SE	R	r²	r²(adjusted)
(Constant)	41.24	2.44			
Religious beliefs	-.57	.18	.14	.02	.02
ANOVA Summary table for Religious Belief and Family Planning Practices					
Analysis of variance					
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
1. Regression	444.800	1	444.800	10.041*	.000^a
Residual	23699.829	535	44.299		
Total	24144.629	536			

*Sig. at P < .05

Note:

B = Regression Coefficient

SE = Standard Error of B

Table 1 results, showed that the regression coefficient found for Religious Beliefs was $-.57$, significant at $P < .05$ and coefficient of determination, r^2 of 0.02 and r^2 (adjusted). This value revealed that religious beliefs of married women in zone 5 Police barracks accounted for 2% of the total variance in their Family Planning practices. Table 1 also showed that analysis of variance (ANOVA) for the regression produced an F-value of 10.041 . This was also found to be significant at $P < .05$ level.

Therefore, the hypothesis was rejected at $P < .05$. Thus conclusion was drawn that religious beliefs of married women in zone 5 Police barracks will significantly influence their Family Planning practices.

DISCUSSION

Table 1 showed that there is a significant relationship between religious beliefs and family planning practices of married women in Zone 5 Police Barracks. The findings from this study are in agreement with those reported by Asuzu (1996); Ani (1999) that most religions in Nigeria believe that having many children is an advantage and a blessing from God, whether the family is buoyant or not. It is therefore not unexpected as most individuals and couples support their beliefs with what is written in the Holy Bible where God commanded that man should be fruitful and multiply. This Old Testament injunction has its counterpart in the teaching of several religions predominantly throughout Nigeria. And this may account for the reason why some individuals and couples believe that, it is sin to control birth or practice family planning. It is therefore not surprising that the idea of population reduction is viewed with suspicion.

In like manner Osula (2002) reported in a study that most individuals and couples believe that procreation is sacred and any interference with it in terms of contraception would bring down the wrath of God. Similarly, Igbudu, et. al., (2007) opined that the desire by most individuals and couples for a large family size is as a result of the positive value which the Nigeria society attached to marriage, family life and procreation. It is imperative to note that population like all blessings can also be evil if not properly managed. We already know a means to improve the quality of life at less cost than any other single technology – Family Planning – yet, we fail to realize it because family planning methods are not universally acceptable.

Controversy over family planning has prevented many individuals and couples from implementing responsible planning of births. Yet the range of family planning methods and recently gained experience affords people ways to promote and practice family planning which are responsive to the different religious and cultural norms of almost all societies in Sub-Saharan African, including Nigeria. Therefore no one should be denied the benefits family planning provides.

CONCLUSION

In the light of the findings from this study, it is hereby concluded that there is a relationship between religious beliefs and family planning practices of married women in Zone 5 barracks of the Nigeria Police.

Religions have always played an important role in molding views. Three distinctive religions exist in Nigeria. These are Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion (ATR). There are different views within and between the religions and much depends on the women's understanding and acceptance of what the injunctions are. The assertion often made that practices are justified because "religion demands it" in most case is not true. Only women, who discern this, will be able to use it to their advantage.

Religious revivalism has a great role to play in the use of “religion demand it” both as an oppressive tool as well as an enabling tool among both fundamentalist Muslims and a growing class of born-again Christians on family planning. ATR which stressed the importance of ancestry according to Irorere (2002) also favours having large families to such a point that high fertility was normally right, as evident in the worship of goddess of fertility in different parts of Nigeria, and childlessness or rearing few children was seen as evil whether it is the result of barrenness or the death of all or most children.

Most individuals and couples on religious ground are rejecting family planning programmes as an imperialist device and considered increases in the population to be increase in the strength and blessing for the community of believers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations were made.

- The religious injunction of “be fruitful and multiply” should be interpreted to their followers to mean that God is interested in quality and not just quantity.
- The Nigeria Government should initiate massive family planning programmes and policy to peg number of children at the family level, since polygamy makes nonsense of the former (four children per woman).
- Religious revivalism has a great role to play in the use of “religion demand it” both as an oppressive tool as well as an enabling tool among fundamentalist African Tradition Religion (ATR), worshippers, Muslims and growing class of born-again Christian on family planning.
- Nigeria Government should promote fertility at replacement level or below through “two is enough” and a child is a child, boy or girls” campaigns.

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