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Socio-Demographic Correlates Of Family Size Preferences Among Newly Married Couples (2009-2013) In Nsukka Local Government Area Of Enugu State: Implications For Family And Community Empowerment

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**Abstract**

The purpose of the study was to determine the family size preferences of newly married couples in Nsukka LGA of Enugu state. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Specifically, four research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study. A multi-staged sampling procedure using simple random sampling technique of balloting without replacement was used to select a sample of 284 newly married couples (2009-2013) in Nsukka LGA of Enugu state. The instrument for data collection was the researchers-made questionnaire. Data collected were analyzed using percentages to answer the research questions and the regression analysis to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The results showed that the most preferred family sizes by newly married couples in Nsukka LGA are families of 4 (27.7%) and 5 (26.2% children). Males preferred family sizes of 3(27.7%) and 4 (31.5%) while their female counterparts prefer families of 4 (23.9%) and 5 (27.7%). Muslims, Traditional religion practitioners and Christians preferred family sizes of 5+ (67.9%), 5 (33.3%) and 4 (30.3%) respectively. The preferred family sizes for respondents with no formal education, secondary education, primary education, and tertiary education are 5+ (34.9%), 5 (50.5%), 4 (47.9%), and 2 (39.7%) respectively. The researchers, among others recommended that health educators and school teachers should educate and enlighten young people on the merits of small families with regards to current national economic concerns.

**Keywords:** socio-demographic correlates, family size preferences, newly married couples.

**Introduction**

Nigeria is the most populous nation in Africa (National Planning Commission, 2001). The total population of Nigeria according to 1991 census was about 88.5 million people at a population growth rate, stable at 2.9 per cent. In the year 2012, the Nigerian Population Commission (NPC, 2013) declared that the Nigerian nation has over 170 million people living in a world of about 7 billion persons. This makes Nigeria the 6th most populated nation in the world. It is not; however, the size of the population that is of most concern, it is the alarming rate at which it is growing. At the current rate of

population growth which is approximately 2.9 per cent annually, Nigeria adds about 3.5 million people annually, if this high growth rate continues, Nigeria's population will double in about 24 years (NPC, 2004). This high population growth rate will have serious consequences for national development while the main contributor to high rate of population growth includes large family sizes of Nigerians.

Family size preference refers to a measure of a person's preferred family size (Heiland, Prskawetz & Sanderson, 2005). Similarly, Thomson (2002) opined that family size preference otherwise known as family size desires are the number of children wanted in one's lifetime. Preference for a particular family size is not necessarily formed during adulthood but is a life-long process that is shaped early in life and remains constant throughout the reproductive career (Heiland, Prskawetz & Sanderson, 2005). Family size preferences change over time not only because of factors related to this intrinsic uncertainty, but also due to certain developmental processes associated with the reproductive life course. Over the reproductive life course, the preference for more children is expected to evolve based on either age-related factors associated with decreased fecundity or on the attainment of individual or culturally-defined reproductive milestones (Thomson, 2002).

Family size has a relationship with family and community empowerment. Empowerment implies to make a person or people stronger and more confident, especially in controlling their life and claiming their rights (Hornby, 2000). Hence, empowerment is a process of enhancing the capacity of individuals and groups to make choices that can ensure a better future for them. Family and community empowerment can be hard when families are large. Sahleyesus (2005) stated that large families will encourage poverty and economically unsatisfactory lives for parents and for the children. Hence, smaller families should favour the bid for empowerment. Previous studies suggest that family size preferences of couples are shaped by some socio-demographic correlates.

Correlate refers to a close connection between two or more facts or figures (Hornby, 2000). Soukhanov (2004) asserted that a correlate represents either of two variables that are related with the result that a variation in one is accompanied by a linear variation of the other. Hence, socio-demographic correlates of family size preferences would imply those socio-demographic factors that influence the family size desires. Some of such socio-demographic factors include gender (male dominance and woman's sense of security), religion and education.

Typical Nigerian communities are characterised by male-dominant and patrilineal traditions (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1994). In most communities in Igboland, a sociocultural characteristic of couples include the decision making role of the man disregarding the rights of the wife, who remains as the 'yes' member of the family (Igbokwe, 2004). In line with this, Olugbenga-Bello, Oboro, Araoye and Musa (2009) stated that men in general, are usually attributed with economic dominance and decision making power. Even in situations where no spoken decision is made, men's perceived wishes or objections may influence their wives' actions. Therefore, any decision pertaining to family size rests solely on men with little or no input from the women.

Women in Nigerian communities believe that their children will give them a sense of security in their husbands' home. Hence, Castle (2003) opines that some young women always have a need to maximize fertility in order to gain status through childbearing in their marital households. The more children they have, the greater their sense of security and comfort in their matrimonial homes. A study on fertility trends in Islamic northern Nigeria revealed that women in North-western Nigeria ascribed to their

husbands the responsibility for high parity; these women reported deliberately giving birth to many children in order to inhibit men's tendency to divorce or engage in plural marriage (Izugbara and Ezeh, 2010). Women of southeast origin tend to dissociate themselves from decisions bordering around family size as they rely solely on their husbands' desires (Igbokwe, 2004). From a Nigerian perspective, a successful marriage needs children especially male children.

Religion is another factor that affects family sizes in Nigeria. According to Olaitan (2011); family size preferences and family planning choice depends on the religion of the couple. Islam and Christianity have doctrines that call for raising and bearing of more children in the society. According to Oye-Adeniran, Adewole, Umoh, Oladokun, Gbadegesin, Ekanem, Yusuf, Odeyemi, Iwere and Mahmoud (2006); Christians disapprove of contraception and therefore the more predominantly Christian populations in South-eastern Nigeria had the most respondents who had religion as either reason for contraceptive non-usage. These restriction on contraception are based on the belief that it is "God's will to bring children" into the world (Olaitan, 2011).

Higher levels of education are associated with smaller family sizes. Isiugo-Abanihe (1994) identified that male education is a factor that promotes smaller family size and preferences for smaller families, while being in a male-dominant family setting has strong relation with large family sizes. In agreement, Igbokwe (2004) argues that the higher the level of education of the couples, the more likelihood of their accepting Family Planning practices (FPPs) and achieving desirable family sizes. Therefore, the educational background of couples in the context of FPPs will determine their attitude towards sex selection and sex preference. For Instance, the number of females in the family may not change the attitude of educated couples especially when the designated numbers are produced. Thus, socio-cultural characteristics of the people, despite fast urbanization of the area may still be militating against small family sizes in Nsukka LGA of Enugu state.

Nsukka LGA is one of the seventeen local government areas in Enugu state. It is located in the Enugu North senatorial zone of Enugu state between coordinates 6.85667°N and 7.39583°E and covers a land area of 45.38Km<sup>2</sup> (Maplandia, 2014). It is composed of urban and rural settings dominated by Nsukka natives with the presence of people from other parts of the state and the country who are attracted by the University located there. The LGA is predominantly urban. The people are mainly civil servants while a few others are farmers and traders. However, majority of the people have common cultural values, beliefs and traditional norms.

No study exists on socio-demographic correlates of family size preferences among newly married couples in Nsukka LGA of Enugu state, to the best knowledge of the investigator. This study therefore, seeks to fill this gap. In order to achieve this task, four principal study questions were posed thus:

1. What is the family size preference of newly married couples in Nsukka LGA of Enugu state?
2. What is the family size preference of newly married couples in Nsukka LGA of Enugu state according to gender?
3. What is the family size preference of newly married couples in Nsukka LGA of Enugu state according to religion?
4. What is the family size preference of newly married couples in Nsukka LGA of Enugu state according to level of education?

## **Hypotheses**

1. There is no statistically significant difference in family size preference of newly married couples in Nsukka LGA based on gender.
2. There is no statistically significant difference in family size preference of newly married couples in Nsukka LGA based on level of education.

## **Methods**

This study adopted a descriptive survey design. According to Nwana (1990), the descriptive survey research design facilitates the description of situation in its present state and solicits information directly from the respondents. Nworgu (2006) asserted that the descriptive survey research design is one which aims at collecting data on, and describing in a systematic manner, the characteristics, features or facts about a given population. Hence, this design was found appropriate for the present study.

The population of the study comprised 890 couples who registered their marriages at the Local Government (LG) marriage registry between 2009 and 2013. A sample size of 284 couples (142 males & 142 females) was selected using multistage sampling procedure.

The instrument used for data collection was researcher's self-made questionnaire. The questionnaire has developed from the literature in line with the research questions. The questionnaire was in two sections. In section one, information on the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents — level of education, religion and gender were solicited. In section two, a question on family size preference was asked. The face validity was established through the judgement of three experts in the Department of Health and Physical Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The half split method was employed for establishing the internal consistency of the instrument. A reliability index of 0.85 was obtained using Spearman's Rank Order Correlation Formular. Therefore, the instrument was considered reliable for use in the present study. This is because according to Ogbazi and Okpala (1994), if the correlation coefficient obtained on an instrument is up to 0.60 and above, the instrument should be considered reliable to be used for the study.

The instrument was distributed to the respondents including individuals whose marriages were registered at the registry, mainly public servants. Completed copies of the questionnaire were returned with a return rate of 91.6 per cent. The statistical package for social sciences (SPSS V.15) was employed for further data analysis. The data were analyzed using univariate and bivariate statistics were appropriate. The research questions were answered using descriptive statistics of frequency count and percentages while the tests of significance was based on 95% confidence interval ( $p < 0.05$ ) using the linear regression analysis. The results are presented in tables with brief interpretation of their contents.

## **Results**

Of the 260 women who participated in this study, 43 of the respondents had no formal education, 48, 101 and 68 have acquired primary, secondary and tertiary education respectively.

**Table 1**  
**Family Size Preference of Newly Married Couples in Nsukka LGA (N=260)**

No. of children	Preferred sex distribution	F	%	Total
1	1 boy	7	2.69	7 (2.7%)
	1 girl	-	0	
2	2 girls	-	0	52 (20%)
	2 boys	33	12.69	
3	1 boy, 1 girl	19	7.31	40 (15.4%)
	3 boys	21	8.08	
	3 girls	-	0	
4	2 boys, 1 girl	17	6.54	72 (27.7%)
	2 girls, 1 boy	2	0.77	
	4 boys	9	3.46	
	4 girls	-	0	
5	3 boys, 1 girl	23	8.85	68 (26.2%)
	3 girls, 1 boy	-	0	
	2 boys, 2 girls	40	15.38	
	5 boys	7	2.69	
	5 girls	-	0	
	4 boys, 1 girl	12	4.62	
5 & above	4 girls, 1 boy	-	0	21 (8.1%)
	3 boys, 2 girls	33	12.69	
	3 girls, two boys	16	6.15	
		21	8.08	

Table 1 shows that the most preferred family sizes are families of 4 children (27.7%) and families of 5 (26.2%) while the least preferred family size is the family of 1 child.

**Table 2**  
**Influence of Gender on Family Size Preferences of Newly Married Couples (N=260)**

Preferred family size	Male		Female	
	F	%	f	%
1	1	0.8	6	4.6
2	31	23.9	21	16.2
3	36	27.7	4	3.1
4	41	31.5	31	23.9
5	32	24.6	36	27.7
5 & above	5	3.9	16	12.3

Table 2 shows that the preferred family sizes of males are families of 3 (27.7%) and 4 (31.5%) while their female counterparts prefer families of 4 (23.9%) and 5 (27.7%).

**Table 3**  
**Influence of Religion on Family Size Preferences of Newly Married Couples (N=260)**

Preferred family size	Christian		Muslim		Traditional	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	7	3.3	0	0	0	0
2	50	23.7	0	0	2	9.5
3	34	16.1	1	3.6	5	23.8
4	64	30.3	3	10.7	5	23.8
5	56	26.5	5	17.9	7	33.3
5 & above	0	0	19	67.9	2	9.5

Table 3 shows that the preferred family sizes for Muslims, Traditional religion practitioners and Christians are 5+ (67.9%), 5 (33.3%) and 4 (30.3%).

**Table 4**  
**Influence of Education on Family Size Preferences of Newly Married Couples (N=260)**

Preferred family size	No formal Education (N=22)		Primary education (N=48)		Secondary Education (N=102)		Tertiary Education (N=88)	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	10.3
2	4	9.3	9	18.8	12	11.9	27	39.7
3	5	11.6	4	8.3	13	12.9	18	26.5
4	10	23.3	23	47.9	23	22.8	16	23.5
5	9	20.9	8	16.7	51	50.5	0	0
5 & above	15	34.9	4	8.3	2	2.0	0	0

Table 4 shows that the preferred family sizes for respondents with no formal education, secondary education, primary education, and tertiary education are 5+ (34.9%), 5 (50.5%), 4 (47.9%), and 2 (39.7%) respectively.

**Table 5**  
**Summary of Regression Analysis Testing the Null Hypothesis of No Significant Difference in Family Size Preference of Newly Married Couples in Nsukka LGA Based on Gender**

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	f	Sig.	Decision
1	Regression	4.974	2	2.487	4.369	.025*(a)	Reject
	Residual	12.526	22	.569			
	Total	17.500	24				

a Predictors: (Constant), FEMALE, MALE

b Dependent Variable: FAMSP

\*Significant at .05 level

Table 5 shows the F value of 4.369 with 2 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.025. The p-value obtained is less than 0.05 and indicates that the variations observed in the family size preferences of newly married couples according to gender are not due to chance. Thus, the null hypothesis is hereby rejected.

**Table 6**

**Summary of Regression Analysis Testing the Null Hypothesis of No Significant Difference in Family Size Preference of Newly Married Couples in Nsukka LGA Based on Educational Level**

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Decision
1	Regression	16.503	4	4.126	82.774	.000*(a)	Reject
	Residual	.997	20	.050			
	Total	17.500	24				

a Predictors: (Constant), TERTEDU, NFEDU, SSCHEDU, PRIEDU

b Dependent Variable: FAMSP

\*Significant at .05 level

Table 6 shows the F value of 82.774 with 4 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.00018. The p-value obtained is less than 0.05 and indicates that the variations observed in the dependent and independent variables are not due to chance, thus, the null hypothesis is hereby rejected.

**Discussion**

Discussion is hereby presented according to the research questions and hypothesis:

1. Family Size Preference of Newly Married Couples in Nsukka LGA of Enugu State
2. Influence of Gender on Family Size Preferences of Newly Married Couples in Nsukka LGA of Enugu State.
3. Influence of Religion on Family Size Preferences of Newly Married Couples in Nsukka LGA of Enugu State.
4. Influence of Education on Family Size Preferences of Newly Married Couples in Nsukka LGA of Enugu State.

**Family Size Preference of Newly Married Couples in Nsukka LGA of Enugu State**

The findings in table 1 showed that the most preferred family sizes by newly married couples in Nsukka LGA are families of 4 children (27.7%) and families of 5 children (26.2%) while the least preferred family size is the family of 1 child. This finding was expected owing to the socio-cultural characteristic of the people which favours large family sizes. This is in line with the findings of Gray, Hurt and Oyewole (1983) who observed projected family preferences of undergraduate students of 5 children per family with the most preferred family consisting of four children in a 2 male-2 female combination. Whereas, the second most preferred family consisted of five children in a 3 male – 2 female combination.

**Influence of Gender on Family Size Preferences of Newly Married Couples in Nsukka LGA**

The findings in table 2 showed that the preferred family sizes for males are families of children (27.7%) and 4 children (31.5%) while their female counterparts prefer families of 4 children (23.9%) and 5 children (27.7%). The findings were not surprising but in support of some literature assertions. Saad (2011) reported that women in the United States desire larger family sizes than men and that 41 per cent of men prefer 3 or more children, compared to 43 per cent of women who prefer the same number of children. Similarly, Izugbara and Ezeh (2010) opined that having many children was desirable among Northern Nigerian women who reported that they deliberately gave birth to many children in order to inhibit their husband's tendency to divorce or engage in plural marriage. In addition, having more children gave them a sense of fulfilment and security in their matrimonial homes. The findings in table 5 showed the F value of 4.369 with 2 degrees of freedom and a significance of 0.025. The p-value obtained is less than 0.05 and indicates that the variations observed in the family size preferences of newly married couples according to gender are not due to chance. Thus the hypothesis that stated that there is no statistically significant difference in family size preference of newly married couples in Nsukka LGA based on gender was rejected. This finding is plausible and supports the assertion of Izugbara and Ezeh (2010) that women have higher needs for increased family size than men.

#### **Influence of Religion on Family Size Preferences of Newly Married Couples in Nsukka LGA**

The findings in table 3 showed that the preferred family sizes for Muslims, Traditional religion practitioners and Christians are 5+ (67.9%), 5 (33.3%) and 4 (30.3%). This finding was expected and not surprising. This is because religions such as Islam and Christianity have doctrines that call for raising and bearing of more children in the society, thereby encouraging large family sizes and prohibiting contraception (Olaitan, 2011). James and Isiugo-Abanihe (2010) reported that in a predominantly Muslim study population, three in four females (74.6%) and almost two in three males (66.1%) were of the opinion that a family size of six children or more was large while those between one and five children were small. Hence, the more conservative, non-conformist religions are more likely to have large families even in the light of modernisation and socio-economic challenges. James and Isiugo-Abanihe further stated that adherents to Islamic faith and indigenous religions have higher family size preferences than do Christians, perhaps because the former are more likely to come from polygamous homes.

#### **Influence of Education on Family Size Preferences of Newly Married Couples in Nsukka LGA**

The findings in table 4 showed that the preferred family sizes for respondents with no formal education, secondary education, primary education, and tertiary education are 5 and above (34.9%), 5 (50.5%), 4 (47.9%), and 2 (39.7%) respectively. These findings were anticipated and in consonant with literature. James and Isiugo-Abanihe (2010) asserted that education has an inverse relationship with family size preferences. That is, the higher the level of education the fewer the ideal family size and the number of children desired. In their opinion, adolescents with some tertiary education desire at least one child fewer than those with no formal schooling. In line with this, Isiugo-Abanihe (1994) had earlier stated that male education is a factor that promotes smaller

family size and preferences for smaller families. The findings in table 6 showed the F value of 82.774 with 4 degrees of freedom and a significance of .000. The p-value obtained is less than 0.05 and indicates that the variations observed in the dependent and independent variables are not due to chance. Consequently, the hypothesis that stated that there is no statistically significant difference in family size preference of newly married couples in Nsukka LGA based on level of education was rejected. This finding is interesting and consistent with the assertions of Heiland, Prskawetz and Sanderson (2005) that education has an inverse relationship with large families such that the higher the level of education, the less the preferred family size.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the results of the study and discussion, the following conclusions were made:

1. The most preferred family size is four children.
2. There are gender differences in family size preferences
3. Conservative religious ideologies promote large family size preferences
4. Education has an inverse relationship with family size preferences.

### **Implications for Family and Community Empowerment.**

In view of the fast growing Nigerian population and the current trends of global economic meltdown, most countries of the world are encouraging population control. This is in recognition of the fact that the less competition there is, the more opportunities there will be for those ready to take them. With smaller families, government aids and programmes will be easily accessible. Thus, there will be small, healthy and happy families contributing actively to communal good.

The findings of the present study revealed that the most preferred family size is the family of 4, gender and religion influence family size preferences of newly married couples in Nsukka LGA. It was also observed that education has an inverse relationship with family size preferences, so that, the more educated a person is, the smaller the preferred family size. It is therefore obvious that Nigerians yet face serious challenges in issues of family size. The fact that some young Nigerians consider families of five children as 'small' (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2010) and worse still, preferences for families of four to five children have remained constant for at least 30 years now (Gray, Hurt and Oyewole, 1983). These are mainly determined by cultural preferences which may be unhealthy and counterproductive with respect to family and community empowerment and entrepreneurship. It seems obvious that ensuring a good education and a generally happy life would seem more feasible for a smaller number of dependents than if the same resources were to be applied to a larger number of persons.

For optimum family and community empowerment, there will be a need for a shift in cultural preferences towards smaller families. Although, Saad (2011) opined that the population growth rate may not drop below the threshold needed to maintain the population, but considering the fact the Nigerian population doubles every 24 years (NPC, 2004) and the government efforts seem insignificant amidst the growing populace, it therefore becomes essential for people to take initiative, limit family size, reverse their socio-economic conditions and contribute to the general wellbeing of the community. Also important to note is the fact that high dependency ratios on young entrepreneurs is counterproductive and limits the abilities of families and communities to become

empowered. Considering the peculiar Nigerian circumstances, limiting family sizes would be in the best interest of families and communities.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings and discussions, the following recommendations were made:

1. Health educators and school teachers should educate and enlighten young people on the virtues of small families and the demerits of having large families with regards to current national economic concerns.
2. Parents should ensure adequate education of their children, look beyond their desire for grand children and encourage them to have less children for the good of the family and community.
3. Young adults who desire to have families should consider the general welfare of the family first, by having a few children for whom they can care for adequately.

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