

Factors Sustaining High Fertility Regime in Southwest Nigeria

Introduction

Studies have shown that family size preferences are strong predictors of future fertility levels (Coombs, 1974, Ogunjuyigbe, 2001). Family size preferences reflect the values which society or individuals in society attach to children. Such preferences actually indicate the demand for children.

However, one of the unresolved issues in demographic research is whether certain systems of gender power dynamics or particular socio-economic conditions systematically differentiate women's and men's demand for children in developing countries (Manson and Taj, 1984). Overwhelming majorities of Nigerian men and women believe that men wanted more children than their wives. Donovan (1995) however, found that men who are educated, who marry at a later age, who are monogamous, who discuss family size with their wives, and who plan to rely upon investments or savings instead of upon their children for old-age support, were significantly more likely than other men to prefer small families and to have fewer children.

A line of argument from the literature on fertility determinants is that demand for children is expected to decline when societal changes increase the power of women relative to men (Caldwell, 1983). This argument rests on a sound basis; in most or all societies, the costs of rearing children fall more heavily on females than on males, and thus the optimal number of children to bear from the perspective of a female striving to maximize her reproductive success often should be less than for a male.

Various studies have shown important effects of the husband's desires on a couple's fertility and a low level of communication between spouses about family size and family planning has also been reported in such studies (Thomson et al, 1990; Ezeh, 1991). Male dominance is particularly profound in matters of reproduction. They generally view reproduction as their prerogative, an issue in which the compliance of their wives is taken for granted. The relatively high fertility levels in most of sub-Saharan African countries therefore point to the need for a closer examination of the mechanisms of spousal communication about fertility decision making among couples in different family settings. This is imperative judging from the influence of men's preferences and power on childbearing and other reproductive outcomes. Interspousal communication should therefore be among the most important factors leading to lower desired family size and increased contraceptive use.

Traditional roles generally accorded the males in our societies show the male to be paramount in family decision making and such decisions include determination of family size. Men are the dominant decision-makers in Nigeria families, including matters relating to reproduction and family size. As observed by Donovan (1995), the male-dominant and patrilineal traditions encourage large families.

In patriarchal societies, men play important roles as heads of their households, the custodians of the interests of their lineage and breadwinners. By the nature of these societies, men control land and other economic resources while their wives are expected to depend on them for almost all matters. In spite of modernization factors which have facilitated the emergence of nuclear families that operate outside the confines of the

traditional extended family control, family life in male dominated societies is still guided by normative principles, institutions and beliefs that vary from one place to another.

Conventional approaches to fertility reduction have focused primarily on altering women's sexual and fertility patterns while neglecting male sexual and contraceptive behaviour (Bruce, 1994). Thus family planning programmes are primarily targeted at the females, with emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge concerning family life and reproduction. The consequence of the female-only approach to the fertility control has been that some men view family planning with suspicion, regarding it as being aimed at undermining their authority in the family. Failure to involve men in decisions pertaining to family size and family planning programmes can, therefore have serious implications.

Statistics show that male literacy rate in many developing countries is higher than that of females (Bankole and Olaleye, 1993). Also, as pointed out earlier, men in Africa, were noticed to be dominating and controlling many of the structural, behavioural, and cultural dimensions of the family and its fertility processes (Adamchak and Adebayo, 1985), an understanding of their attitudes, preferences and behaviour concerning reproduction outcomes becomes an important area for demographic investigation. This paper attempts to examine the various factors determining the desired and actual fertility of Yoruba men and women of Southwest Nigeria. It provides insight into the number of children the respondents consider desirable for themselves, their fertility history and behaviour, attitude of men to women status as well as value placed on children as factors precipitating high fertility in the zone. Finally, the impact of spousal communication on family size and contraceptive use was also examined.

Methodology

The study which took place in 2004 was conducted in Southwest Nigeria. The region largely inhabited by the Yoruba speaking people, the group which constitute more than 80 percent of the resident population. Yorubas exclusively occupies eight of the thirty-six states of Nigeria namely: Lagos, Oyo, Ogun, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti, Kwara and Kogi States. However, two of these states, Kwara and Ekiti States are currently carved out of the zone being covered in this study. The region is highly urbanized having the largest number of urban centres with 100,000 or more inhabitants (NPC, 1991). Although less than one-fifth of the total national population lived in the Southwest, however, well over two-fifths of the people residing in urban centres were found in this part of the country (NPC, 2006). The crude birth rate of the region compares with the national rate of 45 live births per 1000 population while the total fertility rate is 5.7 live births per women (NPC, 1991). The people inhabit an agriculturally fertile and undulating thick forest which in effect makes the economy dominantly agrarian. Three of the remaining six states in the zone were randomly selected and these are Osun, Oyo and Ondo States with growth rate of 3.2, 3.4 and 3.0 respectively. By 2006 census, Osun State has a population of 3,423,535 inhabitants (1,740,619 males and 1,682,916 females), Oyo State 5,591,589 (2,809,840 males and 2,781,749 females), while Ondo States has 3,441,024 inhabitants (1,751,263 males and 1,679,761 females). These states broadly represent the custom and tradition of the Yoruba ethnic group.

Selection of eligible respondents in urban areas followed a multi-stage stratified random sampling design, while selection of respondents in the rural areas was done by simple random sampling technique since each rural area consists of a largely homogenous group. However, the selection was done in such a way that all the different parts of the locations were represented. A target sample size of 200 men and their wives were selected in each state. On the whole 1,396 respondents were interviewed. However, after data cleaning, only 1,300 of the returned questionnaires were found useful and these were made use of in the analysis. Apart from the structured interview, twelve in-depth interviews were conducted in each study location to collect additional information on cultural practices of the people that may likely influence their desired and actual fertility.

Fertility preference as a subject is conceptualized in a variety of ways. These include: ideal family size, desired family size, preferred family size, intended family size, expected family size and sex preference. In practice, surveys have varied widely in the wording of questions used to measure these concepts. Stated fertility preference, although undoubtedly flawed by theoretical and methodological problems, are the best available indicators of actual and desired family size. Therefore, arising from the nature of the available data, the measures of fertility preference used in this study are the actual and desired family size. The data was collected based on responses to the questions “if you could choose exactly the number of children to have in your lifetime, how many would that be?” and “if you could go back to the time you did not have any child and could choose exactly the number of children to have, how many would that be?”. These questions aim at estimating the total number of children these respondents hope to have in future and how many children they already have. Data from the field were edited and

entered into the computer using SPSSPC+ version 11. The qualitative data were categorized and were also subjected to computer analysis. Generally, the data collected were analyzed at three levels and each level requires different analytic procedures. The first level involved an examination of the distribution of the respondents according to each of the selected characteristics. The second level involved the examination of the patterns of association between the dependent and independent variables. The third level involved the use of advanced statistics to examine the pattern of association between dependent and independent variables. However, results presented in this paper only include the analyses done at univariate and bivariate levels.

Socio-Economic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 shows that 63% of the male and 97.2% of the female respondents were between ages 15 and 44 years. The study shows that 12.8% had no formal education, while 70.1% attained secondary or higher levels of education. As is the case in most of the developing countries, the proportion of women who have never been to school is higher than that of men (18.8% females as against 6.7% males). Almost 80 percent of the respondents profess the Christian faith as against only 18.2% who are Muslims. The table further shows that 43.6% of the respondents live in rural areas as against 56.4% in the urban areas. Of particular interest is the near universality of marriage institution where most birth takes place. Respondents in monogamous unions constituted 72.3% of the total respondents. About 80% were working, however, majority of the respondents engaged in trading. Twenty-three percent also engaged in farming.

Table 1: Percentage distribution of respondents by their socio-economic characteristics

Characteristics	Male (N=585)	Female (N=715)	Total (N=1300)
Age			
15-29	7.1	39.3	23.5
30-44	55.9	57.9	56.9
45+	36.9	2.8	19.9
Residency			
Urban	60.0	52.7	56.4
Rural	40.0	47.3	43.6
Education			
None	11.1	20.7	15.8
Primary	11.1	16.7	14.1
Secondary	57.8	46.0	51.9
Tertiary	20.0	16.7	18.0
Occupation			
Farming	18.6	23.3	20.9
Trading	34.5	41.7	38.1
Public/civil servant	21.3	11.6	16.4
Professional	9.5	5.3	7.4
Artisan	11.8	8.6	10.3
Other	4.3	9.5	6.9
Religion			
Catholic	17.8	13.0	15.2
Protestant	20.0	18.5	19.2
Other Christian	40.0	50.0	45.5
Islam	20.0	16.7	18.2
Other	2.2	1.9	2.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Desired family size

It could be observed from Table 2 that more than three out of five respondents desired to have between three and four children. The mean desired family size is 3.7. Only 8.2%

percent of the sampled population desired 1-2 children, while 24.5% would prefer a minimum of five children. More males (26.1%) than females (23.1%) preferred 5 or more children indicating that men want larger family size than the women in the area. Various studies (Oppong, 1985; Olusanya, 1969) have shown that African man value and cherish children for economic and social reasons. Children are assets to their parents because they would be helping them on the farm and because of the absence of social security scheme in the continent, men tend to have preference for larger number of children so that when they are old, the children would be fending for them.

The concentration of respondents preferring less than four children in the area may be due to the prevailing poor economic situation of the country in which people now consider their financial capability before they start bearing children or having an additional one. Since ideal desired family size is measured in terms of the children ever born and the number of children still desire, the preference for four children or less does not mean that most of the respondents may have four children because some of them are still in the process of childbearing.

Table 2: Percentage distribution of respondents by sex and according to number of children wanted at first marriage

Desired family size	Male (N=585)	Female (N=715)	Total (N=1300)
1-2	4.3	11.5	8.2
3-4	69.6	65.4	67.3
5+	26.1	23.1	24.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Conjugal relationships and decision-making

The expectation is that couples who had discussion on issues such as pregnancy matters, when to have another child, discussing or taking decision on family planning etc. would be better able to predict partner's position than would a spouse who did not have such discussion. However, there are some prevailing socio-economic and institutional factors that will play significant impact on couples reproductive behaviour and contraceptive decision-making. For instance, a number of cultural factors have been identified to have favoured men in matters related to marriage and family life (Renne, 1993). Probably as a result of dependence of women on their husbands, socially and economically, men greatly influence their family decisions.

Tables 3 shows that a significant proportion of the respondents claimed that they eat together, sleep together, have leisure together and do many other things together. However, it is discernable from in-depth interview that the topics of interest included mainly financial problems, children welfare and their schooling. Food was also a topic of frequent discussion. Table 3 shows that issues pertaining to pregnancies and family size were seldom discussed. When asked 'whether they ever discussed the number of children wanted with partners', more than half of the men compared with 49% of the female respondents reported that they had never had such discussion. About two-fifths of the respondents (55.8% and 56.3% males and females respectively) had also never discussed whether to do something to delay pregnancy with their partners. We notice from the table that conjugal relationships are relatively closed according to reports of both the husbands and wives. Problems about children's welfare are frequently discussed, but discussions relating to reproduction are avoided in general. When asked 'what the wife's reaction would be to decisions taken without consulting her', some of the men that participated in

the in-depth interview said: “she would not take kindly to it”; some thought “their wives would agree to the decision that has been made” and some believe that “their wives would neither agree nor disagree”. Close conjugal relationships can be a good indicator of joint decision making among couples.

Table 3: Percentage distribution of respondents by sex and according to conjugal relationship

Conjugal Relationship		Male (N=585)	Female (N=715)	Total (N=1300)
A. Do you and your spouse:				
Eat together	Yes	58.3	56.6	57.2
Sleep together	Yes	69.5	74.1	71.9
Go out together	Yes	61.9	63.0	62.5
Share confidence and secrets	Yes	78.6	79.6	79.2
Pool resources together	Yes	35.7	50.0	43.8
B. Have you and your spouse ever discussed:				
(a) Number of children to have?	Yes	48.9	51.0	49.9
(b) Doing something to delay or avoid pregnancy?	Yes	55.8	56.3	56.1
(c) Whether to stop having children?	Yes	54.1	57.2	55.7
(d) Has your partner initiated discussion about family planning?	Yes	38.4	27.9	31.6

Value placed on children

There is currently a growing body of data from different parts of the world to indicate that fertility declines do not simply follow changes in such indexes of modernization as literacy, women’s work or female autonomy, but the macro-level socio-economic changes affect different sectors of the population of a given community in different ways and fertility declines occur according to changes in the value of children within the context of class specific family economies and costs (Oppong, 1985; Greenhalgh, 1990). Reproductive behaviour is largely a response to the underlying preferences of parents for children.

Table 4 shows that in spite of the reduced desire for large family sizes as espoused in the Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey, 2003 (NDHS, 2003), there is still clear evidence of a high value placed on children in Nigeria. Asked ‘what a husband should do if the wife has no child, 48.5% of the respondents thought he should remarry, 13% thought he should send the woman away. The desire for children is still so deep rooted in the area that in the opinion of majority of the respondents, childlessness would be negatively viewed by the community; a childless woman, in their opinion, could incur social neglect (24.3%), be despised (32.8%), or command no respect in the community (17.7%). Responses concerning the good things about having children include: security at old age, perpetuation of family name and other cultural values. Son preference was still slightly evident. The most popular reason for having a son was to be able to carry on the family name followed by enhanced social status. The popular reason among the respondents for having a daughter, on the other hand, was to be able to help in the household chores (59.3%).

Table 4: Percentage distribution of respondents by value placed on children

Value placed on children	Percentage (N=1300)
What husband should do if wife has no children	
Remarry	48.5
Send the woman away	13.1
Keep looking for one	23.5
Other	14.9
Attitude of community to a woman without a child	
Social neglect	24.3
Despised	32.8
No respect	17.7
Other	25.1
Total	100.0

Preference for sons and daughters

The desire to have or not to have children depends not only on the age and actual family size but also on the sex composition of the children a person has already produced. As presented in various studies, there is preference for sons in most of the sub-Saharan African countries for economic and cultural reasons (Orubuloye, 1987; Raimi, 1992; Lloyd and Gage-Brandon, 1993 and Ogunjuyigbe, 2001). For instance, in many developing countries, sons are their parents' only source of security in old age. Particularly where women have little economic independence or cannot inherit property, sons are insurance for a mother against the loss of her husband's support due to death or desertion (Cain, 1984; Raimi, 1992). Where women have few opportunities to earn income, investing household resources in female children, who will marry and leave the family, is likely to have little pay-off and so poor families tend to invest what little they have on sons (Kishor, 1991; Lloyd and Gage-Brandon, 1993). Male children are expected to make financial contributions towards keeping their parent's farm or business going, towards building new houses, paying younger siblings' school fees, taxes, levies etc. Male children perpetuate the family name by marrying and raising children and they inherit the family' property after the death of their parents (Orubuloye, 1983; 1987). Also, in many countries, kinship systems, traditional and religion value males over females.

The responses from various in-depth interviews with men and women of reproductive age indicate that there is still much higher desire for male child than female in the country, especially among the Yorubas. The preference is borne out of the fact that culturally, Nigerians would prefer to pass on their inheritance and the family names or titles to their sons rather than to their daughters. It is generally held among the

participants that if the first child of the newly married wife is a boy, she always has a special place in husband's heart. Male children are needed particularly to carry on family name, they are a source of prestige and equally as security against old age.

Attitude of men to women status

The indication from responses to the traditional sex-role ideology statements (Table 5) is one of a gradual shift from a purely traditional to a more modern outlook by men, although the idea that men must always be breadwinners is still very strongly adhered to. The male dominance ideology statements were generally agreeable to the men. Hence, two-thirds agreed to the statement that 'the wife should not work if the husband is opposed to it'; more than 44% agreed that 'it is better for the family when a woman earns less than her husband'; and about 80% agreed that 'the husband should have final say on important family matters including decisions on family size'.

There is less inclination on the part of the men to agree with the married women's motherhood role ideology statements. Fifty-five percent of the men still believed that 'a married woman should have as many children as her husband wants', but only 21.8% agreed that 'a woman should continue to have children until she has a son'. The high value still placed on children in the Yoruba society is evidenced in the fact that 46.2% of the men agreed with the statement that 'a man should marry another wife if his wife has no child'; thirty-one percent agreed that women with many children have more prestige than those who have few children or none, another 42.5% were neutral on this issue, while only 26.5% disagreed.

Findings have shown that since men do not have to depend on the status of their wives for their families to survive, their attitudes to their wife's status can be seen as unbiased and independent, providing useful pointers for fertility-related behaviour. The general support in the home given to wives by Yoruba husbands and the fairly positive attitude to women's economic status seem to negate traditionally held views in sex-role ideology among the Yorubas. The men obviously still want to be breadwinners and maintain authority in the home, but gradually, expression of greater opportunities for women to better their positions and to have a better independent standing (i.e. not dictated by number of children or number of sons) does come out of the responses: a pointer to change of traditional values. Such changes are welcome, not only because they make for greater possibilities in improving status of women, but because, there are implications for decision making, fertility desires and practice of family planning. Positive attitudes to women's improved status, especially in an atmosphere of fairly close conjugal relationships, are likely to result in less independent, and thus more egalitarian decision making, greater approval and use of family planning and hence, greater reduction in desired and actual and fertility.

Table 5: Percentage distribution of men according to sex-role ideology statement among the Yorubas

Sex-Role Statement	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Total
Woman should have many children as husband wants	54.8	19.9	25.3	100.0
Woman should not stop childbearing until she has a son	21.4	31.4	46.9	100.0
A man should marry another wife if wife has no children	46.2	29.1	24.8	100.0
Women with many children have greater prestige	31.0	26.5	42.5	100.0
Husband should be the breadwinner	58.2	12.8	29.0	100.0
Wife should not expect husband to help	44.6	15.9	39.5	100.0

with housework				
Wife should not work if husband is opposed to it	66.6	16.7	16.7	100.0
It is better for a woman to earn less than her husband	44.3	28.7	27.0	100.0
Husband should have final say on important family matters	77.6	11.7	10.7	100.0

Reproductive decision making

Table 6 shows that both male and female respondents in the study area agreed with the statements that men should decide family size (47.6%), decide when to have sex (34.4%), decide what to do to unwanted pregnancy (57.3%), and when to take decisive decision on family planning. Thus confirming Isiugo-Abanihe's (1994) findings on reproductive decision making among couples in Nigeria that most of the vital decisions on reproductive matters rest with men. The general impression to be deduced from responses to these statements is that while they support the fact that women should be assisted in the home and that they should not be forced to comply with their husband's wishes with regard to number and sex of the children, they are very much in favour of maintaining authority and leadership in the home and at the workplace.

Table 6: Percentage distribution of respondents by sex and according to reproductive decision making

Statement		Male (N=585)	Female (N=715)	Total (N=1300)
Men decide family size	Agree	50.3	44.8	47.6
	Disagree	35.1	33.7	34.4
	Undecided	5.4	9.3	7.3
	Don't know	9.2	12.2	10.7
Men decide when to have sex	Agree	28.6	38.9	34.4
	Disagree	54.6	51.9	53.1
	Undecided	14.3	9.3	11.5
	Don't know	2.4	-	1.0

Men decide duration of abstinence	Agree	46.2	40.7	43.5
	Disagree	37.1	40.7	38.8
	Undecided	16.7	14.8	15.6
	Don't know	-	3.7	2.1
Men decide whether to practice family planning	Agree	50.0	35.2	42.6
	Disagree	26.2	38.9	32.5
	Undecided	19.0	16.7	17.7
	Don't know	4.8	9.3	7.3
Men decide family planning method to use	Agree	45.2	40.7	42.9
	Disagree	19.0	40.7	29.8
	Undecided	28.6	9.3	17.7
	Don't know	7.1	9.3	8.3
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0

Number of living children and fertility preference

The number of living children is claimed to be an important factor influencing fertility preference. Table 7 shows the mean desired number of children by number of surviving children. The table shows that the mean number of children desired increases with increasing number of living children. It is observed from the table that respondents with fewer children desire smaller families than those with many children. This could be due to some reasons. Respondents with fewer surviving children are more likely to be younger and more educated. They may hold relatively new views about reproductive norms, more probably a shift towards smaller family sizes as against those with more surviving children who may be exhibiting the traditional norms of reproduction. Older men and women may be adjusting their fertility preference upwards to be in consonance with their growing family size. In other words, they may tend to rationalize their family size to avoid implying that some of their children are unwanted.

Table 7: Mean number of children desired ny number of living children

Number of Living Children	Mean desired family size	
	Male (N=585)	Female (N=715)
0	2.6	2.8
1	3.7	3.4
2	4.3	4.2
3	4.9	4.5
4	4.6	4.6
5+	4.9	4.8
Total	3.7	3.6

Discussion and Conclusion

Evidence from this study suggests that a higher fertility level is the major determinant of the high growth rate which the country is witnessing. The need for a corresponding control of fertility as recognized in both the 1988 and 2003 Population policy documents, is therefore a matter of necessity. Evidence of a decline in desired family size should become apparent before any widespread fertility change can take place. Along with the economic and social changes, there are attempts to make modifications in the demographic sphere. The attempts so far do not appear to be strong enough to alter the demographic parameters substantially. The degree of adoption of birth control methods and the consequent change in male reproductive behaviour would depend on the tempo of communication among couples and improvement in women status in the rapidly changing socio-economic reality.

Strongly held traditional beliefs about the responsibilities and roles of husbands and wives have influenced the range and control of reproductive decision-making. For instance, within the family, women and men of all ages and educational levels believed that husbands should provide guidance to their wives. Therefore, almost all participants in in-depth interview agreed that husbands must be educated, older and presumably as a

result, wiser than their wives. These attitudes are consistent with traditional cultural tenets in which age is accorded respect. Moreover, the man is expected to be the primary income earner. These widely held beliefs reinforce hierarchical features within the society. A woman's marriage to an older man reinforces male dominance both in terms of gender and age. Because she occupies a subordinate position, the wife is subject to her husband's tutelage. That educated women embrace this traditional belief raised questions about respondents' views on the meaning and importance of female education as observed by Mihira, Stark and Wolf (1997).

For the adoption of family planning and the concretization of pre-determined family size, education emerges as a major determinant. The educated as well as high status groups are more likely to engage in inter-spousal communication and offer a visible leadership. At a time when governments at various levels are embarking on free education, education is unlikely to remain a scarce commodity and its effect can be expected to become widespread. Therefore, based on the assumptions of demographic transition, increasing education and attendant increase in inter-spousal communication will contribute to reduction in desired and actual family size of couples. Government and other agencies interested in controlling population growth may through their activities ensure universal education at least at the secondary school level for all males and females.