

Birth Control: A Panacea to Poverty Reduction in Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper examined the nexus between birth control and poverty reduction in Nigeria, the 6th most populous nation of the world with over 200 million population and about 113 million (63%) people who are multi-dimensionally poor. Both primary and secondary data were utilized. Primary data were gathered through interview method, while secondary data were gathered from existing literatures. Among many others, the study revealed that there is a direct relationship between birth control and poverty reduction in Nigeria. It was recommended that all stakeholders including the family, government, Non-governmental organizations, have a vital role to play in reducing poverty through birth control practices. The paper concluded that, there is still inadequate knowledge about the importance of birth control practices as many still breeds uncontrollably without the means to cater for the children, and thus, increasing poverty level.

Keywords: Birth control, Family planning, Poverty, Poverty reduction, Nigeria

1. Introduction

The more populated a nation, the more greatness can be achieved in socio- economic development, if well managed. The common parlance of *the more the merrier* is a mirage in the exploration of Nigeria population in tandem with the level of poverty that has pervaded the larger portion of the populace. 26 years after the World Bank described Nigeria as a paradox, recent events and statistics have continued to confirm this description in the country. One of the paradoxes is that Nigeria as a nation with huge resources of people, agriculture, petroleum, gas, developed and undeveloped solid minerals, has a high rate of poverty despite its enormous wealth (Obadan, 2018). Instead of economy boom, the country is experiencing an increase in inflation rate and population explosion. The quality of governance can be measured by the quality of life of the citizens (Odewale and Badejo, 2018). The United States Census Bureau (2020) claimed that the current world population to date is more than 7 billion and the most populous countries (in a decreasing order) are China, India, United States, Indonesia, Pakistan, Nigeria, Brazil, Bangladesh, Russia, and Mexico. It has also been forecasted that by 2050 the world population will hit and exceed 9 billion (World Population Data Sheet, 2016).

According to data from the World Bank for 2021, Nigeria had a population of 211.4 million, making it the most populous nation in Africa. This data and the word of Khurfeld (2006) shows that Nigeria is already facing

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a population explosion and the result of the population boom is that food production cannot match the drastic growing population, just as the Malthus theory stated that the population increased in a geometric progression (i.e. 2, 4, 16, 132...) while the food production on the other hand increased in arithmetic progression (i.e. 2, 4, 6, 8, 10...) and there is inadequacy in food production, water supply and employment. It is interesting to note that in 2021 in Nigeria, the birth rates (36.855 births per 1000 people) are higher than the world averages of 17.873 births per 1000 people (Macrotrends, 2022). However, Ehrlich and Ehrlich (1994) noted that the key to understanding over population or population explosion is not the population density of an area, but the population of the area in relation to its natural resources and the environment's ability to support human activity.

This population explosion has caused many challenges, especially in Nigeria because it has spurred the limitation to basic necessities such as food, water, employment and housing, more also it leads to denial of luxury of life especially among the low income earners with large family thereby imposing a greater economic burden on their shoulder. Mbizvo and Phillips (2014) mentioned that aside the shortage in food supply, increased in birth rate increased the chances of health risks for the mother and child, which at the long run lead to poor quality of life, and reduces access to education, employment and housing.

It is generally noticed that family income also has a strong influence on birth rate. In a research survey data from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in 2018, investigation shows that wealthier families in Africa, and particularly in Nigeria, have fewer children, while the low income families have many children. These more affluent families adopted the global trend that has shown that parents having fewer children, especially between the ages of 15 and 65 results in better health and an ability to contribute to national economies. Additionally, it has been demonstrated that those nations with families of fewer children are better equipped to employ more people due to increasing economic prospects because there will be a smaller population of dependents. This shows that too many children might be a problem for low-income households (Sonia, 2018).

Malter and Franca (2012) also noted that absence of birth control and unintended pregnancies among teenagers has been linked to emotional and psychological problems among teenagers. The teenagers display signs of depression, low self-esteem, lack of social support, loneliness, sleeplessness (insomnia), and anxiety among other mental health challenges. The mother also does not have enough time to unwind physically and to provide her body the necessary nutrition and physical supplements to restore energy lost during child birth. In addition to this, mothers also have some psychological unrest that prevent them from giving their kids the care and food they need. In regards to this, Orbeta (2005) opines that, the size of the family and poverty level has a direct correlation. He explained how a significant family size increased obviously has a negative impact on family savings. He noted that increasing families size necessitate spending more on needs and saving less for the family. He also said that poverty will rise because families with more children would need more money to meet all of their needs regardless of changes in family income. Additionally, he added that these earnings will be used to invest in their children's human capital, contributing to the rise in poverty. This is considered strong evidence that the main reason for poverty is increased family size. The cultural belief that children are gift from God, and it should be always welcome, is a popular notion in nations like Nigeria. They consider how many children they have as a reflection of God's will. Another reason for an increased number of children is that African parents regard their children as their old age insurance for future repayment of all cost incurred (Sonia, 2018:4). This line of thought exacerbates the need for a larger family size as many believe they need more children because they cannot predict which ones will succeed or survive. However, this narrative is considered faulty as many children are seen hawking on the street and market and denied access to better life, many children in the process of "hustling" are prone to illegal means of making life easy for themselves. Higher increased in limitation to resources couple with severe economic burden to the family as a result of declined in the household saving with increased in rates of poverty are all caused by this population explosion.

Duze and Mohammed (2016) claim that, Nigeria has recently adopted the birth control techniques to restrain the increasing growth in population; however observation shows that the adoption rate of the birth control method is low. WHO (2015) also observe that about 225 million women desire birth control in developing countries but are unable to do so due to lack of resources, access restrictions, unmet needs, religious restrictions, lack of facilities, lack of proper information and education, and lack of family planning services and centers. This could be seen as among the challenges faced in achieving the birth control aims. Birth control is currently among the most pressing issues that require attention and action, particularly in Nigeria. Birth control however has an important role in ameliorating the wellbeing of the family, health of the mother and the child by reducing the number of unplanned pregnancies, thus reducing the dependency ratio, mother and child mortality rate. It is in line with the above that this research paper aim to assess the synergy between birth control and poverty reduction, prospects and challenges of birth control in Nigeria. The paper is divided into six sections, including introduction, conceptual clarification, methodology, discussion of findings, recommendation, and conclusion.

2. Conceptual Clarification

2.1 Birth control

The concept could be seen in many dimensions, and often time, to a layman, been used as family planning, which is differ. Birth control is seen as a sub-set of Family Planning. Family planning covers a broad range of reproductive health services, which birth control is one of them. Family Planning include reproductive health services like fertility, birth control, sterilization, and regular exams, which help to get pregnant, preventing pregnancies, or aborting unwanted pregnancies. Basically, Family Planning is a process of guiding people in controlling when, how often, and how healthy they are in deciding to have or not to a child. Family Planning helps in conceiving or preventing pregnancy.

Birth control is often a part of family planning that allows individuals to decide when or if they get pregnant and have a child. Birth Control is not only important for the health of the parent who wants to circumvent of having a child, but much more for the wellbeing of the existing children and the unborn. Birth Control allows a couple to wait to have a child until they are ready to provide the best possible environment for their child

Birth control also known as *fertility control* is the use of various methods, devices, drugs and sexual practices to prevent conception or pregnancy. It allows people to decide when they want to have a child. Family planning on the other hand is the planning, making available, and the using of birth control methods and practices as agreed by both partners. Although birth control has been practiced since antiquity, but modern times saw the development of safe and reliable birth control methods.

A variety of devices and methods are available for both the men and women to help avoid getting pregnant. Presently, birth control practices can either be from the modern methods or traditional methods. Studies, Duze and Mohammed (2016), Ike and Obasi (2018) show that the modern methods are more effective than the traditional methods. For example, the contraceptive pill, if used correctly, is over 99% effective. In spite of concomitant high rate usage, traditional birth control methods have high failure rates. Some societies and cultures restrict and discourage access to birth control because they view it as immoral, unreligious, or politically unwise.

2.2 Modern birth control and traditional birth control method

The term "modern birth control method" refers to the scientifically developed methods, artificial methods and devices that are used to avoid unintended pregnancies. They included the condom, the diaphragm, IUD (Intrauterine Device), the oral contraceptives, the cream/foam tablets, sterilization and the injectable.

Hospitals, health centers, and family clinics offer these methods to anyone who is interested; users are recommended to choose the one that is most compatible with their body type. Simply put, modern birth control is regarded as the contemporary way of limiting the number of children or prevents unintended pregnancies.

In contrast to the modern birth control methods is the traditional birth control methods. The traditional birth control methods include abstinence, where couples refrain from sex for the period they want to avoid pregnancy. Other methods are timing (calendar method), withdrawal method during intercourse and prolonged breastfeeding.

2.3 Poverty

The concept has emerged as a multidimensional phenomenon established on the discourse of material deprivation. Various studies have explored the multidimensional approach to poverty as how the poor themselves conceptualize poverty (Watson, 1998; Brock, 1999; Moore, Choudhary, & Singh, 1998; Naraya, Patel, Sxhafft K, et al., 2002). The approach conceives deprivation not only as lack of material goods, but also as deficiency in other important areas such as social capital, human capital, power, and voice. The result has been the emergence of multidimensional conceptions of poverty within the long established discourse of material deprivation. More so, Blackwood (1994); & Sindzingre (1999) ultimately see the poverty as a concept based upon societal values and norms, anchored on social and distributive justice on moral philosophy and political responsibility.

Mawafi & Khawaja (2005) see poverty as a symptom that is multivariate in its causes and dynamic in its trajectory. Poverty could be economical in nature, i.e deficiency in the amount of financial resources a household has to meet its basic needs. This could also be either absolute or relative in nature. Schwartzman (2002) sees absolute poverty as a deficiency in the set of resources a person must acquire to maintain a minimum standard of living for survival, especially against hunger, premature death and suffering. Meanwhile, Mawafi & Khawaja (2005) opines that relative poverty is concerned with how worse-off an individual or household is with respect to others in the same society. Relative poverty does not necessarily reflect against hunger, premature death and suffering, but rather the level of inequality in a given context. Absolute poverty could be seen as a stage of not having money to meet basic need of life like food, water, clothing and shelter. While relative poverty can be view as the denial of luxury, not necessary the basic needs. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, assert that it is the responsibility of governments to ensure that its citizens have access to a level of goods that meet their basic right to health and wellbeing.

The concept “poverty” varies depending on the situation and borders, as being poor in Canada is different from living in poverty in Nigeria or Togo. From the World Bank Organization description, poverty is equivalent to hunger, lack of shelter, sickness and not been able to see a doctor, joblessness, not having access to education, inability to read and communicate. Poverty is the state of being poor and not having money to meet basic necessities of life such as food, water, shelter and clothing. It is also, the denial of luxury. Poverty is a complex societal issue all over the globe.

The result of the 2022 multidimensional poverty index (MPI) survey through the national bureau of statistics highlighted the following about poverty in the context of Nigeria:

- About 113 million (63%) people living in Nigeria are multi-dimensionally poor.
- The poverty level varies from state to state. 86 million (65%) people live in the northern part while about 47 million (35%) live in the south.
- Over ½ of the total population are multi-dimensionally poor and cook with wood, charcoal or dung instead of clearer energy.
- The 2022 multi-dimensionally poverty index compare to the 2018/2019 noticed an increased from 40.1% to the current 63%.

- The multidimensional poverty index is higher in rural areas (72%) compared to 42% in urban areas.

2.4 Relationship between Birth Control and Poverty Reduction

From the word of Wusu et al. (2016), there are macro and micro levels at which the relationship between birth control and poverty alleviation can be studied. At the macro level, he claimed that the countries with the highest levels of poverty globally are those with the highest rates of population increase, high fertility, and low birth control practices. This is because family size restrictions and child spacing are unpopular, and birth control practices is extremely low. This result to the high proportion of children and adolescents who are dependents, the dependency ratio thus escalated. Due to the pressure this situation puts on family and governmental income, personal savings is thus reduced likewise investment in socioeconomic development also reduced. Ayodele (2021) observed that Nigeria has one of the lowest saving rates in the world and according to the international monetary fund, the nation gross savings rate in 2019 was 13.9%, far below Tanzania of 24.8% and Togo 21.2%. He also claimed that any region with an increasing effective birth control methods and practices will have child spacing and family size restrictions becoming popular and fertility levels declined. If proper planning and the establishment of necessary institutions are made, this will result in a decrease in the dependency ratio. Bloom and Williamson (2008) also claim that, economic prosperity at the national level and a reasonable decline in poverty levels at the national level are therefore very likely to materialize. At the micro level, family who adopt birth control/family planning either through the modern or traditional method have the opportunity to put reasonable spacing between their children, and by so doing send both male and female children to school without denying the female children their right to education. This gesture gives the children of such family the opportunity to acquire formal education, positioning them to easy opportunities and take advantage of these opportunities in life Onipede (2016:4-5). This is undoubtedly challenging for families who do not use birth control or do not space out their children and keep the number to a manageable size and who lack the information and resources to do so.

3. Methodology

This research was conducted in the economic hub of Nigeria, Lagos State. The state with an estimated population of 35 million is made up of 20 Local Governments Areas (LGAs), with 37 Local Council Development Areas (LCDAs) created out of these 20 LGAs. Despite its Yoruba indigeneity the economic base induced a high rate of migration of other ethnicity across the length and breadth of Nigeria. Primary and secondary data were used for this study, while secondary data were sought from existing work on the subject matter; the primary data were collected with the use of direct interview. A total of 120 individuals, consist of 82 females and 38 males were interviewed to have a wider range of responses on the subject matter. For data collection, 5 households from each LGAs making 100 respondents, Moreso, 20 respondents were randomly selected from 4 popular market of the state, totaling 120 respondents. In the course of the household interview, situation where the husband and wife were available, they both agreed who answered the interview questions and in most cases encountered the wife was always willing to respond. It is also important to state that respondents to this research work were anonymous, this made many of them to provide answers without the fear of being known, only state of origin was asked while respondents were denoted with letters, they were all allowed to respond with their choice of language, mostly Yoruba and *Pigin* English which was later interpreted to English for analysis. The data generated were analyzed descriptively.

4. Discussion of Findings

The first interview question seeks interviewees understanding of birth control, responses shows that most of the respondents have trivial knowledge of the subject matter. This popularity was expressed by a female respondent label N6 when she said;

“To my own understanding oo, birth control na the way husband and wife decide the number of children they wan born, whether na 2, 3, 4, or 6”.

Analysis from the first question is that the subject matter is popular within the subject area, although many of them take family planning as birth control, the two are use interchangeable by the interviewees but they are not the same. Respondents were asked which of the birth control they used, it was widely observed that many of the interviewee could not differentiate between the modern or traditional method, as many of them directly mentioned the name of the contraceptive they use while some mentioned condom. To assist their comprehension, examples of both methods were provided and majority (98) of them agreed to use the modern methods.

Table 1 Distribution of Respondents’ Characteristics

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage %
SEX		
Male	38	31.7
Female	82	68.3
TOTAL	120	100
AGE		
No Response	18	15
20-25years	7	5.8
26-30years	24	20
31-35years	38	31.7
36 and Above	33	27.5
TOTAL	120	100
RELIGION		
No Response	7	5.8
Christianity	58	48.4
Islam	42	35
Traditional	13	10.8
TOTAL	120	100
CATEGORY OF RESPONDENT		
Civil servant	26	21.7
Private company employee	41	34.1
Self employed	53	44.2
TOTAL	120	100
ACADEMIC QUALIFICATION		
No response	19	15.8
None	12	10
Ssce	28	23.4
Tertiary education	61	50.8
TOTAL	120	100

Source: Field survey, 2023

Table 2 Birth control method using

Birth control method	Frequency	Percentage %
Modern	98	81.7
Traditional	22	18.3
TOTAL	120	100

Source: Field survey, 2023

An interviewee, a male, labeled G2, condemned the traditional method as he claimed that; *“Withdrawal method is like jumping from a moving bicycle, it very hard to do oo”* he claimed he prefers to use condom which he also claimed is not 100% safe. Responding to the third question, a good significant number of the respondent claimed that their choices of method were in agreement with their spouse. In addition, interviewees were asked if birth control was only needed in a bad economy, 89 of them agreed that birth control is needed whether in good or bad economy, a woman F3 who was undecided claimed she won’t mind to have many children if she has the money, in her word;

“If the economy is good and I have the resources to take care of them, I won’t mind having 6 or 7 because I love children”. The view of respondents were also considered about the religious belief that GOD commanded man to multiply as a reason for increase in child bearing, many answered this question from their religious perspectives, as those who believe in two to three wives agreed that God gave them the right to multiply by marrying and giving birth to as many as they have the power. One of the remarkable response to this question from a mother of 2 claimed; *“wisdom is profitable to direct because God will not rain babies’ food from heaven or help me buy babies cloths”*

Assessing the performance of government on the issue of birth control program and campaign, many people reacted that government are trying by providing them with free access to counselling, condoms, contraceptives and campaign on radio and television, although some claimed it was done by the past administration, they claimed the only fault is the lack of follow-up. When respondents were asked about the ideal numbers of children to have considering the state of the economy, it was observed that their answered range from 1 to 5 children, 13(10.8%) interviewees claimed that a child is the ideal to have, 22(18.3%) were in support of having two children as maximum, 68(56.7%) claimed that three is enough, 9(7.5%) were in support of having four at most, while the remaining 8(6.7%) interviewee mentioned that five is the ideal number of children to have.

Table 3 Ideal number of children

Ideal number of children	Frequency	Percentage%
One	13	10.8
Two	22	18.3
Three	68	56.7
Four	9	7.5
Five	8	6.7
TOTAL	120	100

Source: Field survey, 2023

These responses show that the ancient narrative where large number of children are consider an achievement because they were used as labourers in their fathers farm land has changed as majority claimed that two to three is enough so as to reduce expenses and save in the process of giving them the best of education and comfort. Respondents were equally asked the benefit of birth control, it was gathered that many of them have something to say about the importance of birth control, a respondent label H6 claimed; *“birth control is good, it gives us opportunity to give birth to only the number of children we can train and provide for, also it will reduce the issues of giving out the children to relatives to train who later may maltreat or abuse those children”*. Interviewee perspective were also sought regarding challenges facing birth control on reason why people do not control birth, among the reasons provided include negative health reaction through the use of modern contraceptive, disapproval mostly by the husband, religious belief that children are from God and should not be deny, ignorance and absence of adequate information.

Examining the relationship between birth control and poverty nature, which could be absolute or relative, a male respondent, a father of 4 claimed that the first 3 children are in school where he pay an

average fee of 19,500 naira per term, he said; “*assuming I have just two, I will be able to manage the little I am getting from my maruwa business, because aside the school fees, I have to pay house rent, buy food stuff, cloths and other things, there are times me and my wife will go to bed without food just to make sure that the children are okay, I make up to twelve thousand naira daily, I will deliver five thousand naira to the owner, pay eight hundred naira ticket, buy petrol and go home with the remaining which I will drop at least one thousand two hundred naira for food before leaving in the morning*”. Another notable response is from a single mother of 3 who claimed her husband left her for another woman four years ago in Ibadan and she have to come to Lagos to work, she said; “*I sell minerals and pure water at the garage with the help of my eldest daughter who help me to get ice block and drinks from my supplier after school, we can’t eat if we don’t sell. I borrowed from our micro finance anytime the business is down and pay school fee, although I am not allow to borrow for children school fee but I can’t stand my children been sent home while their mate are in school, so I lied the loan is for my business.*” The findings in consonance with the word of Schwartzman (2002) who sees absolute poverty as a deficiency in the set of resources a person must acquire to maintain a minimum standard of living for survival, especially against hunger, premature death and suffering revealed that many are living with absolute poverty as it was gather that the little they get from their small or medium business are majorly used on feeding, house rent and children school fees without any saving. It was also observed that many are living from hand to mouth and owing one loan company or the other, where they pay back weekly with interest, with no saving.

Responses and observation from the study showed that those with large family with many children feel the burden more and are mostly living in absolute poverty. They all confirmed to the claim that *more children more expenses and less children less expenses*.

Economically, saving which is one of the components of a country gross domestic product to aid growth and reduce poverty level is variably low in Nigeria due to the fact that many families with many children spend more than they earn and thereby increasing their debt profile. This is in line with the word of Ayodele (2021) who claimed that Nigeria has one of the lowest saving rates in the world and according to the international monetary fund, the nation gross savings rate in 2019 was 13.9%, far below Tanzania of 24.8% and Togo 21.2%. This finding means that with increase in population explosion, increase in consumer prices, income stagnating and low saving, poverty level may continue to be increasing. And also, the reason for increase in the inequality gap between the rich and the poor is birth control as it was rightly observed that many of the well-to-do family have two to three children even when they have resources to take care of many children.

5. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that:

1. Individual family should take up the responsibility of controlling birth using modern practices and method as *more children equate more expenses*.
2. The governments at all levels and especially the local government should intensify more sensitization on the need for birth control among her citizens.
3. Governmental campaigns on importance of birth control should be taken to communities and local government areas for their local leaders to transmit the idea to their members locally.
4. Private and Non-governmental organizations should assist the governments in their efforts to educate people on the importance of birth control.
5. Campaigns should be organized on various media outlets to enlighten the public against the popular myths against modern birth control means.
6. Religious bodies are also to preach the need for birth control and the implication of uncontrolled births among their congregations.

7. Campaigns on the need for abstinence or the use of contraceptives among teenagers should be intensified.
8. Much more, governments at all level should be engaging in economy policies that would tend towards alleviating or reducing poverty level of the populace,

6. Conclusion

The findings of the study revealed that there is still inadequate knowledge about the importance of modern day birth control practices among the larger populace. They are still influenced by myths and misinformation gotten from several quarters and thus breeding uncontrollably without the means to cater for the needs of the children. This is hereby leading to not only population explosion but also economic strain to the communities and nation at large.

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