

Couple Fertility as Determinant of Family Stability in Calabar Metropolis of Cross River State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This research examined the fertility of couples and family stability in the Calabar Municipality Local Government Area of Cross River State, proposing two null hypotheses. The study focused on married individuals in public secondary schools in Calabar, with a purposive sample of 240 respondents. Using a survey research design, data was collected through the "Couple Fertility and Family Stability Questionnaire" (CFFSQ) and analysed using Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient at a significance level of 0.01. The findings revealed a strong correlation between family stability and factors such as couple education, communication, religious background, and age. Based on these results, it is recommended that couples experiencing fertility delays seek medical assistance and maintain a positive mind-set, avoiding negative thoughts. Additionally, it is important for relatives to support couples facing infertility and refrain from actions that could undermine their relationship. Married couples should also prioritize sexual satisfaction to enhance marital stability, recognizing sexual activity as an essential marital responsibility.

Keywords: Couple, fertility, family and stability

Introduction

Education is a key determinant of an individual's lifestyle, social standing, and reproductive behaviour. Research shows that educational attainment significantly influences contraceptive use, fertility rates, and attitudes towards family health. For example, women with some levels of education are more likely to use modern contraceptives than those with no education (Clements and Madise, 2004). Education enhances cognitive abilities, economic opportunities, and social mobility, while also shaping attitudes and encouraging modernization, which is crucial for managing fertility rates (Ayoub, 2004). The educational background of both spouses also affects fertility decisions. Studies have shown that couples where the wife has lower education are more likely to agree on having another child, and the husband's education often has a greater impact on fertility goals than the wife's (DeRose and Ezech, 2005). Effective communication within marriage is critical for stability and resolving conflicts. Poor communication can lead to marital issues, while good communication fosters stronger relationships and can prevent divorce (Esere, 2002, 2006; Olagunju and Eweniyi, 2002). Mastering communication requires practice and is essential for maintaining a healthy marriage. Effective communication includes not just speaking, but also listening and understanding nonverbal cues, which are crucial for resolving disputes and fostering mutual understanding (Hybels and Weaver, 2001). A significant number of relationship breakdowns are linked to poor communication, highlighting the need for couples to develop strong communication skills to maintain long-term relationships (Dowu and Esere, 2007).

In Nigeria, particularly in Cross River State, it's widely observed that many marriages fail to last until their first anniversary, often dissolving within the first year. Contributing factors to this unfortunate trend may include a lack of trust due to poor communication, infertility issues, inadequate sexual satisfaction, and financial stress. When marriages are plagued by these challenges, couples often find themselves "enduring" rather than enjoying their relationships, which can

ultimately lead to the marriage's breakdown. This research seeks to explore the factors influencing fertility rates and family stability in the Calabar Municipality Local Government Area of Cross River State.

Research questions

The following research questions were raised:

- i. What is the significant relationship between couple fertility educational level and family stability in Calabar Municipal Local Government Area?
- ii. What is the significant relationship between couple fertility communication and family stability in Calabar Municipal Local Government Area?

Research hypotheses

The following research hypotheses were formulated:

- i. Couple fertility educational level has no positive significant relationship with family stability in Calabar Municipal Local Government Area.
- ii. Couple fertility communication has no significant relationship with family stability in Calabar Municipal Local Government Area.

Methodology

This study employed a survey research design. According to Isangedighi, Joshua, Asim, and Ekuri (2004), the purpose of a survey design is to collect information from a specific population by using a sample that accurately represents that group. This method involves systematically observing and summarizing individuals' behaviors, characteristics, or opinions to achieve a particular objective. The research was conducted in the Calabar Municipality Local Government Area of Cross River State, one of the eighteen local government areas in the state, with its administrative headquarters in Calabar. According to the 2006 National Population Census (NPC), the area has a population of 191,515 individuals. The study focused on all married couples in public secondary schools within the Calabar Municipality. A purposive sampling technique was used to select a total of 240 respondents, with 24 participants chosen from each of the 10 institutions. The primary research instrument was a custom-designed questionnaire, the Couple Fertility and Family Stability Questionnaire (CFFSQ). The questionnaire underwent face validation and demonstrated a high reliability estimate of .98. Data were analysed using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) method.

Presentation of results

Hypothesis one

Couple fertility educational level has no positive significant relationship with family stability in Calabar Municipal Local Government Area.

Table 1 shows strong positive correlation coefficient value of ($r = 0.971$ and $p < 0.000$) between couple education and family stability. The p-value or significant value of 0.000 is less than the critical value of 0.01 at 0.01 level of significance. With this result, the hypothesis was therefore rejected and the alternative hypothesis retained. Hence, couple fertility educational level has a positive relationship with family stability in Calabar Municipal Local Government Area.

Table 1 PPMC of the relationship between couple education and family stability.

	Couple education(X)	Family stability(Y)
PPMC	1	.971**
Couple education(X) Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
N	240	240
PPMC	.971**	1
Family stability(Y) Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
N	240	240

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Hypothesis two

Couple fertility communication has no significant relationship with family stability in Calabar Municipal Local Government Area.

Table 2 PPMC of the relationship between couple communication and family stability

	Couple communication(X)	Family stability(Y)
PPMC	1	.990**
Couple communication (X) Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
N	240	240
PPMC	.990**	1
Family stability(Y) Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
N	240	240

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 displays a significant positive correlation coefficient value of ($r = 0.973$ and $p < 0.000$) indicating a strong relationship between marriage communication and family stability. The p-value of 0.000 is less than the crucial value of 0.01 at a significance level of 0.01. The null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was upheld based on this outcome. Therefore, there exists a substantial correlation between the communication of couples and the stability of the family unit.

Discussion of findings

The results from the first hypothesis reveal a significant correlation between couples' religious backgrounds and family stability in the Calabar Municipality Local Government Area of Cross River State. This finding is consistent with the research by Damianakis et al. (2018), which shows that religion can positively influence individuals facing personal crises, such as illness, retirement, and other major life events. Moreover, religion may act as a protective factor against the negative effects of health challenges on relationships.

The results from the second hypothesis demonstrate a strong correlation between the age of couples and family stability in the Calabar Municipality Local Government Area. This finding aligns with the study by Das et al. (2011), which highlighted the impact of age disparity between partners on marital fertility and the increased risk of marital breakdown due to widowhood before a woman's reproductive years end. The age of a couple also influences marital stability, satisfaction, family size

decisions, and contraceptive use. This suggests that more mature couples are better equipped to handle reproductive challenges, leading to greater marital stability.

Conclusion

Marriage is a sacred institution ordained by God for companionship and procreation. A healthy marriage will lead a healthy society and vice versa therefore the result of the findings is that the pillars for marriage stability are education, communication, religious background and age between marriage couples, their absence in a marriage could spell doom and probably lead to divorce.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made in the paper:

- i. Couples who want to postpone having children in their marriages may consider seeking medical intervention and maintaining an optimistic mind-set, rather than indulging in pessimistic or illogical thinking.
- ii. Relatives of couples facing infertility should provide assistance and refrain from actions that might potentially undermine the strength of their marital relationship.
- iii. It is important for married spouses to prioritise attaining sexual gratification, since it may enhance the stability of their marriage. It is crucial for individuals to acknowledge that sexual closeness has significant value within a marital relationship and should not be denied to each other.
- iv. Parents and influential adults in the lives of young people can actively support them in choosing partners who come from similar cultural backgrounds. This may foster the use of a common language and result in shared methods to dealing with family issues.

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