



## Educators' Perspectives on Family Planning and Religious Influences: Implications for Population Management in Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

Nigeria's rapid population growth has created huge challenges for sustainable development, due to the fact that Nigeria is one of those with the highest birth rates in sub-Saharan Africa. Family planning (FP) is known for its key in improving maternal and child health, yet its adoption is hindered by religious beliefs, misinformation or cultural traditions. Educators, especially those in health and family planning sessions, play key roles in providing accurate information. This study examined how these educators are able to influence FP acceptance and awareness while also examining the challenges they face. The study is anchored on the Theory of Planned Behavior. The study looked at how lecturers' knowledge, attitudes, and positions impacted the discussions on FP. The findings showed that while these education lecturers may help correct misconceptions or promote FP, strong cultural and religious resistance continued to slow progress rate. The study suggested that the addition of culturally and religiously appropriate FP education to school curriculum coupled with a collaboration with religious leaders can help to improve public acceptance. Addressing these issues thus essential for better reproductive health education in Nigeria.

Keywords; family Planning, Religious Influence on Contraception, Cultural Norms and Fertility, Christianity and Family Planning, Sustainable Population Growth

### Introduction

Nigeria's rapidly growing population is a critical issue that has far-reaching implications for economic development, healthcare, and social infrastructure. With fertility rates among the highest in sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria's population is projected to exceed 400 million by 2050 (United Nations, 2022). High fertility rates, driven by limited contraceptive use and deeply entrenched cultural and religious beliefs, continue to strain national resources and hinder progress toward sustainable development goals (World Bank, 2021).

Family planning (FP) is widely recognized as an essential tool for reducing fertility rates, improving maternal and child health outcomes, and alleviating socioeconomic pressures. However, FP adoption in Nigeria is significantly influenced by religious doctrines, which often discourage contraceptive use and promote high fertility as a divine mandate (Afolabi & Adeyemi, 2019). Christian and Islamic teachings, which dominate the Nigerian religious landscape, frequently shape reproductive behaviors, either by directly opposing modern contraception or by promoting only natural methods of birth control. This strong religious influence has led to widespread misconceptions about FP, contributing to persistent resistance among both individuals and communities (Pinter et al., 2016; Ikogho & Akpokiniyo, 2025).

Education lecturers, particularly those specializing in health and FP education, are strategically positioned to challenge these misconceptions and promote evidence-based reproductive health practices. As educators and influencers, they can shape the attitudes of future teachers, healthcare workers, and students, who, in turn, impact community perspectives on FP. However, their ability to drive change is often constrained by religious sensitivities, institutional restrictions, and the broader sociocultural environment that reinforces resistance to contraceptive use (Eze et al., 2021; Ikogho & Igbudu, 2013).

This study explores the role of education lecturers in shaping FP attitudes in Nigeria, assessing their capacity to challenge myths and promote informed decision-making while navigating religious and cultural barriers. Using the Theory of Planned Behavior as a guiding framework, the study examines how educators' attitudes, perceived social norms, and institutional constraints influence FP education and adoption. By identifying both the opportunities and limitations within this landscape, the study provides insights into potential strategies for integrating FP education into religious and culturally acceptable frameworks, ultimately contributing to improved reproductive health outcomes and sustainable population management in Nigeria.

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## Statement of the Problem

Nigeria's population is growing at a rapid rate, presenting a major barrier to national development, with high fertility rates and among the highest in sub-Saharan Africa region (United Nations, 2022; Ikogho & Onoharigho, 2025). In spite of the advantages of family planning (FP) in promoting maternal and neonatal health, reducing poverty, and its relevance in achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs), FP adoption remains low in Sub-Saharan Africa. One major barriers to FP in Nigeria is the strong influence of cultural beliefs and religious belief, which often deter community women from contraceptive use. Thus reinforcing high fertility as a societal norm (Afolabi & Adeyemi, 2019; Ikogho, 2021). The influence of religious doctrines, which dominate the region, also help in reshaping reproductive behaviors either directly promoting or opposing modern contraception, thus giving credence to natural methods of birth control (Pinter et al., 2016). This has contributed to the proliferation of misconception, myths, misinformation, and the reluctance faced by women in the region toward FP programs.

Education lecturers on the other hand especially those specialized in health education, are strategically positioned to influence and challenge misconceptions related to FP and promote correct reproductive health knowledge. As educators, they play key role in influencing future healthcare workers, teachers and students who will further disseminate correct and up to date information about FP within the communities. However, these efforts are sometimes constrained by sensitive religious barriers or other societal resistance thus, effectiveness in changing attitudes toward FP are reduced (Eze et al., 2021; Ikogho, 2022). It was also observed by recent researches that while some educators advocated for FP as a tool for nation building and development (Ikogho & Igbudu, 2013) others are hesitant in addressing the topic due to fear of being backlashed from religious institutions, conservative communities, and even from within professional environments.

Existing studies have explored the key role of religious and cultural factors in FP adoption, with reduced attention given to the perspectives of education lecturers, who are key intermediaries for policy and practice. There is a therefore a need to understand how these beliefs connect with religious ideologies in shaping their role in FP education. This study was therefore designed to examine this gap by identifying the challenges and opportunities experienced by educators in an attempt to influence FP adoption in Nigeria. By identifying key barriers and proposing culturally sensitive strategies for integrating FP education, this study aims to contribute to efforts enhancing FP acceptance, improving reproductive health outcomes, and support sustainable population management in Nigeria (Pinter et al., 2016).

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## The Role of Religion in Family Planning Attitudes

Religion plays a significant role in shaping societal norms and individual behaviors in Nigeria. Christian and Islamic doctrines, which represent 95% of the population, often emphasize procreation as a divine mandate. While Protestant denominations generally accept modern contraceptive methods, the Roman Catholic Church opposes artificial contraception, advocating instead for natural family planning methods (Salza, 2024). Similarly, Islamic perspectives on family planning (FP) vary, with some scholars permitting contraceptive use under specific conditions, while others oppose it on moral grounds (Berlin-Institut für Bevölkerung und Entwicklung, .).

Religious beliefs strongly influence reproductive decisions in Nigeria, often shaping attitudes toward contraception. Lecturers play a crucial role in challenging harmful myths about FP, particularly those perpetuated by religious doctrines. Misconceptions, such as the belief that contraception is sinful, contribute to resistance against FP adoption. However, educators can promote both religious values and reproductive health by addressing these myths in a culturally sensitive manner. By integrating FP education that aligns with religious teachings and modern contraceptive practices, lecturers can foster more inclusive and sustainable discussions. Some religious scholars permit contraceptive use under specific conditions, a perspective that could be emphasized to dispel myths while respecting religious beliefs (Pinter et al., 2016; Ikogho & Akpokiniovo, 2024).

Although religious doctrines often discourage contraceptive use, leading to mixed acceptance among educators, perspectives on FP remain divided. Some educators view FP as essential for societal development, while others see it as contradicting religious principles that emphasize procreation. This dual perspective influences how FP is communicated in educational settings, ultimately shaping students' understanding and acceptance of FP in the future. Certain religious teachings, such as those in **Psalm 127:3-5** and **Hosea 9:11**, frame contraception as a rejection of God's divine blessings (Salza, 2024). However, scholars argue that these interpretations are not always aligned with modern public health imperatives and have contributed to persistently high fertility rates (Ajayi & Olayemi, 2020).

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## Educators' Role in Family Planning Advocacy

Lecturers play key roles as they mediate between policy and practice, influencing future teachers who in turn will disseminate the knowledge gained in schools and communities. However, few studies examined how educators' religious beliefs may impact their perspectives on FP. This was probably why Nwosu and Chima (2020) opined that educators often reflect broad societal perceptions, including resistance to FP rooted in religious and cultural norms. This resistance may increase their reluctance to integrate FP topics into the curriculum, thus perpetuating myths and misconceptions about contraception (Eze et al., 2021).

Despite these limitations, evidence suggested that integrating culturally sensitive FP education within religious circle can promote acceptance and uptake. For example, studies by Mwaura et al. (2018) suggested that FP programs carried out in Kenya involving religious leaders and educators experienced significant community acceptance. Conversely, programs that disregarded the inclusion religious contents faced significant opposition and low adoption

rates (Adebayo & Ibrahim, 2017). These findings highlighted the need for collaborative approaches that will connect religious leaders, educators, and policymakers in developing FP initiatives with respect to cultural and religious values.

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### Barriers to Family Planning Adoption in Nigeria

Several studies identified varied barriers to FP adoption in Nigeria, such as misinformation, myths and religious opposition. Ajayi and Olayemi in 2020 and Igabari et al., in (2025) argued that deeply rooted religious beliefs can contribute to the rapid spread of myths about contraceptive methods, like infertility or moral degradation. Additionally, fear of being stigmatized or ostracized and the notion of FP being contrary to religious teachings further deter individuals from seeking FP services (Frost & Doodoo, 2009). Addressing these challenges requires targeted educational interventions that can challenge misconceptions while respecting religious stands (Nwoke et al., 2022; Ikogho and Ikogho, 2022).

Theoretical Framework: Theory of Planned Behavior

This study is anchored on the frameworks of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which posits that attitudes, perceived norms, and perceived behavioral control shape intentions and behaviors, based on this theory, lecturers can ensure FP adoption by influencing these three factors:

- lecturers can promote favorable attitudes toward contraception by physically demonstrating that FP has no conflict with religious values, thus emphasizing its benefit for the health of mother and child as well as its role in sustainable development.
- Education lecturers can influence subjective norms, this way, individuals will perceive the expectations of others regarding FP. This can be achieved through classroom discussions and engagement with religious communities, they may also see FP as an accepted practice, even within religious domain.
- **Lecturers can** equip students with practical knowledge or skills to make informed choices regarding their reproductive health, thus education lecturers may use their position to enhance individuals' perceived control over their reproductive health. This could include training on navigating FP discussions within family and religious settings, thus boosting their confidence in the use of contraceptive methods.

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### Long-Term Cultural and Societal Change

Education lecturers are capable of influencing not only their students but also the broader communities to which the students belong. Teaching FP in a culturally sensitive manner, lecturers can disseminate accurate information that will challenge misconceptions within their own families units and communities. This can lead to a long-term shift in attitudes toward FP and reproductive health. Lecturers also play a role in collaborating with religious leaders, policymakers and professionals to help design FP programs that are both culturally and religiously sensitive. This will ensure that FP education is widely accepted and practiced.

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### Conclusion

Education lecturers in Nigeria have a major role in dispelling myths related to FP, especially those rooted in religious beliefs. Their influence goes beyond the classroom, shaping attitudes and behaviors that can lead to making informed, positive, and sustainable FP decisions. Addressing these intersection related to religion, education, and FP requires a nuanced approach that respected religious diversity while promoting evidence-based FP practices. Future research should explore strategies for integrating FP education within religious frameworks to enhance acceptance and uptake, ultimately contributing to Nigeria's broader population management efforts.

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