

FAMILY SIZE AND ITS SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS ON THE INHABITANTS OF DELTA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The size of the family is a matter of great concern not only to the state alone, but also to the welfare and health of the individual, family and the community. This study assessed the basic factors responsible for choice of family size and the socio-economic implications of such choices. The specific objective is to access the relationships that exist between family sizes and socio-economic life of the inhabitants of Delta State of Nigeria. The review indicated that family size depends on: family income, cost of children and wages. It realized that choice of family size is influenced by socio-economic variables in the State. Hence a campaign that will sensitize families on the need to maintain a manageable family size should be taken seriously by appropriate government agencies.

Keywords: *Family Size, Socio-Economic Implications, Inhabitants*

INTRODUCTION

Family sizes and its tendency for a probable world population explosion could plunge poor developing countries into further abject poverty and helpless wretchedness. The traditional perception of women's role in society makes it difficult for them to contribute to population control. The notion among most African women especially the illiterates is that the most important role of a woman is to procreate as many children as possible. In a developed economy, large family sizes and the resultant high birth rates are accompanied by rapid population growth during economic improvement and are mainly because of improved public health. As countries become more prosperous, death and birth rates decrease, resulting to population growth rates. Today, most developing countries are characterized by encouraging birth rates for much the same reasons as in the industrialized countries. In the same manner, death rates are reducing drastically mainly because of improvements in health care, education and sanitation. Though birth rates have declined substantially in many developing countries recently, they still remain high in some mainly for the following reasons.

- i. Agriculture is an essential activity for poor households, they possess the incentive to invest in children to serve as farm labour and therefore help household tasks such as fuel wood, water collection and childcare.
- ii. Large families provide social security through extended family, investing in children becomes a way of ensuring care in old age
- iii. And lack of knowledge about family planning.

We therefore need to ask four basic questions that are relevant here:

- i. To what extent do the populace in Delta State is committed to small family size?
- ii. To what extent does the level of education relate to perception of family size?

- iii. Does culture determine the perception of family size?
- iv. Does education affect choice of family size?

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AREA

This study adopted Delta State as a focus point in determining the relationship between family size and socio-economic implication. Delta State was created on the 27th August, 1991 from the defunct Bendel State. Bendel State was formerly known as the Midwestern Region as at the time it gained regional status in August 1963 from the then western region, it is made up of 25 Local Government Areas. The State covers a landmass of about 18,050km² which has more than 60% land mass. The provisional census result of 1991 put the population at 2,590,491 (comprising of 1, 271,932 males and 1.318,559 females). The State's population is projected to be 3,629,102 in 2003 and in 2006 the census figure recorded increased in the figure between 1999 and 2003. According to NPC (2006), there are 2,074,306 males while females are 2,024,085 in Delta State. The major tribes in the state are the Urhobos, Ukwuani, Isoko, and other minor tribes such as Izoos and Itsekiris. Basically, they have identical customs, beliefs and traditions. The cultural Identity manifests in their festivals, traditional marriage ceremonies, certain words as well as their folktales, dances, arts, and crafts. Their systems of traditional administration tend to be identical. Farming, fishing and hunting are the major occupations of the inhabitants and about 80% of the active labour force are engaged in these occupational activities with the remaining 20% who are into other occupations.

FAMILY SIZE AND ITS SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

Family size in this study is regarded basically as a family above five siblings. Such family size comes with its implications of poor health, inability to provide adequately for the education of the siblings, low standard of learning and the inability to fulfill one's dreams in life. The three basic necessities of life, food, clothing and housing are essentially issues to such a large family that is taken in this study. A small size on the other hand is seen as a family with an average of three siblings; more so, such family is considered on the grounds of the ability to cater adequately for the needs and be able to meet up with the three necessities of life with a touch of some luxury. The implications of a small family size are the ability for one to enjoy adequately the basic necessities of life with little or no stress. Consideration for a small family size would consequently be considered to be between 2 and 3 siblings. Notwithstanding, the undesirable effect of a large family size; most people are giving birth to large families as a result of factors such as ignorance, culture and demographic factors. Not taking the above into account, one can witness low family sizes in some categories of families due to high level of education, health, income, better accommodation, access to capital and potable water. Such families though not many in the State, are basically of good social standing and as well being economically stable and balanced. Basic factors influencing family sizes include the following:

Awareness: According to the Longman (1995) Current English Dictionary, awareness is a condition of having knowledge of what is obtainable in the society. The composition of

the State populace lacks the implication of involving into large family size. Sooner or later before they know it, are already deeply into the society of large family size with the implications.

Ignorance: Another factor in this respect is ignorance. Absolute lack of knowledge about the implications of either small or large family size. Because of the societal state of ignorance, they fall victim of large family size with all the burden and implications associated with it.

Education: In this context is the training of the mind and character. Many of the societal composition (population) lack education and therefore can not guide against the involvement into large family and its implications.

Culture: Is the way of life of people. Basically, the culture of the people determines the family size that one involves.

Poverty: Berger (1980) as expatiated in *www.hhs.gov* (2005) shows that family size is an important determinant of whether a family or individual is in poverty because the official poverty measure incorporates family size. Family size depends on: family income, cost of rearing and training children, wages, government transfers, and preferences. Berger(1980) theory of the demand for children predicts that the number of children in a family depend on family income and the costs of rearing and training children. Income plays a role in determining family size because families with higher incomes are more able to afford additional children.

In terms of the cost of rearing children, direct costs associated with having children include, among others, food, clothing and health-care expenses. In addition to these direct costs, there is also the relative cost. The relative cost of having a child is affected by the opportunity cost of child rearing as measured by the female wage, to a lesser extent the male wage, and government may affect the number of children and adults in a family by altering the relative cost of having a child and creating incentives or disincentives to marry. Finally, individual preferences will affect family size. Family size is also noted for its influence on variables like poverty, literacy, health, education among others. These results are also based on environment, economic, cultural, and social factors.

William (1983) in his statement on the causes of malnutrition states that innumerable studies pointed to social and environmental factors associated with poor nutrition status in children, such as poverty (especially with mis-distribution of wealth and inflation). Family size, mother's literacy level, single parent households, maternal deprivation, and many other factors including child neglect or abuse. This, as indicated, will lead to inadequate food intake in the planting season in particular when the problem is compounded by food shortage, high incidence of infections, especially malaria. During the planting season child neglect is an additional problem. In certain instances as asserted by William (1983), there may be sufficient food but the quality may be undesirable hence leading to kwashiorkor. Alvin (1984), on family size postulates that regardless of ability, youth from the higher social strata compared to the others do better in school, stay longer, and are ultimately prepared to move into higher status occupations. Although family size appears to have a stronger direct effect on school performance in early childhood than in late adolescence

the advantages tend to be cumulative. Most research findings indicate that abused children tend to come from relatively large families. Although only 20% of or more children; these account for 40% of the cases of abuse as cited in Cicchetti (1989). Furthermore, it was identified that most of the child abuse cases correlate with families with more siblings and this is not different from the situation in most places. Young (1964) reveals more dramatic findings on family sizes and child abuses. In his findings, it reveals that 20 of 80 abused families studied have fewer than three children. In the light of the research carried out, it was identified that the findings yield lesser results in other states such as Edo, Ondo, etc.

Cicchetti (1989) notes that sometimes one child in a family is singled out for abuse while the other siblings are treated well. He describes this as a vicious cycle in which for instance, an unattractive child, targeted for abuse by parents, becomes more alienated and unattractive with repeated abuses, and as a result is subjected to still more ill treatment. Frequently, the youngest child is the one singled out for abuse (Zigler, 1976) as cited in Cicchetti (1989). Nuttall (2000) study of family size and academic achievement selected a sample of 306 girls and 247 boys from the Boston area. The sample was divided into small family (two kids) and large family (5+ kids) groups. Academic achievement was examined using school records and 10 tests. Nuttall (2000) concluded that boys from small families tend to have better academic achievement than boys from large families because boys in the larger families are probably more influenced by peer groups who tend to have anti-academic values.

Ernst and Angst (1983) also support the argument of Beth Zojonc (1986) with the addition that if children develop verbal and cognitive skills through interaction with parents. Those from small families will spend more time with parents than with peers and siblings, as compared to children from large families, in furtherance of the above, it was indicated that children will enjoy spending time with their parents since they can be assured of the undivided attention of their parents. More so, parents are able to keep track of their kids, and their discussions to ensure prompt attention. Such parents even go the extent of helping their children with their homework including others.

Family size often weighs the effect of social class, as seen in the achievement of working-class youth from small families (Alvin 1984, Blake, 1985). They further argued out that if the above was so, then the general societal trend toward small families should weaken the advantages currently enjoyed by middle-class students. Zabin (1999) states that the relationship between fertility intention and childbearing and the link between fertility intention and contraceptive use are strongly affected by other independent attitudes, such as the attitude toward contraception itself.

Therefore, it is suggested that measures of intention should be used to predict what can only be predicted in the presence of cogent measures of contraceptive attitudes, and that the data available on the intention status births. Delta State today may not represent as serious a failure in contraceptive practice as is often supposed. Rather, they may tell us that timing intentions are not compelling. When childbearing is related more to social relationships than to economic necessity, as may be the case today, its timing within the limits of small family size may not be salient.

Maihi (1999) study of child sex preference and family size identifies in summary that, preference for male children exerts a substantial impact on the fertility desires and family planning behaviour of women in urban Delta State. Fertility behaviour appears to be influenced by a strong desire to acquire a minimum number of at least two surviving children. In the light of these findings, it appears that despite the declining fertility level in the state, further reductions in fertility may become increasingly more difficult to achieve unless there is a concomitant decline in the preference for male children.

CONCLUSION

Family size has determine to a large extent the economic background of families with relative small sizes of (1-5) do not visit the hospital for treatment regularly, hence much expenditure is expanded on health. Most sickness that sends such category of families to the hospital is malaria, a sickness that can easily be avoided with basic preventive measures such as life-styles, nutrition and improve sanitation. This is not common with family sizes of above 5 children since they are prone to visiting the hospitals for medication as a result of poorer nutrition, low incomes and lesser spousal support in terms of income. This has made those with smaller family sizes better-off economically.

Moreso, families of less than 3 children have comparatively been able to educate their children to higher levels of educational attainment. Compared to their compatriots with larger family sizes (7-10). Educational attainment seems as possessing positive influence on their respective family sizes since educational levels have positive influence on their family sizes; that is towards smaller family sizes of (3 children). Family size is influenced mainly by socio-economic factors such as level of income as well as spousal contributions to the family's income. A larger section of families are influenced by culture, ignorance, awareness and educational background of the parents. Hence a campaign that will sensitize families on the need to maintain a manageable family size should be taken seriously by appropriate government agencies. Also, since son preference is linked to women's status in society, there is an urgent need to bring about widespread structural changes to enhance the status of women in the state. It is therefore imperative that the Delta State government instead of propagating the two-child family norm across board, emphasizes programmes and policies that actively improve the status of women and change attitudes towards female children.

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