



FULAFIA JOURNALS OF SOCIAL SCIENCES (FJSS) Vol. 3, No. 4 Dec., 2020
Quarterly Journal of Faculty of Social Sciences, Federal University of Lafia

The Socio-Cultural impact of Childlessness on Married Couples in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State. Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Marriage is a union between a woman and a man which may produce offspring or children. The emphasis is becoming more pronounced in recent time, especially among Christian couples who have agreed that marriage is for “better and for worse”, thus suggesting that marriage is not necessary for procreation of children. In the case of barren couples, children may be adopted. However, this situation raised cultural implications. This study therefore, examined the relationship between childlessness and social cultural impact among married couples in Egor Local government Area of Edo state, using cross sectional research design. Random sampling techniques was used to draw data from 100 respondents in four communities in the LGA. The findings revealed the existence of a relationship between childlessness and social incompatibility; which often result in separation and/or abandonment of wives in the community, poor communication among married couples; lack of knowledge on adoption; and other socio-cultural consequences, including abuse on the woman, social stigma, and divorce. Based on these findings, the study recommended among others that: the Social Welfare Department should intensify awareness campaign on adoption; such information should be complemented by community advocacy and mobilization through the media, as well as Healthcare Providers playing their role in counseling.

Keywords: Adoption, Childlessness, Marriage, Cultural stigma, Social Stigma

ABSTRAIT

Le mariage est une union entre une femme et un homme qui peut produire une progéniture ou des enfants. L'accent est de plus en plus prononcé ces derniers temps, en particulier parmi les couples chrétiens qui ont convenu que le mariage est «pour le meilleur et pour le pire», ce qui suggère que le mariage n'est pas nécessaire à la procréation des enfants. Dans le cas des couples stériles, les enfants peuvent être adoptés. Cependant, cette situation a des implications culturelles. Cette étude a donc examiné la relation entre l'absence d'enfant et l'impact culturel social chez les couples mariés dans la région de gouvernement local d'Egor



de l'État d'Edo, en utilisant une conception de recherche transversale. Des techniques d'échantillonnage aléatoire ont été utilisées pour extraire les données de 100 répondants dans quatre communautés de la LGA. Les résultats ont révélé l'existence d'une relation entre l'absence d'enfant et l'incompatibilité sociale; qui entraînent souvent la séparation et / ou l'abandon des épouses dans la communauté, une mauvaise communication entre les couples mariés; manque de connaissances sur l'adoption; et d'autres conséquences socioculturelles, y compris la maltraitance de la femme, la stigmatisation sociale et le divorce. Sur la base de ces résultats, l'étude a recommandé entre autres que: le Département de la protection sociale intensifie sa campagne de sensibilisation sur l'adoption; ces informations devraient être complétées par un plaidoyer et une mobilisation communautaires à travers les médias, ainsi que par les prestataires de soins de santé jouant leur rôle dans le conseil.

Mots clés: adoption, sans enfant, mariage, stigmatisation culturelle, stigmatisation sociale

INTRODUCTION

The issues of childlessness and its implication can be traced to the Patriarch family in the holy bible where Sarah did not have child for several years, Genesis 11:30, Micah David's wife was childless, Elkanah's wife Hannah was childless for so many years 1st Samuel 1:6 and so on, however, this history shows that this families in one way or the other management their socio-cultural implication of their childlessness (Ayanilo, 2019 & Zastrow 2001), identified reasons couples decide to have children is that from the beginning biblically children are blessing ranging from religion to ideology to economic necessity population replacement and cultural expectation.

Historically, in agricultural and pre-industrial societies children were seen as economic asset; their labors were important in planting and harvesting crops and in tending domestic animals (Nwafor, 2018). Parents wanted large families to help with the work because, children were seen as economic asset, and values were gradually established that it was natural and desirable for married couples to procreate. However, for most people, getting married and starting their families and having children-is not a matter of choice; but necessities. In marriage, childlessness is one aspect of the diversity inherent in contemporary experience of marriage and the family (Rasak & Oladipo, 2017). For most of history, childlessness has been regarded as great personal tragedy involving much emotional pain and grief, especially when it is resulted from failure to conceive or from the death of a child. With this greater diversity, once common pressures for childbearing have given way to greater social acceptance of remaining single or married without children. Before conception was well understood, childlessness was usually blamed on the woman and this in itself added to the high level negative emotional and social effects of childlessness (Rasak & Oladipo, 2017).

Nonetheless, childlessness is a concern, partly because of its implications for the maintenance of societies and partly because of its unwanted consequences for individuals (Nwafor, 2018). However, societies regard children as the most important asset in every successful marriage and for this reason; childless couples become an object of ridicule in their communities (Makinwa-Adebusoye, 2001). The dynamics of culture and human



relationships have made researchers to observe many influences, manifestations, happenings and occurrences in marriage stability within the Nigerian ethnic communities.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In most societies, marriage and procreation are intertwined and inseparable. It is almost always presumed that readiness for marriage is readiness for procreation; to get married is an opportunity to contribute freely, through procreation, to the survival of the lineage and society at large (Nwafor, 2018). During marriage (both traditional and Christian), one of the most appreciated and common gestures of good-will show to the newly married couple is praying for them for the fruit of the womb, may God grant you many children, you shall give birth to male and female, in nine months we shall gather to celebrate the birth of your baby (Abiodun, 2010). In these wishes, both the societal perception of marriage and the use of sexuality in marriage as primarily geared toward the begetting of progeny are encapsulated. Having children is perceived to be a natural part of reproductive cycle for women (Obiyo, 2016). This expectation emanates from young people as individuals, as a couple, and from the society of which they are part (Mabasa, 2000). The problem arises when a marriage fails to lead to procreation. A cultural context that stresses procreation blames a woman for any failure in this regard.

Globally, the word “childlessness” sounds interesting to the ears of listener and a sense of pity is immediately aroused in the minds of the couple. This problem is prevalent in the African setting particularly Nigeria. There is an uncomfortable silence around the issue of childlessness in our Society. It is often tough enough to lend an ear to the laments of those who experience such pain, suffering and indignity when it comes to the scourge of barrenness (Obiyo, 2016). It can be even more grueling for those who suffer from childlessness.

In many cases in Nigerian men simply refuse to accept that they could be the problem and the women in their desperation from social pressures have been forced to help their men to bring in children from outside (Obiyo, 2016). Childlessness seems to cause constant fight, misunderstanding and suspicion in the marriages (Dike, 2013). It appears to make sex become mechanical and unfulfilling and the risk of being sterile can be a heavy burden among couples. The socio-cultural problem is the woman risk divorce and in some cases gets rivals. The number of childless couples seems to be tremendously on the increase, this is evident to the fact that attempts to initiate a move which would have been directed towards adoption is taken with serious resistance in some places mostly by couples without child (Hollos, 2003). Differences in the way couples commonly view childlessness can lead to tension and anger in marital relationships.

Research Questions

- (i) In what way does childlessness affect the social compatibility of married couples that could lead to abandonment in the community?
- (ii) How does the socio-cultural perception of childlessness affect marital stability among couples and their family peers?



LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept childlessness means having difficulties to conceive by a woman or to impregnate a woman by a man. That is, no conception after at least one year of attempting to achieve a pregnancy (Adegbola, 2007). However, childlessness comes with different consequences when it occurs in the society, its effects on the lifestyles and life chances of individuals cannot be overemphasized. The childless lifestyle enhances life satisfaction for some individuals, while diminishing it for others, for whom parenthood was a personal goal. For societies, childlessness is a factor in low birth rates and population decline, with which are associated diminishing labour force entries and rising proportions in older ages (Rasak & Oladipo, 2017). Demographers define childlessness as the inability of a non-contracepting, sexually active woman to have a live birth. Childlessness is defined as the inability to achieve pregnancy after one year of unprotected sexual intercourse. The commonly-used description of childlessness is: after a year's unprotected sex, no pregnancy has taken place (Uyterlinde, 2003). It seems that the desire for a child involves a complicated motivation founded on psychological need, biological drives and historical and social tradition.

In industrialized countries, childlessness was more prevalent at the start of the twentieth century than at the end of the twentieth century. It was, however, less conspicuous because it occurred in conjunction with a large family system; that is, where some had four or more children, partly offset the childlessness of others, keeping birth rates relatively high. In the present situation, one reason why the effects of childlessness are now more apparent is that smaller families are more prevalent, with pronounced preferences for two children; relatively few couples have four or more (Amakwa, 2013). Childlessness can now make the difference between maintaining population numbers and precipitating long term decline.

Medically, there are different causes and risk factors for couple's childlessness. According to Eisenberg, Park, Hollenbeck, Lipshultz, Schatzkin & Pletcher, (2011), infertility for men is most often caused by low or no sperm count and blockage of the tubes that transport sperm. Infertility in women on the other hand, is caused by a range of other factors such as problem with ovulation, blockage of fallopian tubes and physical damage to the uterus. Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD), advanced age, smoking, and excess alcohol use are also mentioned as risk factors of infertility.

The problem is thus usually perceived as caused by other factors than medical ones. Some associate infertility with supernatural powers and others associate it with diseases or with the absence of reproductive organs. The social meaning of infertility in Southwest Nigeria showed that there are several traditional beliefs regarding the causes of infertility (Hammond, 2009). Social scientists, however, are still debating the relative importance of voluntary and involuntary factors in the upturn in levels of childlessness, although individual self-fulfillment and freedom of choice have been seen as important. Waziri-Erameh & Omoti (2006) attributed the early part of the rise in childlessness mainly to voluntary factors linked to broader changes in the fabric of society regarding fertility control, contraceptive technology, female work preferences and patterns, and sexual and family norms.

There has probably always been a mixture of voluntary and involuntary factors in childlessness. It cannot be assumed that in the past marriage and family formation was universally desired, or that in the present, all are able to achieve their particular marital and reproductive goals. Nor is there an absolute distinction between voluntary and involuntary



outcomes, especially since childlessness often results from delaying childbearing, rather than from a single decision never to have children (Waziri-Erameh & Omoti, 2006).

Social and Cultural Impacts of Childlessness on Married Couples

All human beings are expected to be treated with respect and dignity. That is why section (18) of the 1999 Nigeria constitution, dealing with the fundamental principles of state policy reflects the nation's commitment to equality of all irrespective of race, sex or gender (Osokoya, 2008). According to Nwosu (2010) the number of children a man has determines the socio-economic importance of the man. Childlessness demoralizes some of the affected couples' zeal to accumulate wealth; this is because they view that wealth accumulated would go to the community when they die. Because of this, most of the couples squander their money while they are still alive, and as culture measures the political strength by the number of children a man has, childless couples are not recognized in the society they find themselves in a political desert. Nwapa (2004), explained that children help to render valuable services and this create source of income on their father's farm land, cattle, rearing and in agricultural pursuit, besides this, the females are source of income to their parents when they get married.

Childlessness seems to have major psychological and social implications for affected persons, especially in settings where fertility is highly valued. However, childlessness is perceived in these societies and the multitude of adverse consequences suffered by affected individuals, studies have not made a clear distinction between voluntary and involuntary childlessness in these settings (Rasak & Oladipo, 2017). A semi-structured questionnaire was used to elicit information on socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, socio-cultural implication of childlessness on married couples, causes of childlessness on married couples, perception of married couples towards childlessness, and effects of childlessness on married couples and what are the coping strategies adopted by these childless couples from the selected Yoruba communities, the study explores both voluntary and involuntary childlessness. Findings show that not having children, whether voluntarily or not, contributes to a kind of invisibility and poverty in Nigeria. Regardless of the reason, voluntary childlessness evoked strong negative feelings among family members (Rasak & Oladipo, 2017).

Childlessness is not only a medical condition but it is also a social-cultural construct. The weight of the crisis of involuntary childlessness cuts across socio-economic and religious boundaries. Although couples might be clinically proven to be unable to have children, it remains a socio-cultural issue where parenthood is "given a pride of place" (Nwaomah & Dube, 2018). The perception of these wishes is that society expects much from every marriage than just the mere grand occasion that is witnessed on the day of marriage. Problems arise when after a year or two and such marriages do not produce children. This spells danger for the woman, and may lead to a replacement for another wife that is deemed capable of procreating. Childlessness leads to stigmatization and the feelings of inferiority.

The Effect of Childlessness on the Couple Relationship

Childlessness often comes as an unexpected shock to most couples. For many, having children is not a question of if, but when. Gayle (2014) and Freeman, Boxer, Rickels, Tureck



and Mastroianni (1985) reported that almost 50% of women considered childlessness the most distressing experience of their lives, compared to only 15% of men. Schwarz (2013) found that wives considered childlessness an enormous role failure, while husbands perceived childlessness as a disconcerting event, but not a tragedy.

The experience of childlessness by childless women in most Nigeria communities is marked by various kinds of social, economic and emotional consequences. Those experiences are in many ways similar to those of childless women in other cultures. What most Nigerian childless women share with other childless women is the feeling of low self-esteem due to their childlessness? They are often described as being hollow, empty, barren or wasted and arid. Gray (2002) observed, that vast majority of these childless women made no distinction between failed bodies and failed selves. They seem to experience childlessness as a generalized role failure, not just as a failure of the body. Similarly, the feelings of guilt accompanying distress have also been found in studies of childless women in many Nigeria communities.

Divorce, abandonment and remarriage by husbands are more frequent outcomes of childless women. Mariano, (2004) explanation of the status of married women in the family identifies the root cause of the problem. In her ethnographic study on marriage, she points to the „stranger“ role of a newly-wed woman in her in-laws“ house. This woman must prove her usefulness as a woman, in order to contribute to the prosperity of her in-laws“ family. The main way to show this is to give birth to a baby. If she fails in this task, she remains a permanent stranger in the family, and continues to hold a low status. Through bearing a child a newly-wed woman gains acceptance and this is an experience that a childless woman never feels.

Socio-Cultural Perception of Childlessness and Marital Stability

Perceptions of childless individuals and community members, limit level of awareness about the medical causes of and solutions to infertility (Amakwa, 2013). The Nigerian setting is clouded with severe stigmatization, abuse of childless women. Childlessness has socio-economic and emotional consequences, in many families the husband may decide not attend to the women financial or even regard her as anything. Other extended women calls the childless woman different names, such as woman-man, just eating without fruitfulness, and many of such women are excluded from their women age group. Childless women are not passive victims as they have developed different coping strategies to seek solutions for their childlessness and to deal with the stigma. Cultural, environmental and economic factors influence the prevalence of childlessness due to infertility especially in countries where poverty and infections are widespread (Sampson & McCormick, 2014).

Deribe, Anberbir, Regassa, Belachew & Biadgilign (2007) noted that some childlessness as result of infertility in women could lead to marital instability. Others reported that their husbands had lost interest in them. Some husbands on the other hand told that they were planning to marry another woman to get a child. These practices of divorce and remarriage exposed childless women and men to STIs and HIV/AIDS.

Lancy (2008) documented, children especially in some part of the world, contribute to the household through child-minding, selling products in the market, tending livestock, fetching water, cooking, and farming. Besides their labour contribution to secure parents' and



families' survival, children support aging parents in the absence of social support systems for the elderly (Inhorn & van Balen, 2002). Deribe, Anberbir, Regassa, Belachew & Biadgilign (2007) found that most of the childless couples are worried about not having helpers in their old age. In many African communities a wealthy person without children might not get recognition in a community (Dyer, 2007), as much as he/she would have had.

Theoretical framework: Symbolic Interactionist

The symbolic interactionist approach was adopted as a theoretical orientation. The approach is anchored on the idea that people do not respond directly to the world around them, but to the meaning they bring to it. Furthermore, the approach assumes that society, its institutions and social structure exist as a result of human interaction (Blumer, 1969). This means that reality is what members of society agree to be reality and this is shaped in social interaction. During such interactions, objects and symbols are developed and used (Blumer, 1969), which denotes things in the real world whose meaning is defined by the actor. Therefore, different objects have different meanings for different individuals. For example, people interact on the basis of how they see and understand a situation and the meaning they attach to the situation or encounter.

Symbolic interactionism is a micro-level theory that focuses on the relationships among individuals within a society. Communication—the exchange of meaning through language and symbols—is believed to be the way in which people make sense of their social worlds. Theorists Herman and Reynolds (1994) noted that this perspective sees people as being active in shaping the social world rather than simply being acted upon.

Symbolic interactionism can be seen as the bases of the relationship between couples, and no one couple should blame childlessness on the other but it is supposed to be a symbiotic relationship. Couples interact based on their childlessness ascribing either socio-cultural undertone or mere acceptance of their fate of childlessness believing the two of them are responsible for their predicament; they ascribe meaning to their childlessness through interactions with their immediate communities and society. The couples admit that they are both responsible for their childlessness trying to make meaning of the socio-cultural interference on their compatibility especially when dealing with things in specific circumstances (Blumer 1969). If you love books, for example, a symbolic interactionist might propose that couple learn how they can interact on bases of their position and cultural acclimatization with family, friends, school, or church; maybe their family had a special perception about their childlessness, getting your library card was treated as a special event, or bedtime stories were associated with warmth and comfort.

Social scientists have applied symbolic-interactionist thinking on the patterns of relationship between individuals such as husband and wife and socio-cultural events that may arise from their day to day life. Their studies often involve observation of one-on-one relationship between individual within a particular society. Consistent with Blumer's view, every time social interaction occurs, people creatively construct their own understanding of it whether "real" or not and behave accordingly. Furthermore, these shared meaning and or understanding among couples do not necessarily need to be accepted by all-hence the capability and autonomy for unique and independent choices of their childlessness. This aforementioned view agrees with the assertion of Stearns (2010), that "if men define



situations as real, they are real in their consequences”, allowing for the possibility of individuals’ definition of situation in which people modify meanings and symbols.

Symbolic interaction theory which proposes that reality is what humans cognitively construct it to be. This study therefore, adopts social constructs based on relationship between childless couples, and those constructs that last over time are those that have meanings which are widely agreed-upon or generally accepted by most people within the society. Sometimes this approach is often used to understand what’s defined as deviant within a society when couples agree to adapt their childless condition contrary to their cultural environment. This is because most often the problem of childlessness is blamed on the woman rather than both man and woman.

It is further assumed that this segregation is likely to create a gendered subculture that may strengthen the perception of gender difference and possibly erode the common ground upon which status-equal genders are formed. Hence, differences in reaction are more likely to be noticed, defined and acted on. This difference in reaction may also be connected with familial and community treatment overtime as a result of the possible definition and meaning collectively held by community members on who is defined as been infertile.

METHODOLOGY

This study was designed to investigate the impact of socio - cultural perception of childlessness on married couples in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State. The study is interested in getting information from both childless and married couples in the study area, hence the study adopts cross-sectional survey research design. The population of the study consisted of all married couples in Egor Local Government Area between ages of 20 and 59 years which population was given as 339,899 (NPC, 2006). The projection for 2019 was 499,153 at 3% population growth rate. The study considered samples from four (4) communities in Egor Local Government Area, which included Uselu, Uwagboe, Uwelu & Egor.

The study employed combination of systematic sampling and convenience sampling techniques to choose sample of ninety participants. The sample is made of twenty 45 families, two respondents each (not necessarily childless couples) from 20 - 59 years. The instrument of data collection for the study was questionnaire, using a 5-point Likert scale.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

A. Socio-Demographic of respondents

Table1 1: Socio-Demographic Variables of respondents, N = 90

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Age:		
20-30 years	19	21.11
31-40 years	29	32.22
41-50 years	17	18.89
50 and above years	25	27.78



Religion:

Christianity	54	60.00
Islam	9	10.00
traditional Religion	18	20.00
Others	9	10.00

The table 1 (about here) shows the socio-demographic profile of the respondents. The analysis shows that for age: 19(21.11%) of the respondents are 20-30 years, while 29(32.22%) of them are 31-40 years, 17(18.89%) represents 41-50 years, 25(27.78%) falls between 50 years and above. For religion, it shows that 54(60%) of the participants are Christians, 9(10%) of the respondents represent Islam, 18(20%) indicates traditional religion and 9(10%) falls within other religions. From table 1.1 above it shows that those between ages 31 and 40 years are more and in terms of religion, Christians are more than other participants.

Cultural Perception of Childlessness

The cultural perception of childlessness in Egor community was assessed by how community members referred to childless couples. Three variables, including 'bareness', 'wasted farm', and 'male-woman' were used. These variables are considered as stigma. Respondents were asked to rate these perceptions under a 5-point Likert scale. The result of the responses is summarised in table 2.

As shown in table 2, childlessness couples were mostly referred to as 'wasted land' (Mean = 3.75; SD = 1.36). This stigma was followed by 'barren' (Mean = 3.77, SD = 1.42), and the stigma of 'male-woman' (Mean = 2.99, SD = 1.45).

Under a Likert Scale of 5 points, it is shown that childless couples were referred to as "wasted land". The stigma of 'wasted land' seemed to be derived from the Holy Scripture, where the Almighty God said, "go and multiply and fill the earth". The multiplication and filling of the earth was to be done through procreation. In this context, therefore, couples who are unable to bear children are seen as simply failing to fulfil the Biblical injunction of filling the earth. A little more than a half of the respondents (Mean = 2.99, SD = 1.45) perceived childless couple in a more derogatory way as "male woman". Given the score of the standard deviation, stigmatizing childless couples as "male-women" had a wide score around the mean.

Table 2: Cultural perception of childlessness of married women in Egor LGA, Edo State, Nigeria of Nigeria, N = 90

Variables	Rating					Mean	Std. Dev
	SA*	*	D*	*	D*		
Stigmatised the woman as barren	40 (44.4)	20 (22.2)	9 (10.0)	11 (12.2)	10 (11.1)	3.77	.42
Stigmatised the woman as wasted land	38 (42.2)	23 (25.6)	10 (11.1)	10 (11.1)	9 (10.0)	3.79	.36
Stigmatised the woman as male-woman	6 (17.8)	5 (27.8)	1 (12.2)	8 (20.0)	0 (22.2)	.99	.45



*SA = Strongly Agree; A= Agree, UD = Undecided; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree

Perception of the Effect of Childlessness on Married Couples

Ten variables were used to assess the compatibility of married childless couple in Egor community. These variables included “commitment to monogamy, sex intimacy, attractiveness among couples, close companionship, warmed mutual friendship, shared aspiration, communication, respect, genuine love, and shared sense of justice”. Under a 5-point Likert scale, the score ranged from Communication (Mean = 4.08, SD = 1.18), close companionship (Mean = 3.72, SD = 1.37), attractiveness among couples (Mean = 3.67, SD = 1.54), shared sense of justice (Mean = 3.64, SD = 1.52), shared aspiration (Mean = 3.56, SD = 1.28), to sex intimacy (Mean = 3.18, SD = 1.43). Although other scores (commitment to monogamy, warmed mutual friendship, and genuine love) were less than three points, none was below the average score of 2.5points.

The first problem associated with compatibility of married couple in the event of childlessness was communication among the couples. Although opinion differs (SD = 1.18), respondents believed that childless among couple affected understanding among them. The lack of communication was followed by lack of close companionship; and in the course of time “attractiveness” among the couple wane (Mean = 3.67, SD = 1.54). When compatibility was assessed using shared sense of justice among the couple, it generated a high mean score of 3.64 (SD = 1.52), thus suggesting that the continued belief and or hope among the couple that the problem of bareness among them will be solved in the nearest future is low. In this context, shared aspiration among the couples was highly affected (Mean = 3.56, SD = 1.28). More than 50 per cent of the respondent believed that couples affected with childlessness no longer have shared aspiration.

Many of the respondents did not know whether childlessness affected the practice of monogamy among the people of Egor community (35.6%). However, available findings revealed that childlessness affected married compatibility among couples in terms of “warmed mutual friendship” (Mean = 2.96, SD = 1.22) and the sharing of genuine love (Mean = 2.96, SD = 1.32). Although opinion among the respondents differs as indicated by the standard deviations, the findings suggests that commitment to monogamy (the marriage of one wife) was gradually giving way to polygamy (marriage of two or more wives) due to the problem of childlessness.

Table 3: Respondents rating of lack of compatibility between married childless couples in Egor, N = 90

S/N	Variable	Rating (%)					Mean	Std Dev
		SA*	A*	D*	*	D*		
	Commitment to monogamy	12 (13.3)	15 (16.7)	2 (35.6)	0 (22.2)	1 (12.2)	.97	.29
	Affect sex intimacy	16 (17.8)	32 (35.6)	(8.9)	7 (17.8)	7 (20.0)	.18	.43
	Attractiveness among	40	20		0	15	.67	.54



couple	(44.4)	(22.2)	(5.6)	(11.1)	(16.7)		
Close companionship	30	35	0	5	-	.72	.37
	(33.3)	(38.9)	(11.1)	(16.7)	-		
Warmed Mutual	13	14	0	2	11	.96	.22
friendship	(14.4)	(15.6)	(33.3)	(24.4)	(12.2)		
Shared aspiration	25	28	8	0	9	.56	.28
	(27.8)	(31.1)	(20.0)	(11.1)	(10.0)		
Affect communication	42	30			6	.08	.18
	(47.2)	(32.6)	(7.9)	(5.6)	(6.7)		
Affect respect	15	33	0	9	13	.20	.34
	(16.7)	(36.7)	(11.1)	(21.1)	(14.4)		
Affect genuine love	12	16	1	8	3	.96	.32
	(13.1)	(17.8)	(34.4)	(20.0)	(14.4)		
Affect shared sense of	38	22		0	5	.64	.52
justice	(42.2)	(24.4)	(5.6)	(11.1)	(16.7)		

*SA = Strongly agree; A = Agree; UD = Undecided, D = Disagree; SD = Strongly disagree

Perception of Childlessness on Compatibility of Married couples

In order to assess the effect of cultural perception of childlessness on the compatibility of married couples, a multiple regression analysis was carried out. Respondents' mean rating on the "lack of compatibility between married childless couples" (table 3) was regressed on the rating of effect of cultural perception of childlessness (table 2). In this context, the mean rating of 'compatibility of married couples' was used as the dependent variable, while the three variables used to assess the cultural perception of childlessness were used as independent variables. The result is summarised in table 4.

As shown in table 4, the adjusted R-square of the regression analysis is 0.925. This finding suggests that 92.50% of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by the three independent variables. It suggests that only about 7.5% of incompatibility among childless couples is not explained by the cultural perceptions. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) confirmed the existence of a significant impact [$F = 354.184, p < .001$]. Given this result, it is possible to conclude that a significant effect exist between the perception of childlessness and lack of incompatibility among married couples in Egor community.

Although the three independent variables exerted positive impact on lack of compatibility among childless couples in Egor, only "stigmatizing of childless woman as male-woman" was significant (Beta = .491, $t = 6.736, p < .05$). The beta weights of stigmatizing childless women as "barren" ($\beta = .236, p > .05$), and "wasted land" ($\beta = .259, p > .05$) were not significant. A unit increase in the perception of a childless woman as "baren" was likely going to result in .227 units of lack of marriage compatibility among childless women. Similarly, a one unit increase the perception of a childless woman as "wasted land" could result in a .259 increase in marriage incompatibility among childless couples. In all, perceiving a childless woman as a "male-man" contributed the highest impact on lack of compatibility among childless married couples.



Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis of the Effect of childlessness on marriage compatibility

Compatibility					
R	R-Square	Adjusted R ²	Std Error		
.962	.925	.923	.379		
ANOVA					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	153.005	3	51.002	354.184	.000
Residual	12.384	86	.144		
Total	165.389	89			
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant	.171	.126		1.351	.180
Stigmatised the woman as barren	.227	.165	.236	1.377	.172
Stigmatised the woman as wasted land	.259	.163	.259	1.589	.116
Stigmatised the woman as male-woman	.462	.069	.491	6.736	.000

Childlessness and Marriage Stability

Six variables were used to assess the existence of marital instability among childless couples in the study area. The variables included, incessant quarrel, incessant fighting, separation, divorce, marrying another wife, and extra marital affairs. The summary of the findings from respondents is shown in table 5. Extra marital affairs (Mean = 3.78, SD = 1.39) and marrying another wife (Mean = 3.10, SD = 1.44) were highly elevated by childless of the woman. Many husbands resorted to extra-marital affairs not for the purpose of sexual satisfaction, but to test their fertility. In many instances where such testing comes out positive, marrying the pregnant woman becomes a priority.

In the rating of the respondents, childless among married was the main cause of quarrel (Mean = 2.99). Although opinion among respondents differs that such quarrel childless couple could weaken marital bond (SD = 1.41), the likelihood of such quarrels resulting to incessant fighting was high (Mean = 2.97, SD = 1.21). Both “separation” and “outright divorce” received above average mean rating among respondents as possible indicators of marital instability among childless couples in Egor community (Mean = 2.81 Vs. 2.91 respectively).

Following the assessment of the existence of marital instability among childless couple, the study also assesses the impact which cultural perception of childlessness in the community have on marital instability. This was done by regressing the mean score of marital instability on cultural perception of childlessness. The result is summarise in table 6 (about here). As shown in the table, the relationship between cultural perception of childlessness (Stigmatization as barren, wasted land, and male-woman) has positive significant relationship



with marital instability ($r = 0.97$). The R-square result of 0.943 suggests that about 94.30% of the variances in marital instability in Egor community was explained by the cultural perception of childlessness. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) confirmed the existence of a significant impact [$F = 471.216$, $p < .05$].

Table 5: Respondents' rating of marital instability among childless couples in Egor, N = 90

S/N	Variable	Rating (%)					Mean	D
		SA	D	D	D	D		
	Incessant quarrel	15 (16.7)	25 (27.8)	2 (13.3)	0 (22.2)	8 (20.0)	2.99	.41
	Incessant fighting	2 (13.3)	6 (17.8)	1 (34.4)	9 (21.1)	2 (13.3)	2.97	.21
	Separation	0 (11.1)	7 (18.9)	9 (32.2)	4 (15.6)	0 (22.2)	2.81	.29
	Divorce	1 (12.2)	6 (117.8)	0 (33.3)	0 (22.2)	3 (14.4)	.91	.22
	Marrying another wife	6 (17.8)	0 (37.3)	0 (11.1)	5 (16.7)	9 (21.1)	.10	.44
	Extra marital affairs	39 (43.3)	1 (23.3)	1 (12.2)	9 (10.0)	0 (11.1)	3.78	.39

The perception of childless women in the community as “wasted land” and “male-woman” exerted significant effect on marital instability ($\beta = 490$, $t = 3.436$, $p < .05$ and $\beta = 0.678$, $t = 10.640$, $p < .05$, respectively). The finding suggests that a unit increase in the perception of childless women as “wasted land” was likely going to result in 0.488 marital instability; while a unit increase in referring to a childless woman as a “male-woman” could result in a 0.636 increase in marital instability. As earlier found in table 4, the perception of childless women as “male-women” contributed a higher significant beta weight on marital instability. However, stigmatizing a woman as just “barren” exerted no significant effect on marital instability. In other words, the perception of a women as being “barren” appears to evoke sympathy, whereas other derogatory perceptions as “wasted land” and “male-woman” are stigmas that caused marital instability in the homes of childless couples.

CONCLUSION

In the course of this study, the analysis of the responses to the questionnaires show that a very high percentage of the respondents confirmed the socio cultural impact of childlessness on married couples in Egor local government area of Edo state. The following are summary of the findings from this study: the findings show that severe semen abnormalities may be responsible for the childlessness and that female infertility are ovarian dysfunctions and disorders of the tubes and uterus. However, decline in sperm count could be responsible for infertility and current lifestyle habits for excess alcohol consumption and smoking could cause infertility. To some the use of traditional treatment for infertility could be responsibility for infertility.



The study shows that childlessness causes a lot of social cultural abuses on women than the men, most childless couples are believe to be free from challenges emanating from child upbringing. Long years of no child among couples raise a lot of issues from the extended family leading to victimization. Consequently, some childless couples are not aware of any medical treatment intervention for childlessness this maybe as a result of their illiteracy. The study also revealed that most couples experiencing childlessness may begin to suspect one another and this can affect their marital bond. The result shows that some couples method of resolving childlessness may have negative effect on the woman as the man chooses another woman as an alternative and the stress in childlessness rest more on the women in the African setting, men are not always blamed for infertility. Couples with childlessness may resolve that they are not compatible in an African society, thus, childlessness can lead to marital instability, as a result of pressure from the extended family.

Furthermore the study revealed that due to socio-cultural perception of childlessness and the regard given to childless women it breed misunderstanding among couples. Majority of childless women often have low coping ability when issues with respect to children are being discussed. Most communities in Nigeria look at childless women as an unfruitful spouse among women to their folk. The prevalence of childlessness among couple within the first few years of marriage could be a threat to marital status and stability. Childlessness is seen as family whose labour will have no inheritance.

Table 6: Multiple Regression analysis of effect of perception of childlessness on marital instability

R	R-Square	Adjusted R ²	Std Error		
.971	.943	.941	.331		
ANOVA					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	ig.
Regression	154.689	3	51.563	471.216	.000
Residual	9.411	86	.109		
Total	164.100	89			
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	ig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant	-.011	.110		-.100	.920
Stigmatised the woman as barren	-.170	.144	-.177	-1.178	.242
Stigmatised the woman as wasted land	.488	.142	.490	3.436	.001
Stigmatised the woman as male-woman	.636	.060	.678	10.640	.000

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study the following recommendations was made:



- (i) The social welfare department, of the agency of government should be charged with the responsibility of child adoption, as usually inspects the homes and living conditions of prospective adoptive parents, and assess their capability to cater adequately for adoptees.
- (ii) Awareness of child adoption campaign should be done as this will, knowing about adoption is likely to remove misconceptions and make a childlessness couple more willing to adopt a child.
- (iii) Community advocacy and mobilization, especially through the media, as well as health care providers playing their role in counseling, will go a long way towards enlightenment and enhancement of the uptake of child adoption by women in developing countries.
- (iv) Child adoption should be seen as normal way of the social status, such as the family, friends, culture and pears.

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