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Family Size Norms and Uptake of Family Planning in North-West Nigeria

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INTRODUCTION

Both the number and the spacing of the children can be controlled though the use of contraceptives, this is known as family planning and is vital in enhancing the health of both mothers and children (Alenezi & Haridi, 2021). Reproductive health is encompassed by family planning and family size preferences and preference, which are highly influenced by socio-cultural as well as religious factors as adopted in North-Western Nigeria (Popoola, 2019). Although family planning has been promoted as a public health intervention, its utilization is still low in the North-Western region because of some underlying factors among them are; poor knowledge of contraception, weak health facilities, and cultural beliefs that support sizeable familiy size (Ijadunola et al., 2020).

Family size: The number of children in a family and the way they are taken care of varies with the status of the family, in the North Western zone of Nigeria big families are valued especially in the rural areas because children are perceived as source of income during old age and security (Bello et al., 2022). This culture makes it difficult for family planning because most couples consider modern contraceptives as gadgets that work against God's plan to produce children usually regarded as blessings. Such views also have religious aspect since some of the teachings on contraceptions are against the use of family planning services also contributing to the limited acceptance of such services in the region as noted by Usman et al. (2021).

The total contraceptive usage in the region as reported in 2021 was as low as 8% which worsens the impacts of increased population growth rate and high fertility level (National Population Commission, 2021). They lead to high incidents of maternal and child mortality as often as they encourage early child bearing, short time between pregnancies, FGM/C and poor or no access to Quality health care services. Therefore, the fight against FGM, campaigns, policies which focus on issues to do with family size, and encouragement of family planning practices are helpful approaches that enhance health in North-Western Nigeria. This review seeks to discuss these dynamics and review possibilities as well as constraints to family planning in the region.

STATEMENT ON THE PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM

The North-West is one of the regions in North-Western Nigeria, where women have high fertility rates (Adebola et al., 2023), low prevalence of modern contraception use and poor access to family planning services, and as a result have poor aspects of maternal and child health. Currently, the fertility rate in the North-Western region is among the highest in Nigeria with an average of 6 as described by the Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) 2021. An average of 7 children per woman, as opposed to the national average, equal to 5 children per woman. 3 children for woman (National Population Commission, 2021). This high fertility rate is as a result of high and ALL cultural beliefs that support large families along with the discouragement of the use of modern contraceptives.

The level of CPR in the region is still very low and stands at 8% in 2021 while that of the whole country is 17% (National Population Commission, 2021). This low level is further augmented by high levels of unmet need for family planning which is as high as 24 percent among married women in the region according to WHO, (2022). Women in the rural area are the most affected as they lack access to reproductive health service providers, due to; poor health facilities; shortage of qualified health care givers; rampant myths that circulate in the black market regarding modern barrier methods of family planning (Adeyemi et al., 2022).

These trends have high implications on public health. Maternal and child morality in the region is also high; maternal mortality stands at 1,012 deaths per 100, 000 live births and the child mortality under five years of age is at 67 per 1, 000 births the mortgage rate the national averages of 512 deaths per 100, 000 live births and 68 deaths respectively (Federal Ministry of Health, 2021). This raises the risk of pregnancy related complications such as post-partum hemorrhage, obstructed labour and preterm births hence the high mortality rates. The region's newborns are also more likely to die from malnutrition and other illnesses because of poor maternal care and depleted household resources (UNICEF, 2020).

Besides, failure in family planning contributes to the increased population growth in the region which in turn leads to poor standard of living, education and employment, most especially among females (Wasswa et al., 2020). The high population growth of 3. of the population in the North-Western region:

2% and proxy the pressure on the largely depleted health care and social services infrastructures (World Bank, 2022). To prevent and control these problems, such measures as promotion of family planning, aimed at decreasing family size preferences, should become the focus of efforts towards enhancing the health of the region and attainment of greater socio-economic development.

JUSTIFICATION OF THE REVIEW

A large number of works have been dedicated to the analysis of the family planning in Nigeria, however, not many of them are systematic and dedicated to the peculiarities of the North-western states which culture and religion make a major impact on the reproductive behavior. This review seeks to explain that gap by providing a consolidated meta-analysis of research that assesses family size preferences and family planning behaviors in this particular setting. It will explore the complex interactions between and within socio-cultural, economic and educational demography and their influence toward acceptation or rejection of family planning in that area. Thus, it will be aimed at identification of the barriers and enablers for demand for Family Planning in the NW region by outlining specific features that might be characteristic only for this area.

The review is significant as it was an attempt to fill the gap in knowledge by presenting the regional findings that may not necessarily be present in national research. Further, its implications are useful for policy and program suggestions where health care is delivered, and reproductive health service accessibility in the North-Western region is improved and more contextually sensitive. The findings from this review will assist in the development of suitable culturally sensitive interventions which will help to solve the issues contributing to MMR and U5MR and thus work towards achieving sustainable development in Northern Nigeria.

OBJECTIVES OF THE REVIEW

1. To assess the family size preferences among couples in the North-Western region of Nigeria.
2. To explore the factors influencing family planning practices in the region.
3. To evaluate the barriers and facilitators to the use of modern contraceptives among women of reproductive age.

METHODOLOGY OF THE REVIEW

This review adopted a systematic approach to identify and analyze relevant studies on family size preferences and family planning practices in the North-Western region of Nigeria. The sources of studies included peer-reviewed journal articles, reports from the National Population Commission, and relevant government publications from 2019 to 2024. Key search terms used in the literature search were "family size preferences," "family planning practice," "contraceptive use," "North-Western Nigeria," and "socio-cultural influences on family planning." The selection criteria required that studies focus on reproductive health, family size preferences, or family planning practices specific to the North-Western region. Studies conducted outside this timeframe or without a focus on family planning in northern Nigeria were excluded from the review.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Family size preferences among couples in the North-Western region of Nigeria.

Study	Location	Family Size Preference (%)	Total Respondents	Key Findings
Usman et al. (2021)	Rural Kano & Katsina	68%	500	Preference for large families due to economic reasons (farm work, family businesses). Limited access to family planning services.
Bello et al. (2022)	Rural areas (general)	65%	450	Men prefer large families for social security in old age. Cultural factors dominate decision-making.
Adeyemi et al. (2022)	Urban North-Western Nigeria	35%	300	Urban areas show a shift toward smaller families, with more exposure to education and healthcare, though cultural values still influence decisions.

The synthesis of the data obtained in the studied sources indicates that a large majority of couples is still longing for having large families with five or even more children in that. Such preference can be explained culturally and religiously by connecting family size with wealth, class as well as religious duty. Research that was carried out by Usman et al. (2021) indicated that 68 percent of the respondents in Kano and Katsina rural areas preferred large

families, with the couple noting that children were important in helping to work on farms or the couple's businesses, hence the economic benefits of large families.

In the same vein, Bello et al. (2022) also pointed out that culturally accepted norms of many children as social security in future especially in the later days are still prominent among men in the region. This is in contrast to changes in the urban regions whereby a customization to education as well as superior healthcare services results in a progressive reduction in the number of children per family (Adeyemi et al., 2022). But as time goes on, it was observed that even in urban areas, cultural values are still dominant with regard to the preference of family size which is still higher than other regions of Nigeria. These large family size preferences, therefore, are evident in the reviewed studies implying that there should be appropriate strategies which acknowledge these socio-cultural realities. At the same time as population control information impacts portions of the North-Western region's urbanization into desiring smaller families, the convention of a large family still prevails.

The factors influencing family planning practices in the North-Western region of Nigeria.

Factor	**Description**	**Study**	**Location**
Cultural and Religious Beliefs	Large families seen as a religious duty and source of economic security; Traditional beliefs encourage early marriages and high fertility rates.	Usman et al. (2021), Bello et al. (2022)	North-Western Nigeria (rural areas)
Male Dominance in Decision-Making	Men control reproductive decisions; misconceptions about contraception reduce women's autonomy.	Adeyemi et al. (2022)	North-Western Nigeria (rural and urban households)
Educational Attainment	Higher education among women leads to increased contraceptive use, while rural areas with lower education show minimal adoption.	National Population Commission (2021)	North-Western Nigeria (rural and urban)
Economic Constraints	Cost of contraceptives and limited access to healthcare facilities hinder family planning uptake.	Ahmad et al. (2023)	North-Western Nigeria (rural areas)
Healthcare Infrastructure Deficits	Lack of trained healthcare providers and provider biases decrease family planning service availability, especially in rural areas.	World Health Organization (2022)	North-Western Nigeria (general)

Research has found that in most the communities of the North-Western Nigeria, child-bearing and having many children are considered as religious obligations and for safety as well as economic benefits (Usman et al., 2021). For instance, traditional knowledge promotes young marriages and high child bearing proclaiming that many want to have children as many as God wishes. This perspective has been drummed into the minds of Muslims through the teachings of the Quran and other cultural beliefs which a are part of the Islamic religion (Bello et al., 2022).

Another reason which poses a great influence on family planning practices is male control in decision making especially in reproduction. In many-headed households, decisions concerning the use of contraceptives are made by a man and he may have some misconceptions about family planning, for example, he may believe that this method causes infertility or has a detrimental impact on the woman's health (Adeyemi et al., 2022). Therefore, women also do not have full control regarding decisions made regarding their reproductive rights which in turn decreases the chances of utilizing contraceptives.

The other relevant determinant is educational attainment since the higher the level of education one achieves, the higher the probability that their income will be large as well. It has also been demonstrated that women education level is an influential factor in the use of family planning, therefore women with higher education levels are more likely to use family planning practices (National Population Commission, 2021). It can therefore be seen that female contraceptive use remains relatively low even today because of weak knowledge regarding family planning in developing countries such as India where literacy levels are considerably low in comparison to developed countries. Also, factors that include cost of the contraceptives and lack of easy access to health services act as economic deterrents to the use of modern family planning methods in the region (Ahmad et al., 2023).

Failure in utilization of family planning facilities is occasioned by inadequate health facilities; health prevents and provider related factors. The study also found that a high percentage of the health care providers in the North-Western region of the country has not been trained on how to counsel patients on family planning and a number of them have either religious or personal beliefs that may not allow them recommend use of contraceptives. This has resulted in inadequate availability of comprehensive and quality family planning services especially to the rural areas (World Health Organization, 2022). Barriers to family planning practice in the North Western region include; culture and religion, gender, education, financial and health facilities. Initiating interventions that would attend to these factors will be particularly important in advancing the utilization of family planning in the geographical area under consideration.

The barriers and facilitators to the use of modern contraceptives among women of reproductive age in the North-Western region of Nigeria

Factor	Description	Study	Location
Misconceptions about Contraceptive Use	Many women believe contraceptives cause infertility or health problems, reinforced by cultural and religious norms (Bello et al., 2022).	Bello et al. (2022)	Rural North-Western Nigeria
Economic Barriers	Cost of contraceptives and distance to healthcare facilities limit access, especially for low-income women (Ahmad et al., 2023).	Ahmad et al. (2023)	Rural North-Western Nigeria
Male-Dominated Decision-Making	Men often control decisions on contraceptive use, reducing women's autonomy (Adeyemi et al., 2022).	Adeyemi et al. (2022)	Rural and Urban North-Western Nigeria
Educational Attainment	Women with higher education are more likely to adopt modern contraceptives, as education increases awareness (National Population Commission, 2021).	National Population Commission (2021)	North-Western Nigeria (general)
Women's Empowerment Programs	Women's empowerment programs promote reproductive autonomy and increase contraceptive use (World Health Organization, 2022).	World Health Organization (2022)	North-Western Nigeria (general)

There are some disparities that is common and one of it is the knowledge barrier on the use of contraceptives. This is due to cultural and religious restrictions that frown at modern methods of birth control: most of the women in the region fear that they could suffer from infertility or some other complications after using contraceptives (Bello et al., 2022). This unawareness about contraceptives is a major challenge since many women in the developing world especially in the rural areas lack formal education.

It also affects through economic factors such as; The cost of consumables contraceptives and the geographical accessibility of health institutions reduce use of family planning especially by low-income women. Ahmad et al., 2023 further showed that most women in South-Western Nigeria were unable to use modern contraceptives when in need because of financial barriers thereby using traditional contraception or stopping contraception use. This economic burden coupled with weak health care systems stop continued use of contraceptives in the affected countries.

Another significant social influence is coercion and male decision-making revealed through the practice where men finalize on the use of contraceptives in a household. Thus, women may be unable to control their reproductive decisions even when all use of contraceptives services is accessible (Adeyemi et al., 2022). This is made worse by male partners' misconceptions and lack of knowledge about family planning because this would restrict the options available to women on contraceptives due to fear of damaging family relations or facing stigma.

On the other hand, knowledge is one of the factors that compel people to use contraceptives. This is because, research has found that women with higher education level have better tendencies of embracing and sustaining the use of modern contraceptives (National Population Commission, 2021). Education enlightens the people especially the women on the importance of family planning and the myths that surround the use of contraceptives so as to arrive at right decisions regarding their reproductive system. Besides, the general healthcare measures that targets community education and family planning services in some parts of North West, Nigeria have recorded some effectiveness (Usman et al., 2021).

In addition to this, participation in women's empowerments programmes has also promoted increased use of contraceptives. These programmes empower women, give them economic freedom and enable them to make their own choices especially concerning family planning. If such measures are compounded with healthcare providers whose orientation is to provide culturally appropriate family planning information, the utilization of modern methods of fertility control rises (World Health Organization, 2022).

CONCLUSION

This paper on culture and religion, family size preferences and family planning practices in the North-Western region Nigeria has revealed that all these factors are governed by social, religious beliefs, economic and educational factors. Poor knowledge about birth control methods, decision-making by the males, and restricted access to relevant health services are the major challenges to the use of modern means of family planning. However, there are also big enabling factors including education level above the tertiary level and women empowered programs as they work to enhance the use of the modern contraceptives. Mitigating these barriers via appropriate measures like; community agency mobilization and education, developing health facility infrastructure and engendering empowered women in particular the girl child will be of great significance in the promotion of family planning in the area. Subsequent studies and health related efforts should devise culturally appropriate interventions, capable of addressing socio-cultural realities in North-Western Nigeria hence enhance maternal and child health with long standing population gains.

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