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## PERCEPTION OF FAMILY PLANNING AMONG WOMEN OF CHILD-BEARING AGE IN NORTH CENTRAL NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

This study was undertaken to identify the perception of family planning among women of child-bearing age in North Central Nigeria. The study specifically investigated the influence of selected factors such as educational level and religion on family planning decisions using two objectives. Research questions were raised and hypotheses were formulated. The descriptive survey research method was adopted. The population of this study was made up of women of childbearing age in North-Central Nigeria. A sample of 384 married women was selected for the study. Proportionate and stratified sampling method was used to select the stated sample. Analysis of data was carried out by using frequency counts, percentages and mean scores for demographic data and to answer research questions while, t-test and ANOVA were used to test the hypothesis. The analysis showed negative perception of family planning methods among women of child bearing age in North Central Nigeria. Educational level and religion were shown not to influence the perception of family planning methods. It is therefore concluded that educational level and religion have little influence over family planning methods. Consequently, it was recommended that, relevant authorities should put in measures to improve the negative perception of family planning methods, by public enlightenment through the media.

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**Keywords:** *Perception, Family Planning, Contraceptives, Women, Child-Bearing*

### INTRODUCTION

The primary essence of living is fulfillment and satisfaction. God sanctioned procreation when he said that man should increase and multiply. The responsibility of man especially parents is to take adequate care of children born into the world. Nonetheless, experience has shown that there are many children born without adequate care in terms of feeding, clothing, sheltering, education and health care. The increasing

human population and its growing resources demand are severely tasking earth's carrying capacity. The question of how many people the earth can support is a long standing one that becomes more intense as the world population and our use of natural resources keep growing. Rapid population growth is as a result of uncontrolled birth. The rates of population growth worldwide have caused political leaders to encourage national and regional fertility regulation projects as vital. Supports for regulation of individual fertility have been evident in all cultures and at all times even in those societies in which social and religious rules have favoured the abundant production of children. The need for fertility regulation methods to be applied by national and regional authorities were discussed by United Nations Population Committee in 1941, in 1968, the United Nations General Assembly and other international bodies affirmed family planning as a basic human right which will help to regulate the interval at which children are born (Lordson, 2012).

According to the Population Reference Bureau (2011), the growth in world population is more pronounced in Africa and Asia. One of the African countries responsible for this rapid population growth is Nigeria. According to World Population Prospects (2019), Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and 7<sup>th</sup> worldwide with a population of 200,815,094 million people. This rate of population growth in Nigeria is associated with high fertility rate among women of reproductive age. From the 2019 Nigeria Population Forecast, Nigeria has a fertility rate of nearly 6 children per woman at a median age of 18. However, about 10 per cent of global maternal mortality case load is attributed to Nigeria and it is second only to India.

In Nigeria, one in five women report having experienced an unwanted conception, of these 58% had an abortion and an additional 9% attempted unsuccessfully to end the pregnancy (Adeyemi, 2015). It is estimated that about 25% of women who had abortion in Nigeria experience serious complications. Adoption of family planning measures will definitely reduce unwanted pregnancies and criminal abortions to its barest minimum. Pregnancy is the main reason that women in the reproductive age group die at a higher rate than men. Most maternal deaths occur among poor women who live in remote rural areas and have no access to well- equipped hospitals (Adeyemi, 2015)

Family Planning therefore, implies the ability of individuals and couples to anticipate and attain their desired number of children by spacing and

timing their births. It is achieved through the use of contraceptive methods and the treatment of involuntary infertility. The availability of family planning does more than enable women and men to limit family size. It safeguards individual's health and rights and improves the quality of life of couples and their children, (Rajaretnam,2010). Family planning has received media coverage around the world since its inception . Initially people reacted against it, due to misconception and ignorance of aims and values of family planning, but as the issue developed, it cleared the people's eyes and their perception became more enlightened (WHO, 2015).

According to National Population Commission (NPC) (2014), there is huge difference between the knowledge and use of contraceptives, which is more pronounced in the northern regions than in the southern regions of the country Nigeria. The reasons attributed to this low prevalence were largely due to opposition from a partner on cultural and religious grounds; male child preference and misconceptions about family planning methods. Others were lack of access to methods that meet users' needs; concerns about health and side effects and problems obtaining family planning services generally including being unable to afford contraceptives (Adeyemi, Olugbenga &Agbaje, 2015). It was further stated that determinants of contraceptives use and choices are key variables in the evaluation of family planning programmes. Apparently, population increase in Nigeria seems to suggest that the family planning methods are not effectively used. Based on the above premise, the study identified the perception of family planning among women of child-bearing age in North Central Nigeria.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Potency rate in Nigeria has remained fairly excessive. The country has a huge population with perilous economic indications due to the unnerving rate at which women give birth. Even more distressing is the researchers' personal knowledge of some women that died of complications of abortion. These women perhaps could have lived if they had adequate knowledge, access and used an effective contraceptive to prevent unwanted pregnancy. In many parts of Nigeria, contraception is still perceived negatively, this could be due to lack of awareness, choice of contraceptives, non-availability of different methods and educational level. According to World Population Prospects (2019), Nigerian journey of national development cannot be said to be a successful one. About 10.5

million of the country's children aged 5-14 years are not in school. Over 60,000 maternal deaths occur annually, yet the population keeps growing at an alarming rate. Family planning plays a major role in checking all these anomalies. Nigeria adopted a family planning strategy to curb the current high rate of population growth. The implementation and acceptance rate of this strategy is still low. Several studies have revealed that in spite of the efforts by the government in this direction, the adoption rate of modern birth-control facilities and services or family planning in Nigeria remains largely insignificant. The Northern regions seem to have negative perception of contraception. With a population of about 90,000,000 (Demographic Statistics Bulletin, 2017), encouraging the use of family planning methods will improve the wellbeing of mothers and their children; as well as control population generally. In Northern Nigeria, the maternal mortality ratio (MMR) is estimated to be appreciably higher than the national average with recent estimates for the North over 1,000 deaths per 100,000 live births, compared to MMR estimates for the southern region below 300 deaths per 100,000 live births (NPC, 2014). Apparently, this large difference between the knowledge and use of contraception is more visible in the northern regions than in the southern regions of the country. Thus, improving contraceptive intake among women of reproductive age (WRA) in North Central Nigeria is a critical component of improved maternal health and control of population in the country. The study therefore assessed perceptions of family planning among women of child-bearing age in North Central Nigeria.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of family planning among women of child-bearing age. Based on the purpose, the specific objectives of the study were to;

1. Identify the perceptions of family planning among women of child-bearing age in North Central Nigeria on the basis of educational level.
2. Assess the perceptions of family planning among women of child-bearing age on the basis of religion in North Central Nigeria;

### **Research Questions**

The following questions were raised to guide this study:

1. What are the perceptions of family planning among women of child-bearing age in North Central Nigeria on the basis of educational level?

2. What are the perceptions of family planning among women of child-bearing age in North Central Nigeria on the basis of religion?

### **Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

Ho<sub>1</sub>: There are no significant differences in the perception of family planning among women of child-bearing age on the basis of educational level.

Ho<sub>2</sub>: There are no significant differences in the perception of family planning among women of child-bearing age on the basis of religion.

### **Method**

A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study since sampled opinions were needed to enable generalization of the findings. The population of the study comprised 4,332,000 women of child bearing age. A sample of three hundred and eighty-four (384) women of child bearing age was adopted purposively selected to represent the population of married couples living in North Central Nigeria.

A 36-item, 4-point modified Likert Scale with response options of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (DA), and Strongly Disagree (SA) titled; Perception of Family Planning (PFP) was used in collecting data for the study. The instrument was validated by experts in guidance and counselling as well as educational measurement in the Faculty of Education, University of Abuja. Its reliability was ascertained using test-retest method and the reliability index stood at 0.84. The copies of the questionnaire were administered with the help of research assistants. Afterwards, the copies of the questionnaire were filled and returned. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, such as frequency counts, percentages, mean scores and standard deviation. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance using t-test and ANOVA.

### **Results**

The analysis of the data for the study and the results obtained are presented according to the research questions and the research hypotheses raised in the study.

**Research Question 1:** What are the perceptions of family planning among women of child-bearing age in North Central Nigeria on the basis of educational level?

**Table 1: Perceptions of Family Planning in North Central Nigeria based on Educational Level**

<b>Edu. (Perceptions)</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Dev</b>	<b>Decision</b>
No formal Education		11	2.51	.58	Disagreed
Primary Education		17	2.21	.44	Disagreed
Secondary Education		70	2.18	.50	Disagreed
Tertiary Education		286	2.24	.24	Disagreed
		<b>384</b>	<b>2.28</b>		<b>Disagreed</b>

Table 1 shows the Perceptions of Family Planning in North Central Nigeria based on educational level. The table further revealed strong disagreement to the perception of any family planning method above others with a sectional mean of 2.28.

**Research Question 2:** What are the perceptions of family planning among women of child-bearing age in North Central Nigeria on the basis of religion?

**Table 2: Perceptions of Family Planning in North Central Nigeria based on Religious Belief.**

<b>Religion (Perceptions)</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Dev</b>	<b>Decision</b>
Christianity	283	2.26	.44	Disagreed
Islam	96	2.15	.46	Disagreed
Others	5	2.36	.24	Disagreed
	<b>384</b>	<b>2.25</b>		<b>Disagreed</b>

Table 2 shows the Perceptions of Family Planning in North Central Nigeria based on religious belief. The result showed that all the respondents across various religion strongly disagreed, with a sectional mean of 2.25 to the perceptions of any method above others.

### Testing of Hypothesis

**Ho:** There are no significant differences in the perceptions of family planning among women of child-bearing age on the basis of educational status.

**Table 1: One-way ANOVA on the differences in the Perceptions of Family Planning among Women of Child-bearing Age on the Basis of Educational Level**

Perceptions	Educational Level	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Decision
	Between Groups	1.061	3		1.751	.156	Accepted
	Within Groups	76.746	380				
	<b>Total</b>	<b>77.807</b>	<b>383</b>				

Analysis on Table 1 was carried out to establish whether there is significant difference in the perceptions of family planning among women of child-bearing age on the basis of educational level. The hypothesis that states that there is no significant difference in preferences of family planning method on the basis of educational level is accepted and concluded that the respondents did not differ significantly in preference of family planning method in North Central Nigeria on the basis of their educational level.

**Ho2: t-test on Differences in Perceptions of Family Planning among Women of Child-bearing Age in Terms of religion.**

**Table 2: One-way ANOVA on the Differences in the Perceptions of Family Planning among Women of Child-bearing Age on the Basis of Religious Belief**

Perceptions	Religious Belief	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Decision
	Between Groups	.946	2		2.345	.097	Accepted
	Within Groups	76.861	381				
	<b>Total</b>	<b>77.807</b>	<b>383</b>				

Analysis on Table 2 was carried out to establish whether there is significant difference in the perceptions of family planning among women of child-bearing age on the basis of religious belief. The result on

perceptions of family planning method showed no significant difference in perception of family planning method with significant value of .097 (more than the 0.05 level of significance), the hypothesis that states that there is no significant difference in perception of family planning method on the basis of religious belief is accepted and concluded that the respondents did not differ significantly in perception of family planning method in North Central Nigeria on the basis of their religious belief.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The result from hypothesis three revealed that education has a great influence on many health indicators and is one of the most commonly studied determinants of the use of contraception and unmet need. The level of education among women of child-bearing age has significantly affected their attitudes towards family planning. This is in line with Ramseh (2012), who supported that the effect of education on attitudes and awareness of family planning would be rooted in the level of individual's understanding of the phenomenon of family planning. This is also in agreement with Mckaig (2010), who also contributed that education is a major factor in service use. Undoubtedly, more education could impact greater appreciation of the benefits derivable from the practice of regulating childbirth. With the higher level of education, it is expected that there will be high perceptions of family planning methods. However, this is not the case in this study. The findings revealed that level of education among women of child-bearing age did not influence their perceptions of family planning methods. This is not different from Ezeh (2010), who discovered that many developing countries have seen an improvement in the use of family planning methods. However, they still do not have appropriate access to contraceptive methods that are most effective. Nazli (2017), was also in agreement when he found that there is significant gap between women's reproductive perceptions and the use of contraception in developing countries.

Research question two and hypothesis two of the study went further to establish that religion influences perceptions towards family planning among women of child-bearing age in North Central Nigeria. This underscores undisputed role of how religion influences people's reasoning and behaviour in their disposition to issues especially in sexual relationship. This finding is in agreement with Ehokidem (2016), who interviewed respondents on what they saw as major barriers to the use of family planning. Their responses indicated that religion was more of a



barrier. The findings of this study revealed that the Christian group has favourable perceptions towards contraception than either the Muslims or the others. The disparity recorded in this study concerning the perceptions towards family planning by Christians, Muslims and others is not different from the findings of Mustapha (2013). He contributed that the Quran does not make any explicit statement about the morality of contraceptive but contains statement encouraging procreation. It was also established that religion has no significant influence on the perceptions of family planning among women of child-bearing age. This is in agreement with Bamidele (2015) who confirmed that influence of religion on perceptions of family planning.

## **CONCLUSION**

The following conclusion based on the findings is drawn from the study: Perceptions of family planning methods were not high among women of child-bearing age in North Central Nigeria. Most respondents had no perceptions for family planning methods. This was an undesired conclusion in view of the known comparative advantage of planned family methods. Education and religion had no influence on perceptions of family planning methods. In addition, it was found that the use of contraceptive was low among women who had no formal education. They also did not have any perceptions of family planning method. Family planning remains a very private issue among women in North Central Nigeria, discussing the details is seen as being too personal to shared.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations were made from the findings of this study:

Governments and other stakeholders in the public health service delivery system should help subsidize the price of effective but costly contraceptive methods so that women of child-bearing age could patronize the most effective and efficient method rather than relying on any available method.

Government should engage family planning facilitators and provide them with necessary information to show relationship between economic development and population control through family planning.

Governments should launch media campaigns in various languages to encourage child spacing and population reduction, especially at the rural areas.

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