

## AWARENESS AND ATTITUDE OF COUPLES TOWARDS FAMILY PLANNING IN FEDERAL CAPITAL TERRITORY, ABUJA

Attah, G.E.<sup>1</sup>, Ebute, J.<sup>2</sup>, Yusuf, A.<sup>3</sup> & Usman, M.B.<sup>4</sup>.  
Department of Counselling and Educational Psychology  
University of Abuja

### Abstract

*The study investigated the attitude and awareness of couples towards family planning in the Federal Capital Territory Abuja. The specific objectives were to find the forms, level of awareness and attitude to family planning among couples in the Federal Capital Territory Abuja. A survey design was used for the study with a sampled population of 600 (300 male and 300 female) out of all the couples in the Federal Capital Territory that formed the population of the study. Awareness and Attitude of Couples towards Family Planning Questionnaire (AACFPQ) was used to collect data. The data collected were analysed using mean and t-test for the research questions and hypotheses respectively. The findings from the study showed that couples in the Federal Capital Territory practice family planning at a low level with even lower appreciation for non-natural family planning methods; couples however, have high level of awareness and positive attitude towards family planning; and they do not differ significantly in the level of awareness and attitude towards family planning due to gender. The study recommends that seminars, workshops and enlightenment campaigns about family planning should be carried out on regular bases to sustain awareness and attitude while clarifications should be made on the side effects of non-natural family planning methods.*

### Introduction

Population growth has been a problematic issue all over the world. Consequently, many developed countries have approved and resorted to birth control or family planning. Family planning according to United Nations Population Funds Activities (UNPFA, 2013) is a recognized basic human right and enables individuals and couples to determine the number and spacing of their children. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2013) stated that family planning allows individuals and couples to anticipate and attain their desired number of children and the spacing and timing of their births. This is achieved through the use of contraceptive methods. A woman's ability to space and limit her pregnancies has a direct impact on her health and well-being as well

as on the outcome of each pregnancy. In effect, family planning is the regulation and control of the rate of child birth by individuals, both married and unmarried.

In developing nations like Nigeria, children are valued as they not only demonstrate the masculinity of the men but equally provide the extra useful hands in communities where agriculture is the major source of income. Besides, aged parents and extended family relations depend on their children for maintenance at old age hence, they are reluctant to limit birth. The rapid population growth, made Nigerian former President Babangida ruled that each family should have not more than four children. Consequently, the mass media started awareness campaigns on the consequences of having many children. Family planning clinics were also established in Government owned hospitals especially in the urban areas of the country. This however, did not achieve much result due to cultural and religious inclinations of the multifarious ethnic groups that make up Nigeria. Report from Okediji (2003) however showed that women want to have fewer children than they actually have. In other words, women are more receptive of family planning than their male counterparts since they bear the burden of childbearing and rearing with the attendant house chores and probable break down in health.

The primary essence of living is for fulfillment and satisfaction. God sanctioned procreation when He said that man should increase and multiply. The same God also made it that parents should take adequate care of the children they bring up into the world. Experience has shown that there are many children born without adequate care in terms of feeding, clothing, sheltering, education and health care. One of the reasons for this is the Imbalance between family resources and number of children born to it. Kleinman (2004) reports that the main problem in world population is the growing imbalance between the number of human beings and the resources available to meet their needs such as food supplies, jobs, housing, education, health facilities, road transports and in other words, the problem presented by population growth are between food and people as well as between apace and people. It imposes strain on the provision of good housing facilities especially for poor family.

The rates of population growth worldwide have caused political leaders to encourage national and regional fertility regulation projects as vital. Supports for regulation of individual fertility have been evident in all cultures and at all times even in those societies in which social and religious rules have favoured the abundant production of children (Golden, 2006). The need for fertility regulation methods to be applied by national and regional authorities was discussed by the United Nations' Population Committee in 1947. In 1968,

the United Nations General Assembly and other international bodies affirmed family planning as a basic human right (Filstie&Guileband, 2009).

Family planning implies the ability of individuals and couples to anticipate and attain their desired number of children by spacing and timing their births. It is achieved through the use of contraceptive methods and the treatment of involuntary infertility. The availability of family planning does more than enable women and men to limit family size. It safeguards individual health and rights, and improves the quality of life of couples and their children. The most important proximate determinant of fertility is the use of family planning (Rajaretnam, 2009). Where contraceptive use is widespread fertility is low, Rajaretnam has demonstrated that even if there is no reduction in the family size of individual couples, delaying child bearing will bring about a decline in fertility and population growth rate. Rajaretnam (2009) Lack of adequate information and ignorance are key factors militating against family planning practice in Nigeria. (Adinma,&Nwosu2005). Many potential informational barriers exist to contraceptive use. Women must be aware of the methods available, must know where supplies of these methods can be obtained and they must know how to use the method they choose. (Chandhick, Dhillon, Kambo, Sexena, 2003).

In some parts of Nigeria, one in five women report having experienced an unwanted conception, of these 58% had an abortion and an additional 9% attempted unsuccessfully to end the pregnancy (Rajaretnam, 2009). It is estimated that about 25% of women who have abortion in Nigeria experience serious complications. Adoption of family planning measures will reduce unwanted pregnancies and criminal abortions to its barest minimum. Pregnancy is the main reason that women in the reproductive age group die at a higher rate than men. Most maternal deaths occur among poor women who live in remote rural areas and have difficult access to hospital (Rajaretnam, 2009).

Most maternal death has been associated with unwanted pregnancies resulting from unsafe abortions, high rate of infant and childhood mortality, miscarriages or foetal wastages are problems associated with short birth interval (Suleiman, 2000). Audu, Yahaya andBassai, (2006) argued that although most couples have knowledge about natural family planning, they lack adequate skill to practice it effectively in fertility regulation.

The history of family planning in Nigeria dated back to early 1950s when a concerned group of women known as the Federation Women Council of Nigeria decided to promote the programme by inaugurating the Planned Parenthood of Nigeria (PPN) when family planning was promoted through hospitals, maternity and the media. That created the awareness to everyone

across the nation for the first time. Since then, new methods have been introduced and old methods improved upon. Although before this time, some individuals or couples saw the need for spacing childbirth through traditional methods but such methods were only handed over by words of mouth from generation to generation. These traditional methods range from the use of concoction, charms to douching. Most of the times, these methods were not properly controlled and so may not yield good result. When people became knowledgeable about menstrual cycle and pregnancy, several improved forms of birth control were developed. Family planning has so many advantages, according to Susheelo (2003), in family planning services, poor health conditions are being detected and treated in the process of carrying out investigations.

Family planning is advantageous because it gives room for women to fend for their families by maintaining a paid job, improve the likelihood of survival of infants, provide good physical and emotional health for the entire family at all stages of life. As laudable as these advantages may seem family planning practice is still in its lowest ebb and only 12% of current married women use contraceptives in Nigeria (Okonofua, 2006). Rather they result to abortion, among married women abortion results when the pregnancy comes too close, too early or too late among many children.

The Nigerian government in 2004 revised the national policy on population alongside emerging issues to improve the state of the economy and make progress towards long-term sustainable development. The policy emphasized among other priorities the reproductive rights of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children, and to have the information and means to do so, and the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health.

In spite of efforts to curb population growth through family planning, it appears as though there still exist the problem of awareness and attitude of couples towards family planning in Federal Capital Territory Abuja. In spite of all the efforts at birth control in Nigeria, there still exist a gap between desire for fertility regulation and practice. Studies have shown that birth rate and population growth in the Federal Capital Territory is still high (Federal Republic of Nigeria Official Gazette, 2009). Records from public health centres established across Abuja shows a poor turnout of women or couples in the patronage of family planning services provided by the government through these health centres. (Area Council Health Centre, Family Planning Record, 2009-2011). Furthermore, most maternal deaths have been associated with unwanted pregnancies resulting from unsafe abortions, high rate of infant and

childhood mortality, miscarriages or foetal wastages are problems associated with short birth interval (Suleiman, 2000).

The researcher believe that low level awareness leading to poor attitude towards family planning might have contributed to low patronage of family planning services. More so that the focus of most discuss on family planning appears to be mainly been on how family planning affects the women with little or no reference to their male partners. This may have underestimated the role of men as the custodian, family heads and major decision makers in the family and society in general. Men decide when, where and how family planning programmes should be conducted, so it becomes important to focus on couples in such researches rather than women for an effective awareness and change in attitude of couples towards the practice of family planning. These are the challenges that have motivated the researchers to go into this study, to find out the level of awareness and attitude of couples toward family planning in the Federal Capital Territory from the perspectives of both male and female partner.

The following research questions and hypotheses guided the study

- What are the forms of family planning among couples in the Federal Capital Territory?
- What is the awareness of couples on family planning in the Federal Capital Territory?
- What is the attitude of couples towards family planning in the Federal Capital Territory?
- There is no significant difference between the mean rating of male and female couples on the awareness of family planning in the Federal Capital Territory Abuja.
- There is no significant difference between the mean rating of male and female couples on the attitude of couples towards family planning in Federal Capital Territory Abuja.

### **Method**

A survey design was used for the study with a sampled population of 600 (300 male and 300 female) out of all the couples in the Federal Capital Territory that formed the population of the study. Awareness and Attitude of Couples towards Family Planning Questionnaire (AACFPQ) was used to collect data from the sample. A reliability index value of 0.76 was obtained. The data collected were analysed mean statistics to answer the research questions.

**Results****Table 1: Forms of Family Planning among Couples in the Federal Capital Territory**

<b>N=600</b>		
<b>Items</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Decision</b>
- We avoid sexual intercourse for some time	2.69	Agree
- We use condoms when I am into family planning	2.66	Agree
- We use pills during family planning	2.22	Disagree
- We target the safe period to have sex during family planning	3.13	Agree
- We use prolonged breastfeeding during family planning	2.34	Disagree
- We use diaphragm during family planning	2.19	Disagree
- We use diaphragm during family planning	2.56	Agree
- My husband uses withdrawal method	2.22	Disagree
- We employ permanent method/sterilization	2.18	Disagree
- We practice douching/washing of the vagina	2.13	Disagree
- We use Intra-uterine device (IUD)	2.11	Disagree
- We delayed bearing of child	2.00	Disagree
- We practice oral medication during family planning	1.99	Disagree
- We apply cream jellying during family planning	2.82	Agree
- We approve and like the use of natural family planning methods	<b>2.37</b>	
<b>Sectional Mean</b>		

Table 1 shows the rating on the forms of family planning among couples in FCT. Respondents agree that they use methods like avoiding intercourse, use of condoms, targeting safe periods, withdrawal method and use of natural family planning method but disagree with the other items. The sectional mean for items on forms of family planning among the couples however is 2.37 indicating disagreement since the mean is below 2.50 (midpoint on a 4-point Likert scale). This implies that practice of various form of family planning among couples in FCT is low.

**Table 2: Awareness of Couples on Family Planning in the Federal Capital Territory**

N=600		
Items	Mean	Decision
- Family planning is the decision to control birth as per the number of children one can carter for.	2.58	Agree
- There is an organized family planning programme in my area.	2.94	Agree
- I got to know about family planning through home visit by our family planning counsellor.	2.80	Agree
- I got to know about family planning through discussion with friends/relations.	2.93	Agree
- I got to know about family planning through a nurse/ midwife/ Medical doctor/ pharmacist/ Dispensary.	2.61	Agree
- I got to know about family planning through my Spouse.	2.66	Agree
- I got to know about family planning through my Spouse.	2.92	Agree
- I got to know about family planning by attending Community meetings.	2.93	Agree
- I got to know about family planning through Newspaper/Radio/Television.	<b>2.80</b>	
<b>Sectional Mean</b>		

Table 2 shows the awareness of couples on family planning in the FCT. The sectional mean for awareness of couple on family planning is 2.80 indicating agreement since the mean is above 2.50 (midpoint on a 4-point Likert scale). This implies that there is awareness of family planning among couples in FCT.

**Table 3: Attitude of Couples towards Family Planning in the Federal Capital Territory**

<b>Items</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Decision</b>
- Family planning can help a couple to become responsible parents.	3.11	Agree
- Practicing family planning allows couples to prepare for children.	3.23	Agree
- Children will have better opportunities for education if their parents...	3.12	Agree
- Family planning enhances one's standard of living.	3.23	Agree
- Family planning helps a mother to regain strength before her next baby.	3.21	Agree
- Child spacing protects the health of mothers.	3.22	Agree
- Child spacing helps to protect the health of children.	3.13	Agree
- A woman who has too many children looks tired and worn out.	3.25	Agree
- Women who use family planning look younger.	3.01	Agree
- A woman's beauty lasts longer if she practices family planning.	2.61	Agree
- Spouses who care for each other will practice family planning.	2.78	Agree
- The practice of family planning will bring a couple closer together.	2.93	Agree
- With family planning, a couple can love one another with peace of mind.	3.02	Agree
- A couple that practices family planning has a happy family.	2.77	Agree
- Having a large family strains a couple's relationship.	2.86	Agree
- A husband who loves his wife will allow her to practice family planning.	2.64	Agree
- Family planning does not promote promiscuity.	2.72	Agree
- Family planning cannot be seen as a murder of the unborn.	3.14	Agree
- Family planning does not terminate God's gift and plan.	3.11	Agree
- I do not feel guilty using contraceptives	3.74	Agree
<b>Sectional Mean</b>	<b>3.04</b>	



Table 3 shows the attitude of couples towards family planning in the FCT. The sectional mean for attitude of couples towards family planning is 3.04 indicating agreement since the mean is above 2.50 (midpoint on a 4-point Likert scale). This implies that couples hold largely positive attitude toward family planning in FCT.

**Table 4: t-test Results on Difference between the mean rating of Male and Female Couples on the Awareness of Family Planning in the Federal Capital Territory Abuja**

Gender	Number	Mean	S.D.	t-value	df	Sig(2-tailed)	Decision
Male	300	2.82	.273	2.12	598	.034	Accepted
Female	300	2.77	.308				

The analysis on Table 4 was carried out to determine whether the significant mean difference between male and female couples on awareness of family planning in FCT. A significant t-value of .034 (greater than the 0.05 level of significance) shows that there is no significant difference. The hypothesis is therefore accepted. This implies that there is no significant difference between male and female couples on awareness of family planning in FCT.

**Table 5: t-test Results on Difference between the mean rating of Male and Female Couples on the attitude of couples towards family planning in the Federal Capital Territory Abuja**

Gender	Number	Mean	S.D.	t-value	df	Sig(2-tailed)	Decision
Male	300	3.05	.423	.452	598	.651	Accepted
Female	300	3.03	.407				

The analysis on Table 5 was carried out to determine whether the mean difference on attitude on family planning differed significantly between male and female couples. A significant t-value of .651 (greater than the 0.05 level of significance) shows that there is no significant difference. The hypothesis is therefore accepted. This implies that there is no significant difference between male and female couples on attitude towards family planning in FCT.

**Discussion**

It was found in this study that couples use methods like avoiding intercourse, use of condoms, targeting safe periods, withdrawal method and use of natural family planning method but disagree with the other items. The mean indicates that the practice of various form of family planning among couples in FCT is low. It appears as though the issue of family planning is yet to go beyond knowledge and have deep roots in actual practice. Education and public enlightenment campaigns on family planning issues might have improved but couples in the study area still do not actually practice family planning. This finding is in line with Onuzuruike and Uzochukwu (2001), who discovered that couples embrace the use of condoms and withdrawal methods in their family planning. Onuzuruike and Uzochukwu (2001) in urban area of Enugu, Nigeria had found that the practice of family planning was low, as only 20% of the women were on a family planning method. Couples therefore still shy away from certain family planning practices perhaps for cultural and religious reasons.

The study found relatively high level of awareness of family planning among couples in FCT. Awareness is a product access to information. The increasing number of campaigns on family planning issues by the government and non-governmental organizations might have contributed to improved awareness. It is common to see posters, dramas, radio jingles all tailored towards creating more awareness of family planning issues in Nigeria today. This is line with Ohanele (2016) whose findings show good awareness of family planning practices and positive attitudes towards family planning.

It was also found that couples hold largely positive attitude toward family planning in FCT. It appears that in contemporary society, couples are positively disposed towards family planning. This might be connected to increased education levels as well as obvious economic reason where people tend to give birth to only children that they can afford to take care of. It deviates from the past were parents rely on children or large families as source of labour for farming which was the common type occupation. The study agrees with Igbabee (2002) who found that attitude of widows of reproductive age to other women who practice modern family planning, and to those who provide modern family planning services were positive.

Finally, male and female couples in the FCT do not differ significantly in their awareness and attitudes towards family planning. This position reinforces the finding of this study with respect to the high level awareness and positive attitude toward family planning in FCT. Any discordant tone would have raised doubts since both male and female couples coexist in the same environment and might have been influenced in their attitude and

awareness by the same factors. The implication is that both male and female couples understand what family planning is all about.

### **Conclusion**

The study concludes that natural family planning method were the most practiced forms of family planning among couples in the Federal Capital Territory with low patronage of artificial family planning strategies. The fear of side effects and lack of adequate information might have informed this posture with respect to family planning among couples. The study in more positive light however concludes that the attitude of couples in FCT is positive while the level of awareness of family planning practices is high.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations were made from the findings of this study:

1. Effort should be intensified by government and other stakeholders to sustain the positive attitude towards family planning by conducting seminars, conferences and workshops for couples highlighting the established benefits of family planning.
2. Since couples disagree with certain forms of family planning, effort must be invested in enlightenment campaign to promote equally effective forms of family planning.
3. The high level of awareness of couples towards family planning in the Federal Capital Territory Abuja should be sustained and extended to couples especially those who live in areas where there is reduced access to information.

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