



## Religious Beliefs and Family Planning Practices among Married Persons in South West, Nigeria.

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### Abstract

*The study investigated the influence of religious beliefs on family planning practices among married persons in Southwest, Nigeria. Descriptive research design of the survey type was used to conduct the study among 1, 200 married persons in Southwest Nigeria. Multistage random sampling procedure was used for the selection. A self-prepared questionnaire was used to collect information from the respondents. The reliability of the instrument was determined with Test-re-test method with coefficient of 0.87. Two research questions were answered descriptively while the two formulated hypotheses were tested using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Pearson product moment correlation at 0.05 level of significance. The results revealed that religious beliefs of married persons had significant influence on the family planning practices. This shows that many married persons did not practice family planning as a result of their religious belief. There is also a very robust relationship between religious belief and family planning practices among married persons. Based on the finding, it was recommended that married persons should be sensitised by marriage counselors and religious leaders on the need to practice family planning so as to have sizable family they can adequately take care for home stability, to let them know that family planning is not against God's will and that they must not allow religious belief to influence their family planning practices.*

**Keywords:** Family Planning, Religion, Practices, Married Persons, Beliefs.

### Introduction

Nigeria is one of the countries in the continents of Africa. It is being referred to as giant of Africa because of her population. Nigeria ever since early 20's has a serious population problems that are universally recognized. The population of the country keeps on increasing in geometric rate while food and other resources were increasing in an arithmetic rate. (Delano, 2010). This excess population in a way affects the

standard of living of her citizens. More importantly, the population of the people in Southwest Nigeria is not exempted; there has been a steady increase of population growth in the area in recent years.

According to Akinyemi and Isiugo - Abanihe (2014), the Nigeria population was over 160 million coupled with an annual growth rate of 3.2%. It has been observed that, the



increase in population was associated with some social problems such as food shortage, malnutrition, increase in crime rate, shortage of social amenities, and unemployment, among others. Awosusi (2018) posited that the growth rate of fertility, population growth and maternal death in Nigeria is among the highest in the world. In our society, the problems of infant and maternal mortality, over population, housing, unemployment, and starvation have gained the attention of researchers with a view to finding solution to them (Fasiku, 2016). In order to solve all these problems, it is pertinent to look for a way to stem the tide of this ever increasing population and the best antidote to underscore manageable family size which will affect the entire population, is through family planning.

Family planning is simply a way of maintaining reasonable interval limitation in child bearing process; it is a way of preventing unwanted pregnancy and a means of sexual gratification (Fasiku, 2016). Family planning practices comprises of medical and social activities which enable individuals or couples to determine freely the number and spacing of their children and to select the means by which this may be achieved.

Family planning programme has been recognized for its importance in improving the health of women, children and reducing population growth (Fasiku, 2016). Oladokun (2003) opined that the current

realization of the fact that large population can hold back the nation's development and the need for socio-economic development has made the issue of family planning an important one to the Federal Government and these has attracted attention in decision making about population growth. Despite the fact that there are safe and effective family planning methods for everybody, it has been observed that only few couples in the developing world practices it. Rhonda, Lori, Joy & Donnac (2009) opine that, about 137 million women worldwide were not using any method. Observation revealed that some couples are influenced by their religious background against birth control, for example the book of the bible in the old testament enjoins us to be "fruitful and multiply and subdue the earth (Gen.1vs 28).

Religion is the belief that people have in supernatural being; it is embedded in the culture of any society, irrespective of their geographical location or religion. Because of its importance, it affects virtually all aspects of human endeavor such as decision, ideology and morality. There are different types of religion such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism among others. These different religions often have a united view on issues regarding family planning; some kick against it as a result of their cultural background, while some practices are favoured by their local customs. This is also seen in the teaching of several other religions predominantly in Sub - Saharan African countries, Nigeria inclusive



(Igbudu, Okoedion, Peremene and Eghafona, 2011). Unfortunately, in many religions, there is an opposition to human intervention in the reproductive process. For instance, there are religious doctrines that are totally against family planning regardless of their level of exposure or education. They believe that sexual intercourse must be purely for reason of giving birth to children and anything contrary to this belief by any of the couple may affect marital stability. Also some religious sects see withdrawal method as a sin against procreation which is punishable by God (Gen. 38vs9).

It has been observed that the Muslim religion and African Traditional worshippers practise polygyny type of marriage which permits them to have more than one wife and this serves as license to give birth to many children as each wife will like to have her own set of children. Based on the above observations, a pertinent question that is raised in this study is, "Will religious beliefs have influence on the family planning practices?" It is against this backdrop, that this research work is out to examine the influence of religious beliefs on family planning practices among married person in Southwest, Nigeria.

## **Literature Review**

### **Family Planning**

Adaka (1982), described family planning as part of planned parenthood fertility control, or contraception control in limiting or spacing out

pregnancies either for socio-economic, health or population control purposes. In the researcher's point of view, the scholar's citation is very right as it gives the comprehensive meaning of the concept of Family Planning. The World Health Organization (WHO) (2015) defines Family Planning as "a way of thinking and living that is adopted voluntarily upon the basis of knowledge, attitudes and responsible decisions by individuals and couples, in order to promote health and welfare of the family group, and thus contributing effectively to the social development of the country".

However, Nwabude and Nwagwugwu (2006) defined family planning as having the number of children at interval, that is suitable for the couples in order to ensure adequate care, as well as using birth control and contraceptive for controlling the number and spacing of children. Family planning here is seen as controlling the number of children with the use of birth control and contraceptive measure. It was also revealed that family planning is an organized effort to assist people to have the number of children they desire, and to space them accordingly as they choose. (Nwabude and Nwagwugwu, 2006)

Delano (2010) defined family planning as a means by which individuals or couples space the process of conception and child birth at interval, mutually determined by both partners, in order to have the desired number of children that they can conveniently



maintain. From the above definitions, it can be deduced that Family Planning is working out a plan with one's partner, on how to deal with procreation within the context of a sexual relationship. This covers many aspects such as when and why to get pregnant, the number of children wanted, how to deal with fertility issues, how to avoid unwanted pregnancy, whether to consider an abortion, if an unwanted pregnancy occurs etc. It also concerns issues of having children that are planned for, and not children conceived by accident or chance. One can conveniently say that, the whole essence of Family Planning revolves on the health, survivals, and developments of the family and progress of the entire society.

Family Planning is a key part of the commitment to empowering women and improving family. In almost every surroundings, the objectives of Family Planning commonly highlighted included unwanted pregnancy prevention, extensive population growth reduction and health improvement of women; children and population as a whole. Family Planning benefits the health and well-being of women and families throughout the world. Goals in family planning should include balancing the desire for children with emotional, physical and financial needs, or if partners do not wish to have children, it's important to recognize this, and plan accordingly. In the same vein, knowledge and practice of family planning is a basic human right and an

essential element of responsible parenthood, stable family life and positive contribution towards social harmony and national development. Olaitan (2011) highlighted that a myriad of different factors influence personal decisions about the types of family planning method to use. He listed the factors as: effectiveness, religion, cost, health risk permanence, partner involvement and some other socio-economic factors. According to Olaitan (2011), effectiveness comes in when couples who are not in a financial or emotional situation to have children might opt for the most effective type of family planning in order to avoid pregnancy whereas couples with casual approach towards parenthood might choose a less certain form of contraception. Another factor is religion, some religions such as Catholicism, have restrictions on contraception based on the belief that it is God's will to bring children into the world. Dixon – Mueller & German (2007) was also of the opinion that religious believers might choose to avoid certain methods of family planning such as birth control pill, so as to live their lives according to the teachings of their religion. In this study, one could submit that the author's view is valid in that, religion is one of the factors that could cause marital instability as a result of family planning practices between couples of different religions. It has been observed that marriage between a Muslim man and a Christian woman is always characterized with family size issues as it is obvious that Muslims always have the tendency of setting up



a large family size, which may not go down well with the woman. That is to say, if the couples are not of the same religious belief, taking a mutual decision may generate problems in the home. (Fasiku, 2016).

### **Religion**

Religion could be defined as the belief in the existence of a supreme being known as God and that he is the one controlling the whole universe. It is a man's spontaneous awareness of spontaneous relations to his immediate awareness of a living power and infinitely greater than himself (Idowu, 1982). Generally, in Nigeria, religion is divided into three major categories which are Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion (ATR). The first and the oldest religion in this part of the country is African Traditional Religion. It has been in existence before the advent of the Europeans that brought Christianity and the spread of Islam from the Eastern country. In Southwest Nigeria, that is the Yoruba ethnic group, there is no predominant religion, that is to say, they practice the three major religions (Kalu, 2011). Religion has a very powerful influence on the activities of members of the society irrespective of their religion whether they are Christians, Muslims or African Traditional worshippers more importantly they regulate the conduct and behaviour of people in the community.

### **Religion and Family Planning Practices**

Religion is a phenomenon that has been in existence for a long period of

time. It is as old as the society itself and it grows up within a society as an attempt to explain the meaning and purpose of the environment (Tahir, 2011). Olowokere (2014) wrote that religious beliefs are concerned with actions and goals about supernatural forces and their relationship with human beings. Oyebanjo (2005) opined that religious belief is a wide range concept that deals with doctrine of the religious faith, ideas and content. It is the believer's commitment to the object of worship (Santrock, 2007).

When a man is helpless due to problems and forces that are beyond his power and in an attempt to find solution to his numerous problems, he establishes relationship with the supernatural being. In the same vein, Callistus (2007) saw every religion especially in Southwest, Nigeria, as the belief in one Supreme Being who is believed to be the creator of the universe and controller of heavens and the earth. In a nut shell, religion appears to affect the behaviour or personality of couples and an individual including decision taken on reproductive matter such as family planning practices. In line with the above, Karsner (2001) saw religion as part of marital value in which couples must worship together and be guided by the same religious doctrine and beliefs. Though there are different religions such as Christianity, Islam and African Traditional religion, there are certain issues that are not embraced by some of them. Christianity, for instance, preaches monogamy while Islam and Traditional religion embrace polygamy.



According to Korra (2002) differences in total practices of family planning among religions seem to be obvious. He stressed further that some variations exist in the demand for family planning practices with Orthodox Christians, Muslim and Traditional religions. Unlike Christians, Muslims and Traditionalists are more likely to practise family planning since they have the tendency to establish polygamous families. It is observed that Christians cannot take a clear stand on family planning practices, because of different doctrines. For instance, Catholicism was perceived as opposed to birth control and the only method of birth control accepted by it is natural family planning, though this has posed the threat of overpopulation to the world simply because the method is found to be unreliable, unacceptable and ineffective by people who do not understand it (Ryder, 1993). There are however some churches that are totally against family planning practices with biblical support such as Gen 38 verses 1 to 10.

On the other hand, Islamic worshippers, who constitute about 50% of the Nigerian population, just like Christians, are found in all the states of the federation (NPC, 1991, 2002, 2008 and Olowookere, 2014). They have no concrete stand on family planning practices based on their different perspectives. Some accept the practice while some forbid it totally. According to Kalu (2011), Christians are found in all states of the federation and they cover 40% of the

population. African Traditional Religion is another religion that is being practised in the country, and research shows that about 10% of the Nigerian populace practise the religion. As civilization increases, the number of Muslims and Christians increases while that of African Traditional Religion decreases (Kalu 2011). This type of religion is characterized by polygamy that encourages large family size. In a nutshell, it is obvious that religious belief of any type has great influence on the practice of family planning and the choice of contraceptive methods. The researcher upheld the assertion of Korra (2002) in that the doctrine of each religion determines the stand of their adherents on whether to practise family planning or not.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent of the influence that religion have on family planning. Also find out if there is any relationship between religious belief and family planning practices among married person in Southwest Nigeria

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were raised for the study:

1. Will religious beliefs have an influence on family planning practices among married persons?
2. Is there any relationship between religious belief and family planning practices among married persons?



### Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated for the study:

1. Religious beliefs will not significantly influence family planning practices among married persons.
2. There is no significant relationship between religious belief and family planning practices among married persons.

### Research Method

The descriptive research design of the survey type was used for this study. The population for the study consisted of all married women between the age group of 15 to 49 years and 15 years and above for men in Southwest, Nigeria. The sample consisted of 1,200 married persons (male/female) in their reproductive ages. Multistage random sampling procedure was used to select all married persons in three states out of six states in South west Nigeria using simple random sampling. Five Local Government Areas were selected from each of the three states using random sampling technique, making 15 Local Government Areas in all. The state capital of each state was purposely selected as urban location and Local Government Areas outside the state capital was purposely selected as rural location. Married persons were selected from houses in each street using systematic sampling procedure. A self – designed questionnaire titled, “Family Planning Practices and Marital Stability Questionnaire (FPPMSQ)”. Face, content and construct validity of the instrument were determined by specialists in

Social Science Education, Test, measurement and Evaluation, Guidance and Counseling. The reliability of the instrument was established using test – re – test reliability procedure. The instrument was administered on 20 respondents which are not part of the sample twice within an interval of two weeks and the scores obtained from the two administrations were subjected to Pearson product moment correlation at 0.05 level of significance. A reliability co – efficient of 0.87 was obtained which showed that the instrument was reliable. The questionnaire was administered to 1,200 married persons in the sampled states. The research instrument was retrieved as soon as they were completed by the respondents. The data generated were analysed using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Scheffe Post Hoc Test, and Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The two hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance

### Result

The results of the hypotheses are presented below:

**Hypothesis 1:** Religious beliefs will not significantly influence the family planning practices among married persons.

Scores relating to religious beliefs and family planning practices in Southwest, Nigeria were computed and compared for statistical significance using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) at 0.05 level of significance based on their religious beliefs. The result is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1:** ANOVA of religious beliefs and family planning practices.

Variable	Source	SS	Df	MS	F <sub>cal</sub>	F <sub>table</sub>	P
Family planning	Between groups	6764.927	3	2254.976	15.014	2.60	0.000
	Within groups	179625.659	1196	150.189			
	Total	186390.587	1199				

**\*P<0.05**

Table 1 shows that religious beliefs of married persons in Southwest, Nigeria had significant influence on the family planning practices ( $F_{cal} = 15.014$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). ( $F_{tab}$  is 2.60 which is less than  $F_{cal}$  at 0.05 level of significance). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that religious

beliefs of married persons will significantly have influence on the family planning practices.

In order to locate the sources of significant difference among the groups, Scheffe Post-Hoc test was carried out as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Scheffe Post-Hoc test of religious belief and family planning practices of Married persons in Southwest, Nigeria.

	Religion	Islam	Christianity	ATR	Others	N	Mean
Family planning	Islam		*			271	30.61
	Christianity			*		905	35.38
	ATR					18	42.01
	Others					6	36.33

**\*P<0.05**

**ATR - African Traditional Religion**

Table 2 shows that there is a significant difference between the religious beliefs and family planning practices of Christians and Muslims, Christians and African Traditional Religion practitioners (ATR) at 0.05 level of significance.

### Hypothesis 2

There is no significant relationship between religious beliefs and family planning practices among married persons.



**Table 3:** Correlation analysis on religious beliefs and family planning practices among married person.

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r-cal	r-table
Religious belief	1200	31.887	12.468	0.457	0.195
Family planning practices	1200	56.563	15.941		

\* $P < 0.05$

Table 3 show that r-cal (0.457) is greater than r-table (0.195) at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is a significant relationship between religious belief and family planning practices among married persons. Hence, the religious beliefs of married person contribute to low practices of family planning among married persons.

### Discussion

On the hypothesis that investigated the significant influence of religious beliefs of married persons on the family planning practices in Southwest, Nigeria, the result obtained from the hypothesis shows that family planning practices and had influence on Christians, Muslims and practitioners of African Traditional Religious beliefs. The researcher stressed further that some variations exist in the demand for family planning practices, with orthodox Christians, Muslims and adherents of traditional religion. Unlike some Pentecostal Christians, the Muslims and Traditional adherents are most likely not to practice family planning since they have the tendency of establishing polygamous family. Also the second hypotheses on the relationship between religious belief and family

planning practices revealed that a very robust relationship exists between them. This means that religious beliefs of married persons determined the practices of family planning. This finding is consistent with the view of Korra (2002) that differences in total practices of family planning among religions seem to be obvious.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings, it was concluded that religious beliefs of the married persons are very important when it comes to family planning practices and marital stability. It has been submitted that despite various types and importance of family planning, only few married persons adopted the practices which leads to low practice of family planning in Southwest, Nigeria. Also the religious beliefs of the married persons influenced their practices of family planning and that, there is relationship between religious beliefs and family planning practices. Based on the findings, it was recommended that married persons should be encouraged by marriage counselors and religious leaders to make considerate and beneficial decisions on how to manage their family size through family planning practices irrespective of their religious belief. They must also not allow their doctrine to debar them from practicing family planning and the



religious leaders should build family planning issues into messages and programmes of their organization.

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