

Full Length Research Paper

Gender role and fertility behaviour among Calabar and Oban communities in Cross River State, Nigeria

M. A. Ushie¹, C. V. O. Eneji^{2*}, A. D. Nsemo¹, K. O. Osonwa¹ and E. E. Enang¹

¹Department of Sociology, University of Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria.

²Department of Rural Development and Management, College of Humanities and Development, China Agricultural University, Beijing, China.

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Discussions on fertility behaviour and population control policies have focused exclusively on the behaviour of females, and often target women for change while disregarding the role of the males. The inability of the national population policies to address this while at the same time encouraging patriarchal family system for the stability of the home seems to support this neglect. This study thus, examined male role and other determinants of fertility behaviour in Calabar and Oban areas of Cross River State, Nigeria. It focused on type of marriage preferred, educational attainment, decision on children marriage and socioeconomic determinants as they influence marital values. A simple random technique was used to select a sample of 500 respondents from the two areas (Calabar and Oban) a well structured questionnaire was used as instrument for collecting data while descriptive statistics and percentage analysis were used to analyse the data. Findings reveal that a higher percentage of male favoured polygamy, that low educational attainment, socioeconomic and parental decision on children marriage justifies male role on fertility and marital values. It was recommended among others that adequate attention be paid to male role, if fertility control policies are to be realized; that adequate education and enlightenment be located to both the educated and non-educated populace, that child early marriage be controlled, the consents of the children to be so involved in the marriage should be taken into consideration since they are to be directly involved in this marriage adventure.

Key words: gender role, fertility behaviour, reproductive behaviour, and fertility determinants.

INTRODUCTION

For a long period of history, the discussion of fertility behaviour and population control policies have focused exclusively on the behaviour of female gender and often target women for change while disregarding the role of the male gender. It has been argued that the factor responsible for the steady growth of the population in Nigeria is the inability of the National Population Policies to address male roles. For example, the 1988 Population Policy committed itself to protecting "the patriarchal family system in the country for the stability of the home" (NPC, 1988:18), ignoring major changes in the structure and functioning of the family system that occurred and the inability of the traditional family to cope with the demands

of modern economic and political arrangements (Obono, 2003). Thus, the population policy sought to reduce women fertility to not more than four (4) children, while at the same time protecting the very family system that kept reproductive motivation high-polygamy. With polygamy untouched, men were free to have as many children as they could under the customary and religious laws that upheld the practice of polygamy. This is still going on today. Yet, researchers hardly investigate how men may be responsible for the fertility rates in Nigeria, Efik precisely and perhaps, elsewhere.

The exception is of course Isiugo-Abanihe's (2003) work on male responsibility in fertility and reproductive health. Isiugo-Abanihe notes that "relative to females, little demographic work has been done on marriage among Nigeria men". Any study of fertility focused on female behaviour even when the United Nation (1987: 27)

*Corresponding author. E-mail: vcogareneji@yahoo.com.

recommended that “special effort should be made to emphasize men’s shared responsibility and promote their active involvement in responsible parenthood, sexual and reproductive health and behaviour including family planning, parental, maternal and child health, recognition and promotion of equal value of children of both sexes”. However, information on reproductive behaviour is usually given during antenatal, postnatal clinics, attended typically by women. Implicit in this is that the males are excluded.

It has been said that men’s position and dominance play an instrumental role in every aspect of sexual and reproductive dynamics, “from the timing of intercourse and contraceptive use to sexually transmitted diseases (STD’s) treatment and antenatal care” (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2003). Men play powerful societal roles such as husbands, fathers, uncles, religious leaders, doctors, policy makers, local and international leaders, etc. For example, as the main decision makers, men in most Nigerian cultures, decide when their sons and daughters marry, and often who to marry. In most rural areas and especially in Northern Nigeria, it is the men who give out their young-under-age girls in marriage sometimes to old men, old enough to be their grandfathers. In seeking the socioeconomic conditions and proximate determinants as they relate to women, we must also examine them in the context of the males or at least in their dominant role in fertility behaviour.

Without doubts, an educated male will be more amenable to the current changes in the status of women and be more receptive to their views, aspirations, idiosyncrasies, preferences etc., than uneducated rural counterparts. Whereas, such sweeping generalizations are open to qualification and even debate, the essential core of their truth content is undeniable. This study will as well test such assumption.

Proximate determinants of fertility

According to Bongarrts (1982), not every factor implicated in fertility is important and directly affects fertility. Some factors are direct while others apply through the direct variables. Those that exact themselves directly on fertility, Bongarrts refers to as the proximate determinants while the indirect ones are the socioeconomic and other background variables. Proximate determinants of fertility are behaviour and biological factors. It is the knowledge of the proximate determinants that improves the understanding of operation of the socioeconomic variables. What Bongarrts refers to as “proximate” determinants had been earlier termed “intermediate” determents by Davis and Blake (1956). By intermediate is meant that these variables stand between socioeconomic conditions and fertility. The influence of socioeconomic conditions can

only be felt through the intermediate variable.

According to UN (1987), whatever reduces or increase fertility level takes place through “the direct operation of various factors affecting the exposure to intercourse and exposure to conception and through factors affecting pregnancy outcomes and length of the post partum infecundity period”. And these variable extend to more remote influences such as education and cultural background. Therefore, factors accountable for variation in fertility can be accounted for by these proximate determinants. This implies that differentials and trends of fertility within a country and differences in fertility levels across countries can be directly traced to differences in these proximate variables if it can be assumed that the potential level of fertility is the same in all societies and all factors directly affecting fertility have been fully accounted for.

In sum, there are therefore, three factors that determine fertility trends and differentials.

Factors affecting exposure to intercourse
Factor affecting exposure to conception and
Factors affecting gestation and successful parturition.

A major contribution of Bongarrts (1982) to the understanding of fertility is the development of a model in which three main proximate determinants of fertility could be measured and their relative effects on fertility qualified. In doing this, Bongarrts restricted the factors to be considered to be the four most important variables:

- (1) Marriage (which is only one aspect of sexual intercourse)
- (2) Contraception (or exposure to risk of conception)
- (3) Abortion (one aspect of gestational outcome) and
- (4) Breastfeeding (the most important determinant of the duration of infecundity, temporary separation between married couples and other reasons for involuntary abstinence were not considered by Bongarrts because he felt that their fertility impact would not vary greatly across population).

Studies have confirmed that most of fertility variation in the majority of countries can be explained by these four factors alone (Bongarrts, 1982; Bongarrts and Kirmeyere, 1982; UN, 1992; Isiugo-Abanihe, 1996). The model developed by Bongarrts expresses the actual level of fertility, the total fertility rate (TFR) as a function of the fertility – reducing effects of the proximate determinants on a maximum potential level of fertility the total fecundity rate (TF). The equation or the model is summarized as:

$$\text{TFR} = \text{Cm} \cdot \text{Cc} \cdot \text{Ca} \cdot \text{C}; \text{TF}$$

Where Cm represents the index of marriage, Cc is the index of contraception, Ca is the index of abortion and C;

is the index of postpartum infecundity. The implication is that in any society or group of people where the fertility – reducing effects of the proximate determinants is lower, the outcome will be a higher total fertility rate.

Several studies have omitted the index of abortion. Ca from the model especially in Africa claiming that its effects on fertility in Africa are negligible. This may well be contested, but one must bear in mind that societal laws also affect the smooth operation of the determinants of fertility (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1996), and since our society frowns at abortion, this may well be left out.

So utilizing the proximate determinants of fertility model shown previously, Isiugo-Abanihe (1996), studied the determinant of fertility in Nigeria. It will be very pertinent to review Isiugo-Abanihe's (1996) work while at the same time pointing to the factors determining fertility differentials. In examining marriage as a proximate determinant, he divided the issues into age at first marriage, non-marriage or celibacy, marital disruption and remarriage. He notes that the median age of first marital union was 17 in 1990 in Nigeria. This means that half of Nigeria women aged 15-49 have married by the time they were 17 years old. The mean age at first marriage in 1990 was 17.3 while the singular mean age at marriage (an estimate of the mean age at first marriage of those who ever marry) was about 20 years. Note that these generalized statements do conceal significant variations in marriage behaviour among the component parts of the country. For example, "age at first marriage is higher in urban areas than in rural areas, and among educated women relative to those with little schooling (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1996). Moreover, there is a substantial ethnic variation in age at marriage in Nigeria with a pattern of very early marriage among the Hausa/Fulani (mean age at first marriage is less than 15 years), and the Igbo (mean age at first marriage is higher than 19 years).

Other ethnic groups are said to be found within the continuum between the very low Hausa/Fulani and Yoruba and Igbo (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1996). But age at first marriage among the Igbo is increasing rapidly, and this is been attributed to the higher bride wealth culture. Many areas in the south-south of which Cross River State is part, age at first marriage is relatively high because of impact of social factors such as higher education. On the whole, age at first marriage, as a factor creating exposure to marriage is a very significant determinant of differences between rural and urban fertility.

Again, marriage apart from being early in Nigeria is relatively universal, first as it is in most sub-Saharan African countries. In Nigeria, data indicate that only about 8 percent of women were still single or unmarried in the age group 25-29; at age 40-44, virtually all Nigerian women have married (NDHS, 1999).

More so, all rural women are married at age 30-34, as are women with no education at 25-29 years.

According to Isiugo-Abanihe (1996), "marriage remains a cherished institution in Nigeria, which even the now fashionable female liberation or empowerment euphoria has not rendered less attractive". In the final analysis, voluntary celibacy is uncommon in Nigeria except for religious reasons, even then, only by a small minority of women, such as the Catholic nuns.

According to the United Nation (1992), "a new trend in nuptiality is represented by unmarried cohabitation. Although not all such couples reject legal unions, they engage in premarital sexual relations and some accept illegitimate births, causing illegitimate fertility to increase despite the availability of modern contraception". The point has it that even some of the unmarried people still reproduce under the framework of cohabitation, so that the percentage of the voluntary celibacy is really low, especially in pronatalist societies like Nigeria. It is in this remise that this study was initiated to study the gender role and fertility behaviour among Calabar and Oban communities in Cross River State.

METHODOLOGY

The subjects were drawn from Calabar an urban area and Oban a typical rural area in Akampka Local Government Area all of Cross River State, Nigeria.

A total sample of 500 respondents were drawn for the study. While Calabar (urban) divided into Calabar municipality council and Calabar South Local Government Council had a sample of 300, Oban (rural area had 200 respectively in the sample drawn using a simple random sampling method for the two areas, the instrument for the study was a well structured questionnaire, this questionnaire was pretested to test for validity and reliability, this instrument was used for data collection. The questionnaire contained five sections namely; demographic characteristics of respondents which includes; sex, age, marital status, occupation and educational attainment, type of marriage and fertility outcome, decision on time for giving their children for marriage, socioeconomic determinants, and education as it affects marital values. Descriptive and percentage analysis were employed in analyzing the data.

Data analysis

The result in Table 1 shows that 400 male representing 80% were use while another 100 representing 20% were female. Similarly, the age bracket for 25-35 years had 50(10%), 35-45, 230(46%), 45-55, had 120(24%), 55-65, 90(18%) and 65-75 had 10(2%). In the same vein, 360 representing 72% are married, 15(3%) are separated, another 50(10%) are divorced while 75(15%) are widowed. On occupation, while a total of 260 representing 52% are civil servants, 110(22%) are farmers and 130 representing 26% are into business. Educationally, a total of 65 representing 13% have no formal education, 120(24%) had primary education, another 180(36%) have secondary education while 155(31%) possess tertiary education.

Results in Table 2 for responses on the variable of type of marriage preferred and marital values as it concerns male role in fertility shows that while a total of 260 representing 52% of the respondents preferred monogamy, 240 representing 48% settled for polygamy marriage which adversely affect fertility level.

Table 1. Showing demographic characteristic of respondents.

Item	Calabar	Oban	Total	Percentage
Sex				
Male	240 (80%)	160 (80%)	400	80
Female	60 (20%)	40 (20%)	100	20
Age				
25-35	30 (10%)	20 (10%)	50	10
35-45	130 (43.3%)	100 (50%)	230	46
45-55	70 (23.3%)	50 (25)	120	24
55-65	60 (20%)	30 (15)	90	18
65-75	10 (3.33%)	-	10	2
Marital status				
Married	200 (66.7%)	60 (50%)	360	72
Separated	10 (3.33%)	5 (2.5%)	15	3
Divorce	40 (13.3%)	10 (5%)	50	10
Widowed	50 (16.7%)	25 (12.5%)	75	15
Occupation				
Civil servant	200 (66.7%)	60 (3%)	260	52
Farming	10 (3.33%)	100 (50%)	110	22
Business	90 (30%)	40 (20%)	130	26
Education				
No formal Edu.	10 (3.33%)	55 (27.5%)	65	13
Primary	50 (16.7%)	70 (35%)	120	24
Secondary	120 (40%)	60 (30%)	180	36
Tertiary	140 (46.7%)	15 (7.5%)	155	31

Table 2. Showing response on the variable of type of marriage preferred and marital value.

Item	Calabar	Oban	Total	Percentage
Monogamous	210 (70%)	50 (25%)	260	52
Polygamy	90 (30%)	150 (75%)	240	48
Total	300	200	500	

Source: Field survey 2009.

For Table 3 responses on the variable of decision on time for children marriage results shows that while 190 representing (38%) preferred to give their children out at the age of 18-25 years another 260 representing (52%) favoured age 25-30 while 50(10%) preferred 30-40 for certain reasons.

Result on Table 4 for responses on socioeconomic determinant and marital values as it affects time for children marriage while a total of 270 representing (54%) responded in affirmation that it does influences such decision, another 230 representing (46%) denied the influence of socioeconomic status on time for children marriage.

Table 5 showing responses on educational status as it affects marital values revealed a total of 410 representing 82% respondents affirmed the influence of education, while another 90

representing 18% rejected the influence of educational status on marital values.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Finding revealed that while a great percentage of respondents in the study favoured polygamy as a type of marriage which is in line with the societal preference of patriarchy to matriarchy thereby undermining male role in fertility behaviour it shows that this act justifies the effect of male role in fertility behaviour. Similarly in Calabar

Table 3. Showing response on the variable of decision on time for children marriage.

Item	Calabar	Oban	Total	Percentage
18-25	50(16.7%)	140(70%)	190	38
25-30	200(66.6%)	60(30%)	260	52
30-40	50(16.7%)	-	50	10
Total	300	200	500	

Table 4. Showing socioeconomic factors affecting marital age by parents as it affects fertility behaviour.

Item	Calabar	Oban	Total	Percentage
Yes	100 (33.3%)	170 (85%)	270	54
No	200 (66.7%)	30 (15%)	230	40
Total	300	200	500	

Source: Field survey 2009.

Table 5. Showing educational status of respondents as it affects reproductive behaviour.

Item	Calabar	Oban	Total	Percentage
Yes	260(86.7%)	150(75%)	410	82
No	40(13.3%)	50(25%)	90	18
Total	300	200	500	

Source: Field survey 2009.

emphasis is on monogamy because of its urban nature due to exposure and awareness.

In the same vein, while a greater percentage supported personal decision to give out their children out for marriage between the ages of 25-30, it shows that they decide when children are given for marriage, thereby portraying the male role in fertility, hence early to marry, early to reproduce all things being equal. On the determination of socioeconomic status and marital values as it affects time for child marriage, findings revealed that a greater percentage believed that parental status influences the choice for child marriage as poverty or hardship could make families give out their children out either to survive or to ease the burden of educational sponsorship, hence male role in fertility which before now was undermined.

On educational variable, findings reveal that while a greater percentage believed that educational attainment influences the marital values of people, hence the need for adequate education and awareness in order to understand fertility.

Conclusion

In conclusion, therefore, it could be said that the hitherto

ignored male role in fertility behavior rather has an overwhelming influence on fertility behaviour and outcome of couples. It should be understood that vital decision on the time of marriage for children in a less educated society with low families status, is determined by the parents especially fathers when they consider cost of upbringing, and immediate gratification from wealthy suitors. This in turn enhances fertility outcome in the sense that the level of exposure to mating increase the chances of conception hence fertility dynamics.

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