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The Social and Economic Determinants of Fertility in Udi Area, Enugu State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This research sought out the social and economic determinants of fertility in Udi area of Enugu State, Nigeria. It utilized survey design to collect data from a sample of 240 women spread across the five districts of the study area. Analysis was done using frequencies and percentage values displayed in tabular forms and subsequently described and discussed. The study found that socio-economic factors as age at marriage, duration of marriage, marriage type and status, education and occupation all affected fertility differentially. It was found that a woman's long marriage duration and early age at marriage increases her fertility level. It was equally found that socio-economic status as proxy by education and occupation maintains an inverse relationship with fertility level in the study area. It is recommended a high level emphasis on education of women and their active participation in labour force as this will go a long way in lowering their fertility level and bringing population growth to reasonable and convenient level for the economy.

Keywords: Social, Economic, Determinants, Fertility, Udi Area.

INTRODUCTION

Fertility, the regularity of childbearing among the population, depicts the reproductive performance of an individual and it is more appropriately related to women since they are those that bear children. It is the most important component of demographic change besides mortality and migration. What this means is that the rate of population growth consists of the elements of births, deaths and migration and so population increase is measured as the difference between natality and mortality plus net international migration (Nwafor and Madu, 2002). It is necessary to distinguish between fertility and fecundity which some people use interchangeably but they are not the same. Fertility as we have already defined is the actual reproductive performance of women or men how many children have they parented? The physical ability to reproduce is referred to as fecundity. A fecund person can produce children, an in-fecund (sterile) person cannot (Weeks 2012). A woman may have potential to conceive (Fecund), but owing to her desire or that of others refuses to translate her ability to action by the use of contraception or abstinence (Umoh 2001).

Fertility outcome and variation depend on its biological and social character. The argument is that variations in the level of fertility are not the result of differences in fecundity, but are more often produced by the responses of individuals and couples to the social systems in which they live. Carrying it further, Weeks (2012) maintain that whether children will actually be born and if so, how many, given the capacity to reproduce, is largely a result of the social environment in which people live.

Fertility is one of the major components that influence the size of a country's population. While Nigeria has begun a transition to lower mortality, fertility has remained high which has triggered rapid population growth with its many consequences. However, one must

posit that fertility transition has equally set-in in Nigeria as many young couples today are on the side of lower number of children than the previous generations. Fertility rate is not the same across all groups of people in Nigeria as elsewhere. According to Kpedeko (1982), the factors which determine variation in fertility include age and duration of marriage, area of residence (i.e. rural or urban), type of marriage (monogamous or polygamous), level of educational attainment, occupation, religion and a host of other factors. This was equally echoed by Umoh (2001) who identified that fertility pattern in any geographical area is determined by the interaction of diverse factors social, cultural, economic and religious. Going further, he mentioned education, place of residence, sex preference, religion, marriage type, occupation/income as factors of differential fertility or fertility pattern which gives an insight of the variation in the frequency of child bearing among women in the reproductive ages, and variation among communities.

This insight will then serve as a guide post to enable us understand the variables to encourage that can influence positively women's reproductive ehavior to ensure a more efficient fertility control and management so as to enhance the well-being of families generally; Udi Area is suitable for this study, being typically more of a rural setting than urban and inhabited by people of different socio-economic features as education, occupation, religion etc. it is equally facing the challenge of rapid population increase like the rest of the areas of the state and Nigeria generally.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Historically, there have been a number of population theories that argued for declining fecundity as the primary causal factor in declining fertility. Theories of this sort, labeled biological theories, often focused upon societal characteristic, and argued that it affected fecundity, which in turn resulted to reduced fertility (Kammeyer, 1971). Here, we are arguing for the proposition that fertility behavior is eminently social behavior. Behavior that is shaped by the social contexts and the decision making of individuals and couples, most of the variations and changes in fertility ehavior, whether they occur within a society or between societies, cannot be accounted for by biological or physiological factors. And elementary way of demonstrating the effects of social and cultural systems on fertility is to examine differential fertility.

An examination of differential fertility will accomplish several tasks. In addition to sensitizing the reader to the general relevance of social factors, this analysis serves to identify the causal mechanism producing fertility differences. By locating the groups or categories in the society that have different levels of fertility, it is possible to make some inferences about the operative mechanisms that will eventually be isolated as the determinants of fertility. General explanatory theories of fertility must as a minimum requirement, explain variations in fertility that has been observed between such segments of the population as rural and urban residents, racial group, or social classes. Therefore, an analysis of differential fertility is both a search for theoretical understanding and as theories emerge, a partial test of their validity (Kammeyer 1971).

The concept of fertility transition according to Weeks (2012) is the shift from high fertility, characterized by only minimal individual deliberate control to low-perhaps very low-fertility which is entirely under a woman's control. The phenomena have been summarized by Lioyd and Ivanor (1988) as the shift from "family building by fate" to "family building by design". The transition always involves a delay in child bearing to older ages and also an earlier end to child bearing. This transition can equally be related to the demographic cycle where birth rate (fertility) and death rate (mortality) undergo transition from high level to low level as society moves from dominantly primitive agricultural society to urban industrial age (Eze, 2018). In this regard therefore, fertility transition, fertility variation and patterns can be said to be rooted in forces of socio-economic change acting in different degrees across space and time.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Area

The study area is Udi Local Government Area of Enugu State. It is located at 60, 13/N – 60, 30/N of latitude and 70, 15/E – 70, 30/E of longitude. It is bounded on the North by Igbo-Etiti L.G.A, on South by Oji River L.G.A, on the East by Ezeagu L.G.A and the West by Enugu L.G.A. it is classified into five districts, namely: Ngwo, Egede, Ukana, Ohum and Okpatu districts.

METHODOLOGY

Systematic random sampling was used in collecting data from 240 women spread across the five districts, each district receiving the number of questionnaire reflecting differential population sizes. Thus Ngwo district had a sample size of 80; Egede 50; Ukana 50; Ohum 40; and Okpatu district 20. The data collected reflected demographic characteristics, level of fertility and socio-economic features such as age, education, occupation, marital status, marriage duration and age at marriage.

Analysis of Data

Data was presented in percentage values on tables and subsequently analyzed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section simultaneously presents and discusses the result of the study.

AVERAGE NUMBER OF CHILDREN PER WOMAN IN DIFFERENT AGE GROUPS

Table 1: average number of children per woman in different age groups

Age group	Number of women	Total number of children	Average number of children per women
15 – 19	38	50	1.3
20 – 24	56	112	2.0
25 – 29	90	270	3.0
30 – 34	60	252	4.2
35 – 39	40	200	5.2
40 – 44	30	180	6.0
45^{+}	20	100	5.0

Source: Field survey with students, Dept. of Geography and Meteorology

Table 1 shows the average number of children per woman in different age groups. It is seen that women in early stage of child bearing (15 – 19) had an average of 1.3 children per woman while women in the age cohort 30 – 34, 35 – 39, had 4.2 and 5.0 respectively. The rest is as shown in the table. The implication is that as the age of women increases fertility rate equally increases. This may be explained away by the fact that they have equally stayed longer in marriage and so exposed to having more children than the younger ones who may have equally married recently. This is confirmed in this study as it is found that the average number of children per woman increases from 2.0 to 6.7 as the marriage duration increases. The implication is that those who stay longer with their husbands in the study area given the fact that they are fertile have more children than those who for any reason stay for a short period with their husbands.

AGE AT MARRIAGE AND FERTILITY

Table 2: Average number of children per woman in each age group at marriage

Age at marriage	Number of women	Percentage of women	Total number of children	Average number of children
18 – 21	40	16.79	140	3.5
22 – 25	90	37.5	275	3.0
26 – 29	60	25	150	2.5
30 – 33	30	12.5	62	2.0
34^{+}	20	8.3	30	1.5

Source: Field survey with students, Dept. of Geography and Meteorology.

From table 2 above, it is observed that in the study area 16.79% of women got married at 18 – 21 age group, 37.5% got married between 22–25 and 25% married between of age 26–29 years of age while 12.5% married at 34 years and above. Generally 62.5% of the women got married between ages 22–29. A critical look at the table reveals that those who married between ages 18–21 had average number of children as 3.5 compared to those who got married at 34 plus whose average number of children is 1.5. This then shows that there is higher fertility for women who marry at an early age. Confirming this Umoh (2001), maintain that early marriage and child bearing is associated with high fertility as those women have many years for reproduction compared to those whose marriage were conducted later. This is equally confirmed by Kpedeko (1982) who included age and duration of marriage as factors that determine variation in fertility.

MARITAL TYPE, STATUS AND FERTILITY

Table 3: Marital type, status and fertility

Marriage type/status	Number of women	Percentage of women	Number of children	Average no of children per woman
Monogamy	76	31.5%	230	3.0
Polygamy	110	45.6%	700	6.4
Divorced	10	4.2%	36	3.6
Separated	28	11.6%	84	3.0
Widowed	16	6.6%	40	2.5

Source: Field survey with students. Department of Geography and Meteorology

From table 3 above, it is seen that the monogamous families constitute 31.6%, 45.8% are polygamous, while 4.2% is divorced, 11.6% separated and 6.6% widowed. It is shown that the polygamous families have the highest average number of children. The reason for high fertility among this group is attributed to competition for child bearing among the women involved in this type of marriage. The average number of children among the monogamous homes caught in this study is 3.0. In this type of marriage, there is usually no competition for child bearing with anyone. In the case of the divorced, separated and widowed women, the average number of children is low probably as a result of short stay with husband and so did not have opportunity of bearing more.

EDUCATION AND FERTILITY

Table 4: Average number of children per woman of differing education level

Educational level	Number of women	Number of children	Percentage of women	Average number of children per women
No formal education	30	210	17.8%	7.0
Primary school	90	596	42.2%	5.0
Secondary school	100	400	34.0%	4.0
Tertiary education	20	35	6.0%	3.5

Source: Field survey with students, Dept of Geography and Meteorology

Table 4 shows that 17.8% of the women had no formal education; 42.2% had primary education; 34% had secondary education and 60% of the women attained tertiary education level. It is revealed from table that the higher the level of education of the respondent the lower the fertility; for example, those who had no formal education, have their average number of children; those with secondary and tertiary levels of education have theirs as 4.0 and 3.5 respectively. It is adduced that the difference in their reasoning and understanding based on the level of education affected their average number of children. For instance, the opinion forwarded by those that had no formal education and those that had primary education is that children are free gift of nature and so every woman is entitled to as many children as she desires while others with secondary and tertiary level of education seem to be guided by the concept – “born as you can train or take care of”. It is already established that in most developing countries fertility is strongly related to education (UN 1987). It has been highlighted in different quarters that educated women on the average marry later, breast-feed less, and use contraceptive more than the uneducated ones (Lesthaegle et al 1992). This lowers their fertility as this study confirms.

OCCUPATIONAL TYPE AND FERTILITY

Table 5: Average number of children per woman in each occupational group

Occupation	Number of women	Percentage of women	Number of children	Average number of children per women
Farming	80	33.3%	250	3.1
Trading	76	31.6%	342	4.5
Civil servant	60	25%	180	3.0
Service workers	24	10%	96	4.0

Source: Field Survey with students, Dept. of Geography and Meteorology

Table 5 shows that traders which constituted 31.5% of the respondents have the highest average number of children per woman 4.5; followed by service workers with 4.0; then farmers 3.1; and civil servants with 3.0. According to Umoh (2001) occupation, income and education are intricately linked variables that are related to fertility. Low income families and by extension persons in occupation of low status tend to have more children (Onerkerohaye, 1993; Goliber, 1997). It is known that farming families usually rear large families since they are heavily dependent on manual labour but this study did not find it so; probably it fell by chance that mostly farming families who were reached during the survey had low number of children; however, petty traders and service workers who are mostly low income earners had many more children than civil servants who are generally more educated and may earn more income.

Generally, there are many other social variables that influence fertility such as religion, culture, place of residence, sex preference in developing countries such as Nigeria but these were not captured in the present study; however, we can see in this study a strong relationship between socio-economic status (proxied by education and occupation) and fertility and this relationship is more of inverse. This study equally confirmed that age at marriage has a strong influence on fertility. This is equally agreed by Ushie et al (2011) who maintain that age is a great influence in fertility levels. Age at marriage according to them is a proximate or intermediate determinant of fertility. In African countries, Nigeria for instance, women as young as 14 years have given birth or are in marriage unions and at the risk of pregnancy and child birth (Ushie 2009). However, the determination of when to start family or age at marriage is determined by socio-economic variables such as educational demands, career, law, suitable suitors and economic backgrounds (Davis and Blake, 1956, Bongaarts, 1978).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Population is of very vital importance in Nigeria's socio-economic development as is elsewhere. Factors that influence population growth are therefore, of paramount interest to policy makers, researchers and students. This study found that socio-economic factors as age at marriage, duration of marriage, marriage type and status, education, occupation, all impinge differentially on fertility in the study area. It is observed that a woman's long marriage duration and early age at marriage increases her fertility level. It is equally found that socio-economic status as proxy by education and occupation has an inverse relationship with fertility level. In conclusion one is recommending a high level emphasis on women education and active participation in the labour force as these will impact on other variables such as age at marriage, awareness of the need to bear as much children as one is capable of giving quality training and use of contraceptives – all of which will go a long way in lowering the fertility level and bringing population growth to a level manageable by the economy.

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