

OPINIONS OF NIGERIAN STUDENTS IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS ON FAMILY SIZE

S.N. OMOBUDE-IDIADO AND E. P. KONWEA

ABSTRACT

The study examined the opinions of Nigerian students in tertiary institutions on their ideal family size. It was conducted among students in four tertiary institutions in Edo State of Nigeria. A sample size of 454 final year students was randomly drawn from the halls of residence in the institutions using the stratified sampling technique. A 34-item questionnaire was the main instrument used for the study. A reliability of 0.78 was reported for the instrument using Kuder-Richardson Coefficient (20) in a pilot study with a group of students outside those used for the study. The study reveals that male and female students in tertiary institutions have negative opinion on large family size. A high percentage of Nigerian students (49.6%) desired four children. It was also found that there is no significant difference in the opinions of male and female students on family size.

KEY WORD: Family Size, Nigerian students, tertiary institutions.

INTRODUCTION

In the national population census conducted in Nigeria in 2006, a population of 140,003,542 was declared by the government (Federal Republic of Nigeria Extraordinary Gazette No. 4, 2007). While the total fertility rate in many European countries have fallen below two children per woman, with many couples who desire to remain childless and some planning to have just a single child to have a real family, the total fertility rate in Nigeria is still 6.0 children per woman (Allan Guttmacher Institute, 1999; Gelbard, Haub and Kent, 1999). Given the current demographic trend in Nigeria the answer to the question of how large Nigeria's population would be depends on future fertility levels. In the past, many women married early and have large families while men in most areas practised polygamy and have many children. They considered this a thing of pride and prestige with the belief that the number of children one produced was an indication of one's virility (Caldwell, Orubuloye & Caldwell, 1992). There seems to be changes these days since there is

increase in the percentage of women going to school and working outside the home, resulting in delayed marriage and childbearing. Many people are beginning to see the need to have less number of children and the need for having many children is disappearing/women now desire to have relatively fewer children than they did in the past.

Goliber (1997) posited that fertility rate would decline if the younger generation would limit their reproduction to the level of their stated preference. However, the average preferred family size in Nigeria is much higher than the levels needed for even moderate rates of population growth. They are far above the average of 2.2 to 2.5 children a woman would need to enable the country achieve a zero population growth (Cornelius & Haub, 1999).

It is therefore, obvious that families are large in Nigeria because parents in most societies want large families. The difference between countries in low fertility transition and those that are not is due to differences in family size preferences along with the means of realizing those preference such as family

S.N. Omobude-Idiado, Department of Health, Environmental Education, and Human Kinetics, Faculty of Education, University of Benin, Benin City

E. P. Konwea, Department of Educational Foundations and Management, Faculty of Education, University of Ado-Ekiti, Ado-Ekiti

planning services. The Population Council (1994) stated that population stabilization cannot occur until well after fertility has reached the replacement level of just two live births per couple. In most developing countries, including Nigeria, desired family size still exceeds two surviving children. In most areas of Nigeria, desired family size is typically above four children (Population Council, 1994). There seems to be a general claim especially among foreign authors that the desired family size of Nigerians is six children per woman and that people still desire to have large families as against what is happening in many developed countries (AGI, 1995; Gelbard, Haub & Kent, 1999; Family Health International, 1999). All these reports focused on women already having children and those who have stopped childbearing but none was directed at the present generation of youths and students who would be future parents and whose attitude toward family size would determine the future rate of population growth. This study therefore, is directed at these groups of Nigerians and would therefore provide answer to the following questions:

1. What is the opinion of Nigerian students on large family size?
2. What is the desired family size of Nigerian students?

The following null hypotheses were proposed to direct the study:

1. There is no significant difference in the opinion of male and female Nigerian students on family size.
2. There is no significant difference in the desired family size of male and female Nigerian students.
3. There is no significant difference in the proportion of Nigerian students who favour small family size and those who favour large family size.

METHODS

The study utilized the survey methods. Students for the study were drawn from the four tertiary institutions in Edo State of Nigeria namely: College of Education, Ekiadolor; Federal Polytechnic, Auchi; Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma and University of Benin, Benin City. This

state was used for the study because the state is often described as miniature Nigerian because of the diversity of ethnic groups in the state which is a reflection of the diversity of ethnic groups in the country.

The sample for the study comprised of 454 final year students randomly drawn from the Halls of residence in the four tertiary institutions using the stratified sampling technique. Gender formed the basis of stratification to ensure that both sexes were adequately represented in the sample. Final year students were used for the study because some of them are likely to get married some few years after graduation and therefore would provide better information for analysis necessary for predicting the opinion of students toward family size.

A 34-item questionnaire was used for the study. The instrument was divided into two Sections, A and B. Section A with 4 items elicited background information on students and their desired family size. Section B with 30 items focused on opinions on large family size and other variables related to them. Responses on each item was weighted on a five point scoring scale of "Strongly Agree", "Agree", "Undecided" and "Strongly disagree". Each item was assigned a score of 5-1 from strongly agree to strongly disagree for positively worded items and 1-5 from strongly disagree to strongly agree for negatively worded items. The midpoint of the scale is 2.5. To get the theoretical mean, multiply 2.5 by the number of items on the instrument, which is 30 and this gives a score of 75. For decision making in this study, any calculated mean that is above the normative score which is 75 is regard as significant and that below 75 is regard as not significant.

A reliability of 0.78 was reported for the instrument using Kuder Richardson Coefficient (20) in a pilot study with a group of students outside those used for the study.

Data generated were analyzed using percentages, mean, t-test and z-distribution.

RESULTS

Research Question One: *What is the opinion of Nigerian students on large family size?*

Table 1: Mean score of Opinion of male and female Nigerian students respectively on large family size

Gender	N	X	Remark
Males	196	66.48	NS
Females	258	65.22	NS

* NS = Not Significant

Table 1 shows that both male and female students have negative opinion regarding large family size. This is because the mean score of male students (66.48) is lower than the normative score of the instrument (75). The mean score of female students (65.22) is also lower than the

normative score of 75. It is therefore concluded that students opinion on large family size is negative.

Research Question Two: *What is the desired family size of Nigerian students?*

Table 2: Responses on students' desired family size (n – 454)

Number of Children	Frequency	%
One child	1	0.2
Two children	38	8.4
Three children	100	22
Four children	225	49.6
More than four children	75	16.5
None (no child)	3	0.7
No response	12	2.6

Table 2 shows that 0.2% of the students desired to have a single child family, 8.4% desired two children, 22% would want three children, 49.6% desired four children and 16.5% desired more than four children. Only 0.7% would

want no child and 2.6% did not give any response to the question.

Hypothesis 1: *There is no significant difference in the opinion of male and female Nigerian students on large family size*

Table 3: t-test analysis of difference in the opinion of male and female students on family size

Gender	N	X	SD	t-value	df	Critical t	P
Male	196	66.48	14.52	0.88	452	1.96	0.05
Female	258	65.22	15.21				

Table 3 presents a calculated t-value of 0.88 which is less than the critical value of 1.96. The null hypothesis is therefore retained that there is no significant difference in the opinion of male and female students toward large family size.

Hypothesis 2: *There is no significant difference in the desired family size of male and female Nigerian students*

Table 4: t-test analysis of difference in the opinion of male and female students in their desired family size

Gender	N	X	SD	t-value	df	critical t	P
Male	196	11.6	0.43	0.01	452	1.96	0.05
Female	258	11.5	0.41				

Table 4 shows that the null hypothesis is retained as the calculated t-value (0.01) is less than the table t-value (1.96). In effect, there is no significant difference on the desired family size of male and female students.

Hypothesis 3: *There is no significant difference in the proportion of Nigerian students who favour small family size and those who favour large family size*

Table 5: z-test analysis of the proportion of students who favour small and large family size

Variables	N	X	SD	z-value	df	Critical z	P
Small family size	364	64.43	13.42	12.17	452	1.96	0.05
Large family size	90	71.83	18.38				

Table 5 reveals that the null hypothesis is rejected because the calculated z-value (12.71) is greater than the critical value (1.96). The proportion of students who favours small family size is significantly different from those who favour large family size.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study suggest that a sizeable proportion of Nigerian students have negative opinion of large family size. Table 1 indicated that the mean score of male students (66.48) and that of female students (65.22) are both lower than the normative score of the instrument (75). On the desired family size of Nigerian students, the study showed that 49.6% of the respondents have a desired family size of four children, 22% desired three, and only 16.5% desired more than four. The findings of this study corroborate Owie (1981) who reported 49% of Nigerian students in his study who had preference for three to four children, and 29% desired more than four. The finding of this study could be as a result of the National Population Policy (1988) which stipulates four children as the ideal family size hence a greater percentage of the Nigerian students desire to have four children. The finding of this study is contrary to the claim made by AGI (1995) that Nigerians' desired family size is six children.

The study further showed that there is no significant difference in the opinion of male and female students toward family size as indicated in table 2. Both male and female students expressed similar opinions on desired family size. The explanation for the similarity of opinion of male and female students regarding family size could be the influence of the National Population Policy (1988) which recommended four children as the ideal family size.

Finally, the findings of the study revealed that the proportion of students who favoured small family size was higher than the proportion of those who favoured large family size (80.9% and 16.5% respectively). The proportion of students who favoured small family size are significantly different from those who favoured large family size as indicated in table 5 which reported a z-value of 12.71.

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