

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE PERCEPTION OF CHRISTIAN WOMEN OF FAMILY PLANNING METHODS IN BENUE STATE

Ada Anyebe¹ — Adam Adem Anyebe²

¹Department of Christian Religious Studies, Federal College of Education, Zaria-Nigeria

²Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Administration, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria – Nigeria

ABSTRACT

The unsustainable population growth in the country has necessitated the adoption of some measures aimed at achieving a lower population growth rate via voluntary fertility regulation methods. This study was therefore, undertaken to examine the perception of family planning methods by Christian women in Benue state. The methods employed in the collection of data were survey and documents. This work covered fifteen churches in Benue State, consisting of five churches each from the three senatorial zones. The fifteen churches comprise three thousand, one hundred and eighty registered women. However, three hundred and eighty women were selected as samples. Copies of questionnaire were administered randomly on the respondents. The data were subjected to statistical analysis using t-test. The study revealed that both the Protestant Christian women and the Catholic women agreed that the natural methods of family planning free them from the use of chemicals and help them space their children but with high failure rates. It was also revealed that the artificial methods of family planning reduce the fear of unplanned pregnancies while it was unanimously agreed that weight gain and high blood pressure are some of the major side-effects of the methods. The study therefore, recommended that women should be professionally counselled on their menstrual cycles before using the natural methods of family planning to reduce failure rates. There should also be regular workshops and seminars on the benefits and the side-effects of the natural and the artificial methods for enlightenment.

Keywords: Assessment, Christian Women, Family, Planning, Perception, Methods Menstrual Cycles.

Contribution/ Originality

This study contributes in the existing literature by adding the study of perception and family planning methods in Benue State, Nigeria. This study uses new estimation methodology of stratified-random sampling in the area of study. This study originates new formula of T-test to test the hypotheses instead of the normal descriptive statistics. This study is one of very few studies which have investigated family planning methods in Benue State. The paper contributes the logical analysis of perception and family planning methods in Benue State. The paper's

primary contribution is the finding that the major side-effect of artificial method is weight gain and high blood pressure. This study documents that experts should educate Christian women on artificial methods.

1. INTRODUCTION

The modern methods of contraception were not known until in 1720 when condom was introduced in Europe as a protection against sexually transmitted diseases such as syphilis. The international movement for family planning was first initiated by Margret Sanger, a nurse from America in 1914. She opened the first family planning centre in Brooklyn in 1966. Her counterparts in other countries like Dr. Alleta, Jacob, Dr. Mary Stopes and Mrs. Elis Ottesen were all motivated by concern for women's health and their welfare (Suleiman, 2000). In 1952, they formed the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF). Towards the end of 1968, the IPPF had grown into an organization and spread to over 54 countries of which 36 are from less developed countries. In 1909, Ritcher and Graefenberg were the first people to develop the scientific intra-uterine device made up of worn gut. In 1938, Dr. Fredrick, a German physician invented diaphragm popularly called Dutch cap (Suleiman, 2000). Meanwhile, little was known about the use of modern contraceptive in Nigeria during this period. The natural methods of family planning were however, in use. In Nigeria, the use of modern contraceptive started around 1965. Johnson (2002) states that before 1965 there was an increase rate in criminal abortion. The ugly incidence prompted the Marriage Counseling of Nigeria to cry out for help. This led to the provision of funds by Pathfinder Fund of Boston and the International Planned Parenthood Federation of London to Marriage Counseling of Nigeria to start their first family planning campaign in Nigeria. This was a healthy development for a developing country like Nigeria where high premium is placed on children especially as they are expected to give old-age support to their parents. More so, children are seen as a means for family wealth and social status.

In cultures where the aged are dependent on their adult sons and daughters for support, fertility will in all probability remain high in order to guarantee enough surviving children to meet this need. Also, in an environment where children are seen as blessings from God, their control is believed to incur the wrath of the Almighty. This must have contributed to the low usage of contraceptives in the country. The Federal Government has made an attempt to control this unsustainable population growth by adopting a population policy aimed at achieving a lower population growth rate via voluntary fertility regulation methods, it appears that these socio-cultural and economic determinants of value of children have constituted a serious impediment to the realization of this objective in the country. For example, in a study carried out in Benue State by Adekunle (1998) it was revealed that the use of family planning methods in the State is generally low. The calculation and safe calendar method is however, the most commonly used family planning method while the least used methods are the female/male sterilization and

norplant. The findings also suggest a higher percentage of usage among respondents who are between 40 and 59 years of age than among those who are 60 years and above.

Collaborating this study, [Elaigwu \(2005\)](#) found that contraceptive use throughout the same Benue State remains very low due to certain factors. Some of these factors are based on religious norms while others are on health reasons. In the State, most of the Christian women are aware of the perceived benefits of the use of contraceptives that it reduces the fear of unplanned pregnancy and helps women to enjoy sexual relationship more. It is also believed to relieve women from financial and physical stress, but majority of them are not willing or ready to use any of the contraceptive methods. Some of the Christian women are of the opinion that since the use of artificial methods of family planning is not accepted in their religion and that, it is a sin against God. Others are of the view that its use creates a set of anxieties because women worry about physical side-effects ([Elaigwu, 2005](#)). According to [Onuh \(2003\)](#), in Benue State especially in the rural areas, the most practiced method of family planning is the use of pills and the majority of users in most cases later discontinued the use because of the side-effects which include weight gain and high blood pressure. The women are afraid of using the injectable method (or Depo-Provera) because they see it as a method designed by the foreign countries to sterilize them for life. In the State, members of the Catholic Church are against the use of artificial methods of family planning because they view children as gift from God ([Onuh, 2003](#)). To them, using any form of artificial contraceptives to prevent new life from being born is a sin against the Almighty God. It is believed that there are other ways one can plan one's family that are in themselves thoroughly good. [Elaigwu \(2005\)](#), states that the Idomas living in Angwan-Jukum area of Makurdi local Government Council believe that Alekwu (Ancestral Spirit) would kill anyone who accepts the practice of artificial method of child-spacing. From this viewpoint, the use of artificial methods of family planning suffers double rejection- from religious and cultural backgrounds among the Idomas of Benue State.

Family planning, according to [Golden \(1986\)](#), is divided into two categories, the natural methods and the artificial methods. The natural methods include the symptom-base, calendar base, lactation amenorrhoea, and billings ovulation method etc. The artificial methods are made up of Barrier, Hormonal, Intrauterine devices and Sterilization methods. The artificial methods basically can be sub-divided into two major groups, contraceptive and Abortifacient. All these methods are deliberate ways of preventing pregnancy. The risk of these methods starts from mild discomfort to death for women. In Benue State, according to [Elaigwu \(2005\)](#), there have been efforts to create awareness on the benefits of modern contraceptives. Hospitals, health centres and the mass media such as radio, television and newspapers were fully utilized to create this awareness. Many women of reproductive age initially responded positively but, in spite of the initial interest in family planning, it is perceived that a good number of users of contraceptives in the State have discontinued the use of the methods within the first 15 months of engagement.

What has been responsible for this state of affairs? This study therefore, attempts to assess the perception of Christian women of family planning methods in Benue State.

The following hypotheses are used as a guide in this study;

- There is no significant difference in the perception of Protestant Christian women and Catholic women of the benefits of natural methods of family planning in Benue State
- There is no significant difference in the perception of Protestant Christian women and Catholic women of the side-effects of natural methods of family planning in Benue State
- There is no significant difference in the perception of Protestant Christian women and Catholic women of the benefits of artificial methods of family planning in Benue State
- There is no significant difference in the perception of Protestant Christian women and Catholic women of the side-effects of artificial methods of family planning in Benue State

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1. Population for the Study

The population of this study consisted of all Christian women in the three senatorial districts of Benue State. The total number of women in churches across the three senatorial districts was estimated to be one hundred and five thousand (105,000). This was obtained from the headquarters of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) Benue branch. Looking at the size of the target population, it would not be realistic to cover it and also the geographical spread of the churches would make such an exercise even more difficult, therefore a random sampling technique was adopted.

2.2. Sample and Sampling Procedures

The sample for this study was drawn from the population of all Christian women in the three senatorial districts in Benue State. In order to get a fair representative sample of the population, the churches were broken into clusters. Cluster random sampling was used to get the sample. [Osuala \(2005\)](#) states that the purpose of using random sampling is that each member of the population would have equal chance of being selected. For this study, the sample could be generalised to the larger population since the population is homogenous. Since the population of women might not be evenly distributed among the churches in the three senatorial districts, and to ease sampling procedures, churches were classified in terms of women population above 400 women (large), between 200 and 400 women (medium). Below 200 women (low). Fifteen churches were randomly selected, five each from the three senatorial districts. Out of the total population of 3,605 in the fifteen churches selected, a sample of three hundred and eighty (380) respondents was used for this study. This is in line with Gay (1980) in [Olayiwola \(2007\)](#) who states that for a research of this nature, a minimum sample of 10% is considered sufficient for the study.

2.3. Procedure for Collection of Data

To administer the instrument for this study, letters were sent to the leaders of the various churches. This was done to solicit for maximum cooperation and to make the administration of the questionnaire easy. Although the responses to the items on the questionnaire were recorded in English language, the research assistants used English or local language for the questionnaire administration as was determined by the respondent. This method was considered more suitable than the traditional questionnaire using self-report technique because a large proportion of the research audience lacked effective formal education and therefore, was not in proper position to handle the survey instrument on their own.

2.4. Method of Data Analysis

For purposes of this study, independent t-test was used to test the four hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

2.5. Data Presentation and Analysis

The data collected from 15 churches in Benue State in relation to the perception of Christian women of family planning methods were analysed statistically. The independent t-test was used to establish differences between two categories of Christian women(Protestant Christian women and Catholic women) of their perception of family planning methods.

Table-1. Perception of Protestant Christian women (PCW) and that of the Catholic women (CW) of the benefits of natural methods of family planning

S/NO	Items	Occupation	Response Categories					Mean	SD	S.E
			SA	A	UD	D	SD	Mean	SD	S.E
1.	They increase reproductive awareness	PCW	47	57	12	12	10	3.8623	1.1911	.1014
		CW	26	24	7	3	10	3.7571	1.3772	.1646
2.	They help in child spacing	PCW	43	66	11	9	9	3.9058	1.1132	.0947
		CW	20	32	5	4	9	3.7143	1.2981	.1551
3.	They free me from the use of chemicals	PCW	47	63	10	10	8	3.9493	1.1095	.0944
		CW	27	31	6	2	4	4.0714	1.0539	.1259
4.	They increase communication between me and my spouse	PCW	29	63	16	15	15	3.5507	1.2443	.1059
		CW	12	30	7	3	18	3.2143	1.4733	.1761
5.	They prevent interference during intercourse	PCW	25	57	14	16	26	3.2826	1.3933	.1186
		CW	14	23	10	5	18	3.1429	1.4967	.1788

Source: Survey by the researcher, 2011

According to Table 1 PCW said natural methods of family planning free them from the use of chemicals. The item attracted the highest mean responses of 3.9493 and 4.0714 by PCW and CW respectively. Details of the ratings by PCW on the items show that 47 strongly agreed, 63 agreed, 10 undecided, 10 disagreed while the rest 8 strongly disagreed. Also, details of the ratings by CW

on the same items show that 27 strongly agreed, 31 agreed, 6 undecided, 2 disagreed and the rest 4 strongly disagreed respectively. The ratings on other items can be read directly from the table.

Table-2. Perception of PCW and that of CW of the side-effects of natural methods of family planning

S/NO	Item	Occupation	Response Categories					Mean	SD	S.E
			SA	A	UD	D	SD	Mean	SD	S.E
1.	Find it difficult to abstain from sex	PCW	30	34	4	11	21	3.4100	1.5314	.1531
		CW	10	14	8	20	14	2.7879	1.3979	.1720
2.	Prone to psychological stress	PCW	24	40	7	12	17	3.4200	1.4155	.1779
		CW	11	17	9	15	16	2.9394	1.4455	.1779
3.	Find it difficult to check their body temperature every day	PCW	23	32	8	15	22	3.1900	1.5021	.1502
		CW	11	13	11	15	14	2.8182	1.4237	.1752
4.	Not convenient because of irregular cycle	PCW	18	40	9	9	24	3.1900	1.4681	.1468
		CW	10	18	8	13	17	2.8636	1.4558	.1792
5.	The failure rates are higher	PCW	12	27	4	9	48	2.4600	1.5790	.1579
		CW	11	14	9	16	16	2.8182	1.4348	.1766

Source: Survey by the researcher, 2011

Table 2 shows the level of perception of PCW and that of CW of the side-effects of natural methods of family planning. Based on this table, PCW's opinion and that of CW on the side-effect of natural methods of family planning that they are prone to psychological stress attracted the highest mean responses of 3.4200 and 2.9394 respectively. The ratings on other items can be read from Table 2.

Table-3. Perception of PCW and that of CW of the benefits of artificial methods of family planning

S/NO	Items	Age	Response Categories					Mean	SD	S.E
			SA	A	UD	D	SD	Mean	SD	S.E
1.	Help me space my children	PCW	65	61	9	24	25	3.6149	1.4608	.1107
		CW	56	58	4	40	42	3.2300	1.5521	.1097
2.	Are easy to use	PCW	41	54	17	23	39	3.2011	1.5013	.1138
		CW	31	60	10	36	63	2.8000	1.5269	.1079
3.	Reduce the fear of unplanned pregnancies	PCW	49	64	12	17	32	3.4655	1.4570	.1104
		CW	53	73	8	40	26	3.4350	1.4020	.0991
4.	Relieves me of financial and physical stress	PCW	32	51	17	20	54	2.9253	1.5470	.1172
		CW	25	35	13	39	88	2.3500	1.4894	.1053
5.	Help prevent me from sexually transmitted diseases	PCW	44	57	10	28	41	3.1667	1.5472	.1173
		CW	47	56	3	37	57	2.9950	1.5993	.1130

Source: Survey by the researcher, 2011

Table 3 shows that PCW have a perception that differs from that of CW of the benefits of artificial methods of family planning. PCW are of the opinion that artificial methods help them space their children. This item has the highest mean response of 3.6149. CW on the other hand believes that artificial method of family planning reduces the fear of unplanned pregnancies. This item has the highest mean response of 3.4350. The ratings on the other items can be read from the table.

Table-4. Perception of PCW and that of CM of the side-effects of artificial methods of family planning

S/N	Items	Age	Response categories					Mean	SD	SA
			SA	A	UD	D	SD	Mean	SD	SA
1.	Get high blood pressure	PCW	67	60	19	10	18	3.8506	1.2815	.0971
		CW	88	72	8	10	22	3.9700	1.29518	.0915
2.	Gain weight	PCW	74	69	13	11	7	4.1034	1.0538	.0798
		CW	98	69	7	6	20	4.0950	1.2424	.0878
3.	Prolonged menstrual and irregular cycle	PCW	59	66	23	10	16	3.8161	1.2262	.0929
		CW	77	78	7	13	25	3.8450	1.3378	.0946
4.	Experience pelvic inflammatory disease	PCW	37	68	32	17	20	3.4885	1.2526	.0949
		CW	52	94	22	11	21	3.7250	1.2110	.0856
5.	Have urine wall perforation	PCW	35	58	40	22	19	3.3908	1.2479	.0946
		CW	64	71	31	11	23	3.7100	1.2861	.0909

Table 4 shows that the major side-effects of artificial family planning are that they lead to weight gain. This can be seen in the highest mean scores of 4.1034 and 4.0950 by PCW and CW respectively. The details of responses by PCW on this item show that 74 strongly agreed, 69 agreed, 13 undecided, 11 disagreed and 7 strongly disagreed respectively. On the other hand, the details of responses by CW on the same item reveal that 98 strongly agreed, 69 agreed, 7 were undecided, 6 disagreed and 20 strongly disagreed respectively. Other items ratings can be read directly from Table 4.

2.6. Test of Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the perception of Protestant Christian women and Catholic women of the benefits of natural methods of family planning in Benue State

Table-5.Independent t-test statistics on difference between PCW and CW on their perception of benefits of natural methods of family planning

	Occupation	N	Mean	S.D	S.E	t Calculated	t critical	Df	Sig (P)
Benefits of natural methods of family planning	PCW	138	18.5507	4.3228	.3679	206	.939	1.96	.340
	CW	70	17.9000	5.4244	.6483				

tcalculated<1.96, calculated sig(P)>0.05

The outcome of the independent t-test statistics in Table 5 reveals that there is no significant difference between PCW and CW in their perception of the benefits of natural methods of family planning. This is because the calculated (p) value of .349 is greater than the 0.05 level of tolerance while calculated t value of 0.939 is less than the 1.96 t critical value at df 206. Therefore, the null hypothesis is hereby accepted and retained.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference in the perception of Protestant Christian women and Catholic women of the side-effects of natural methods of family planning in Benue State

Table-6. Independent t-test statistics on the responses of PCW and CW on side-effects of natural methods of family planning

	Occupation	N	Mean	S.D	df	T Calculated	t critical		Sig (P)
Side-effects of natural methods of family planning	PCW	100	15.6700	5.3617					
	CW	66	14.2223	6.3264		164	1.578	1.96	.116

Calculated $t < 1.96$, calculated $\text{sig}(p) < 0.05$

The independent t-test statistics in Table 6 shows that there is no significant difference in the responses of both PCW and CW in their opinion on the side effects of natural family planning methods. The reason is that the calculated p value of .116 is greater than the 0.05 level of significance just as the calculated t- value of 1.578 is less than 1.96 critical t value at df 164 while calculated. Here the null hypothesis is accepted and retained.

Hypothesis three: There is no significant difference in the perception of Protestant Christian women and Catholic women of the benefits of artificial methods of family planning in Benue State

Table-7. Independent t-test statistics on the difference between the responses of PCW and CW on the benefits of artificial family planning methods

	Age	N	mean	S.D	S.E	df	t calc.	t crit.	p
Benefits of artificial Methods of family planning	PCW	174	16.3736	5.9675	.4524				
	CW	200	14.8100	5.7040	.4033	372	2.58	1.96	.010

Calculated $p < 0.05$, $t \text{ calculated} > 1.96$

The outcome of the independent t-test statistics in Table 7 shows that there is significant difference in the responses of PCW and CW on the benefits of artificial methods of family planning. This is because the calculated p-value of .010 is less than 0.05 level of significance while the t calculated value of 2.58 is greater than 1.96 t-critical value at df 372. The null hypothesis is hereby rejected.

Hypothesis four: There is no significant difference in the perception of Protestant Christian women and Catholic women of the side-effects of artificial methods of family planning in Benue State

Table-8. Paired independent t-test statistics on difference in opinions of PCW and CW on the side-effects of natural and artificial methods of family planning

	N	Mean	S.D	S.E	T Calculated	t critical	Df	Sig (P)
Side-effects of natural methods of family planning	374	14.7299	6.0838	.3145				
Side-effects of Artificial methods Of family planning	374	19.0214	4.4546	.2303	9.957	1.96	373	0.000

P-calculated > 0.05, t-calculated > 1.96

The outcome of the paired sample t-test statistics in Table 8 reveals that there is significant difference in the opinions of these two sets of women on the side-effects of natural and artificial methods of family planning methods. This is because the calculated p value of 0.000 is less than the 0.05 level of significance while t calculated is greater than 1.96 t critical at df 373. Their mean responses of 14.7299 and 19.0214 on the side-effects of natural and artificial methods of family planning shows that the side-effects of artificial family planning method is higher than the side-effects of natural family planning method. Therefore, the null hypothesis is hereby rejected

2.7. Findings and Discussion

- According to PCW and CW, the greatest benefits of natural methods of family planning are that they free them from the use of chemicals and also help them to space their children. This is in support of a Christian French Couple in [Trobisch \(2000\)](#) that couples using the natural methods of family planning are not using any chemical barrier to prevent conception from occurring. Therefore, they are not opposed to the will of God in procreation of children since they could still conceive a child each time they engage in sexual relations.
- The two sets of women have differing opinions on the side-effects; while the PCW believe that the failure rates of natural methods are high, the CW's opinion on side-effects of natural methods of family planning is that their users are prone to psychological stress. This is in line with [Marilyn \(2001\)](#) who opined that the calendar method depends on a prediction of what is likely to take place based on a menstrual history and not on what is actually taking place. This method may not be of help to women with irregular cycle which according to [Fathala and Rosefield \(1990\)](#) may cause psychological stress in one or both partners with resulting into marital difficulties.
- The PCW believe that the highest benefit of artificial methods of family planning to the users is they help people space their children, while CW's opinion on the main benefit of artificial methods is the reduction of the fear of unplanned pregnancies. This supports [Fathala and Rosefield \(1990\)](#) who both state that artificial methods like condom use are safe, effective and reversible method. They not only prevent pregnancy but also protect both men and women against sexually transmitted diseases.

- According to both sets of respondents, the major side-effect of artificial method of family planning is the weight gain and high blood pressure.

3. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings contained in the study, the natural methods of family planning are perceived more favourably than the artificial methods, probably because the former appear to be compatible with the women's socio-cultural and religious backgrounds.

It is therefore, recommended as follows:

- Women should be professionally counselled on the menstrual cycles and encouraged to adopt the natural methods of family planning. This is because the natural methods are compatible with socio-cultural backgrounds of the women and also their faith; and
- There should be regular workshops and seminars by Christian medical experts on the benefits and the side-effects of artificial methods of family planning among women so that they could make the decisions on their own as to whether they could adopt them for use.

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