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**REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH PRACTICES AND MENTAL STABILITY OF ADOLESCENT MOTHERS IN SOUTH WEST NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

*The study investigated Reproductive Health Practices and Mental Stability of Adolescent Mothers in South West Nigeria. Descriptive research design of the survey type was adopted for the study. A sample of 1,800 adolescent mothers were drawn from four states in Nigeria using explorative, purposive and accidental sampling techniques. A self constructed instrument titled "Reproductive Health and Mental Stability" (RHAMS) with a reliability coefficient of 0.70 was used to collect data. The data generated were subjected to inferential statistical method. The finding showed that there is significant relationship between Reproductive Health Practices and Mental Stability. It is therefore recommended that adolescent mothers should endeavour as much as possible to practice Reproductive Health for thier mental instability and healthy living.*

**Key words:** Reproductive Health, Mental Stability, Adolescent Mothers, South West Nigeria.

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**Introduction**

Practices are the various exercises performed to gain improvement, or for the acquisition of discipline, proficiency and dexterity. It is the application of knowledge as distinguished from mere possession of knowledge. It is a performance or application habitually engaged in. It is a repeated or customary or the actual mode or method of doing something, thus, practices of reproductive health include the repeated actions of reproductive health engaged in by individuals. Reproductive health is generally a trend in the approach towards focusing on the integral and essential part of the individual's overall health in line with the policy of health for all concerted efforts have been made to ensure that positive reproductive health practices are encouraged globally rather than limiting oneself to fertility regulation alone (Ayodele, 2015).

Marriage as a social institution has been described as a socially sanctioned relationship involving two

or more people of the opposite sex, which is expected to endure beyond the time required for gestation and birth of children (Owuamanam, 1994). It has also been described as approved social partnership whereby two or more persons establish a family. They have the corresponding right to conceive and raise children, as well as attend to other obligations and privileges affecting other members of the society. It therefore carries with it a new set of privileges, obligations and recognition. And it has been observed as a socially recognized union or legal contract between spouses that establish rights and obligations between them, their children and their in- laws.

It is observed that nowadays people rush into marriage with little or no preparation which often results in mental instability, divorce, single parenthood, abortion, child-abandonment, prostitution, child trafficking, child abuse and child labour among others. Children from such background may become problem to the society as, they exhibit all kinds

of deviant behaviours. It has been observed that most students/pupils playing truancy in school today are often from homes that are not properly found on successful principles of marriage.

When marriage is duly constituted, the smallest unit of the society known as family is formed and various relationships begin to come up the moment the blessing of children comes in. It has been observed that a well constituted marriage has important role to play in the society. For instance, the stability of a family could ensure peace in the larger society. Some of such roles include procreation, socialization of the young ones, provisions of physiological needs (shelter, food and clothing), child rearing and a host of others (Mezieobi and Opara, 2007). When these roles are not effectively performed possibly because of marital/family instability there may be social problems such as divorce, separation, juvenile delinquency and others. It should be noted that marriage formation oscillates between monogamy and polygamy, each having its various potentials. Hence, a monogamous marriage may ensure a small, manageable and sizeable family, while a polygamous marriage may lead to large and overcrowded family.

Observation shows that in some homes, children are malnourished and the health of parents is fragile because of the acrimonious relationship existing in homes due to lack of financial capability to cater for large number of children thereby reducing their standard of living. It appears that most Nigerian families hardly have two meals in a day which makes majority of members of Nigerian families to be hungry. Mezieobi and Opara (2007) confirmed this hunger state of Nigerian families when he noted that "only very few are not hungry" and what appears to occupy the attention of everybody is "what to eat", what is eaten, that is if found at all, is mainly carbohydrate. When

this happen the resultant effects are hunger, poor feeding, malnutrition, immune deficiency, anaemia and general poor health.

It has also been observed that separation and divorce are on the increase because of the relationship that has turned sour in homes either because of immaturity of the couple or inability to handle simple issues which were allowed to escalate beyond control and also inability to confront besetting marital challenges. The family as a product of marriage must endeavour to perform some sensitive functions such- as socialization .and education of the young ones, companionship, assistance and satisfactory sexual relationship which is the highest expression of physical love peculiar to human beings: The type of marriage at times determines the number of members of the family. When the number is large, the family may experience some societal vices or problems such as armed robbery, kidnapping, unemployment, prostitution, child abuse insurgencies, burglary, drug abuse, street begging, stealing, internet fraud, human trafficking, and a host of others.

The family unit that is supposed to serve as the basis for society stability these days seems not stable and has been afflicted by some social problem, a stable family where members are happy may not be unconnected with the process through which such a family is formed. Precisely, stable marriages are paramount to progressive and peaceful society.

The society is not static and as such has been attended with all sorts of problems which had gained prominence. One of the problems of the society is marital instability. Marital stability is cardinal to stable society and this explains the various discoveries and inventions that have been developed to find solutions to human problems as regards reproductive health issues. At the centre of these discoveries and inventions is man. Man is always out

to look for solutions to his numerous problems. Contemporarily, the problems of couple separation and divorce have gained the attention of everybody with a view to establishing a stable home. Reproductive health has also taken a central position in order to stem the tide of societal problems and to underscore manageable family size and peaceful family co-existence. This however cannot be achieved by mere fiat or admonition nor rhetoric alone but by concerted efforts of the concerned people regarding the advocacy or creating awareness for the practice of Family Planning.

In all ages, the issue of reproductive health has been taken so crucial and this has informed child spacing, to promote the health of mothers (Ogunlade, 2010). He stated further that traditionally, the issues of child spacing was acknowledged by our fore parents who have their ways of family planning which assisted them to space child bearing thereby giving room for nurturing young ones and recuperation of the health of the mothers. Pregnancy is a thing of joy for couples when it happens at the right time when they desire and are prepared for it. But when the pregnancy just occurred without planning for it, most especially when the mother was of age, take for instance, a woman between forty to sixty years or when the couples had already got up to six or ten children. It usually affects the couple socially, economically psychologically emotionally and mentally.

Most couples, from observation practiced reproductive health to avoid poor health of the mother, regret and guilt, poor financial status or poverty, dependence on others. In traditional Nigeria society, some family planning methods are peculiar to Yoruba customs which are not prevalent among Igbo customs. The various ethnic groups in Nigeria nation acknowledge their peculiar ways of family planning which have assisted them from time immemorial. In 1998,

the Nigeria government appeared to have realized that the rapid population growth has had serious adverse effect on investment in productive enterprises as against consumption, energy resources especially fuel, wood supply, the delivery of social services such as health, housing, education, employment, standard of living and the environment (Onokerhoraye, 1994) in Fan and Edinyang 2006). In the light of these growing socio-economic problems, the Federal Government of Nigeria decided to adopt a National policy on population.

The goals of the policy are to improve the standard of living and quality of life of the people in order to promote their health and welfare, especially through preventing premature death and illnesses among mothers and children (Ugabi, 2001). The strategies for implementing the above policy according to Onokerhoraye (1994), Fan and Edinyang (2006) include - making Family Planning services easily affordable, safe and culturally acceptable. It also includes mobilizing all relevant public and private agencies for effective delivery of these services. Apart from the above, the policy could also assist in tailoring our social and economic status. The involvement of women in developing nations could also help to bring down fertility rates. Finally, it could also assist to strengthen the programme of population information and communication.

Reproductive Health programmes have long been recognized for their importance in improving the health of women, children and in reducing population growth. Oladokun (2003) opined that the current realization of the fact that large population can slow down the nations. Also health for all programmes has led to the quest for information on Family Planning and other related productive health problems in Nigeria.

The issue of Reproductive Health all over the world has attracted attention due to its importance in decision making about population growth. In recent times, attention of international bodies like the World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Fund for Population Agency (UNFPA) have been drawn to Family Planning. This is due to the socio-economic implications and health hazards that high population growth rate could have on the economies of developing countries. On the other hand, the inadequate Family Planning strategies have continuously exposed or increased the vulnerability of developing countries, resulting to high maternal and infant mortality, increasing poverty, disintegration of extended family system, high incidence of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections and high incidence of morbidity and mortality. (WHO 2012)

Shane (1996) posited that at least 25% of all maternal death can be prevented through Reproductive Health. One in four infant deaths in developing countries can be prevented by spacing birth at least two years apart. The above explanation shows that, population growth rate has strong linkages with economic growth and sustainable social development. This position is predicated on the fact that rapid population growth viz - a - viz scarce resources seem to be one of the major problems facing most countries of the world today. Attempts are therefore being made globally to create awareness and find ways of controlling or regulating fertility.

Rhonda, Lori, Joy and Donnac (2009), opined that the widespread adoption of Family Planning represents one of the most dramatic changes of the 20th century and increase in the use of contraceptive devices around the world. Couples now have the ability to choose the number and spacing of their children with tremendous life saving benefits. The authors submitted that the findings of some recent researches shed more light on how Family Planning increase survival, improves the health

of millions of people, and helped to achieve national goals. From this analysis, it is obvious that Reproductive Health appears to be one of the most cost-effective, high yield interventions that exist today and any country that invest in Reproductive Health would reap immediate health benefits, investment savings in the health and education sectors, social and environmental benefits that extend well beyond single generation.

Reproductive Health could prevent many more deaths particularly in poor countries, if current knowledge is put into practice. Generally, Reproductive Health is very important to the health, survival and development of the family. It has numerous health benefits for women, their sexual partners and their children. Reproductive Health Practices help to prevent unintended pregnancies and the number of unsafe abortions, thereby reducing maternal deaths and disabilities. It may also result in low rates of new born, infant and child mortality. It could also give women more time to breastfeed which will in turn improve infant health and enhance mental physical and nutritional recovery of mothers between births (Sunsheela, 2003).

#### **Research Hypothesis**

One research hypothesis was generated to guide the study:

1. There is no significant relationship between reproductive health practices and mental stability of adolescent mothers in South West Nigeria.

#### **Methodology**

##### **Research Design**

This study adopted the descriptive research design of the survey type. The survey research design used was considered appropriate because it focuses on the observation and perception of the existing situation. This research design of study describes and interprets what is concerned with issues of reproductive

health practices and mental stability among adolescent mothers that have a systematic analysis of the present situation

### **Population**

The population for the study was made up of all adolescent mothers in South West Nigeria. South West Nigeria consists of six states which are Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Oyo.

### **Sample and Sampling Techniques**

To select the needed sample for this study, a total of 1,800 adolescent mothers participated in the study through explorative and purposive sampling techniques. Also, the accidental sampling technique was adopted because copies of the research instrument were administered as the researcher and associates came across any adolescent mother.

### **Research Instrument**

The instrument used was a self constructed instrument titled "Reproductive Health and Mental Stability" (RHAMS) The instrument was divided into two major parts of A and B. Part A was made up of the bio-data of the respondents which comprises of age, location, town, state of origin etc. Part B of the instrument is made of 20 items to elicit responses on mental stability from adolescent mothers in order to discuss the hypothesis generated.

### **Validity of the Instrument**

The face and content validities were ensured by specialists from related fields. For face validity, these experts determined the appropriateness of the instrument. This also has to do with making the instrument to be clear, error free and items coherent and well arranged without ambiguity. To determine the content validity, experts reviewed and modified items of the instrument, some items considered inappropriate were deleted and where necessary other items considered more appropriate were added

### **Reliability of the Instrument**

To determine the degree of consistency of the instrument, a test re-test method of reliability was used. In this case, the instrument was administered on 100 adolescent mothers (not part of the target group) twice within the interval of two weeks. The two sets of scores were correlated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation to obtain the reliability coefficient of 0.70 found to be appropriate at 0.05 level of significance. Hence, the instrument was reliable.

### **Administration of the Instrument**

The researcher administered one thousand eight hundred copies of the instrument with the assistance of some trained research assistants on the sample and collected back immediately after completion.

### **Data Analysis**

The data obtained from the instrument were scored and subjected to inferential statistical analysis. The hypothesis generated was tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation at 0.05 level of significance.

### **Result and Discussion**

This section presents the result of the data analysis and discussion of the study. The result was presented according to research hypothesis which guided the study as shown in Table 1

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant relation-ship between Reproductive Health Practices and mental stability of adolescent mothers in Southwest Nigeria.

In order to test the hypothesis, scores relating to Reproductive Health practices and Mental Stability among adolescents mothers in Southwest Nigeria were subjected to Pearson Product Moment Correlation at 0.05 level of significance. The result is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Pearson Correlation of Reproductive Health and Mental Stability in Southwest Nigeria I

Variable	N	Mean	SD	r <sub>cal</sub>	r <sub>table</sub>
Reproductive health practices	180	31.88	12.46	0.45	0.19
Mental stability	180	56.56	15.94	0	5

P<0.05

Table 1 shows that r<sub>cal</sub> (0.450) is greater than r<sub>table</sub> (0.195) at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is significant relationship between reproductive health practices and mental stability among adolescent mothers in Southwest Nigeria. Hence reproductive health contributes to mental stability of adolescent mothers in Southwest Nigeria.

Findings on the relationship between reproductive health practices and mental stability among adolescent parents revealed that a high relationship exists between reproductive health practices and mental stability. This finding is in support of the World Health Organization (2012) Reproductive Health Practices that help to prevent unwanted pregnancies and promote space birth, protection against Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs), HIV/AIDS and provide other health benefits. The consequential effects of negative disposition to reproductive health will lead to mental instability. Also the result is in support of Delano (2010) that paternal and maternal health are subject to reproductive health.

#### Conclusion and Recommendation

Based on the finding of this study, it was concluded that reproductive health practices determine to a great extent the mental stability or wellness of adolescent mothers in South West Nigeria. The emotional and psychological trauma, health challenges and mental strife brought about by lack of reproductive health practices cannot be underestimated.

Adolescent mothers should therefore endeavour to practice reproductive health for their mental stability and healthy living.

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