
PERCEPTION OF WOMEN OF CHILDBEARING AGE (15-45years) ON CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF INFERTILITY IN OSOGBO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF OSUN STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Infertility brings about low self-esteem, sense of powerlessness, discrimination and stigmatization as well as threatens the woman's identity, status, marital and emotional security. This study examined the perception of women of childbearing age on causes and consequences of infertility. A descriptive non experimental research design was used. A sample frame of 40 respondents was selected using purposive sampling technique among women of childbearing age. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Three null hypotheses were tested using student t-test at 5% level of significance. The study revealed that irregular sexual intercourse, irregular menstruation, untreated sexually transmitted diseases, late marriage especially above 30years of age, fibroid, low sperm count, unsafe abortion, and promiscuity were factors contribute immensely to increase infertility rate. Majority of the respondents opined that infertility could result in divorce or separation of couple which can lead to extinction of that family name, husband's family inherit his property after his death, polygamy or polyandry, loss of hope, lack of joy and happiness in the family. The findings of this study revealed that there is no significant difference in the age religion of women under study and their perception on causes and consequences of infertility with t -calculated $>$ t -tabulated ($2.54 > 4.3$); as well as, there is no significant difference was found between the age at marriage of women under study and their perception on causes and consequences of infertility with t -calculated $>$ t -tabulated ($2.56 > 4.3$). The results also revealed that there is significant difference in the religion of women under study and their perception on causes and consequences of infertility with t -calculated $<$ t -tabulated ($7.64 < 4.3$). It was concluded that sound family life education should be given to the public especially women and adolescents teenagers with emphasizes on causes, prevention and management of infertility.

KEYWORDS: Causes Childbearing age, Infertility, Perception, Consequences and Women.

INTRODUCTION

The presence of children cements a marriage and childbearing is an important aim of human being on the earth. It is through this process that human population is maintained and mankind is prevented from going into extinction. Childbearing is an important component of marriage and it is a fact in African society especially in Nigeria, that it is expected of a married woman to conceive after nine month of been married, if a couple fails to achieve pregnancy they will be worried and people in the society especially their family member (in-laws) will start to put pressure on them. Usually the woman is on the receiving end, thus making the couple to be looking for a way out of their predicament. The causes of infertility in a marriage is attributed to the wife alone because infertility is seen in Nigeria as barrenness and only women are thought to be barren and according to Okonofua (2005), one of the consequences is that attention and research have been focused on female infertility to the neglect, and detriment, of male infertility. Childlessness may be a tragedy to the married women and can be a cause of marital upset, stress as well as source of personal unhappiness and ill health

According to Kumar and Clark (2004), Infertility is the inability on the part of a couple at their reproductive age to reproduce after constant exposure to an open sex for at least one year. It can also be defined as the failure to conceive after 12 months of adequate exposure to sex without the use of contraceptives. World Health Organization WHO (1989) also defined sub fertility as the inability to achieve pregnancy after 1 year of unprotected intercourse. According to this criterion, 20% of couples are sub-fertile though this falls to 10% after 18 months after, so the term infertile, strictly should not be used until it is proved that pregnancy is impossible.

According to Smeltzer and Bare (2004) there are 2 types of infertility namely;

- Primary infertility: this refers to a condition of a couple who have never conceived.
- Secondary infertility: refers to a condition of a married woman who has had a previous pregnancy but now cannot conceive.

Secondary infertility appears to be more common than primary infertility, with 35% of couples unable to have a second child and approximately 70% of women with infertility having been pregnant at least once (Burns, 2007). However, couples with primary infertility appear to be twice more likely to seek infertility treatment than couples with secondary infertility, with data revealing that 51% of couples with primary infertility and 22% of couples with secondary infertility have ever sought infertility treatment services (Hirsch and Mosher, 1987)

It was reported from the analysis of data from Cameroon and Nigeria reveals that infertility has declined among all age-groups younger than 40 in the decade between the World Fertility Surveys and the Demographic Health Surveys (Larsen, 1995). Furthermore, the expected number of infertile years between ages 20 and 39 declined from 7.3 to 6.0 in Cameroon and from 5.6 to 4.2 in Nigeria. In addition, the proportion of childless women declined from 12% to 6% in Cameroon and from 6% to 4% in Nigeria. Still, a substantial proportion of women suffer from infertility in both countries--39% of women aged 20-44 in Cameroon and 33% in Nigeria. The age pattern of infertility is similar in both countries, and the prevalence of infertility is associated with a woman's age at first sexual exposure. In Nigeria, the proportion of women infertile at ages 20-24 reaches 15% among those who had intercourse before age 13, but is only 4% among those who postponed sexual activity until after their 19th birthday(Larsen, 1995) . Marked regional variations in infertility also exist in both countries.

Adetoro and Ebomoyi_ (1991) reported in a study on the prevalence of infertility in a rural Nigerian community that the overall prevalent rate was 30.3%, giving indices of 9.2% for primary infertility and 21.1% for secondary infertility. Primary infertility is rare after the age of 30 years and acquired causes of infertility are responsible for the high prevalence rate. Genital infections (post-abortal and puerperal) are major contributory factors to the high rate of infertility.

According to Araoye (2003), the major cause of infertility in Africa is infection--STDs, post-abortal and puerperal sepsis. Beliefs about causes and failure of orthodox methods of treatment have led many couples to seek solution from traditional doctors and faith healers without success. Saddler (2000) stated that male infertility may be due to insufficient number of sperm and/or poor motility. Infertility causes marital disharmony, which often leads to divorce. Women are often blamed for the infertility and men engage in polygamy in an attempt to have children. The couple can also suffer stress from the management of the infertility. Adoption is not popular and assisted reproduction has medico-legal implications. (Araoye, 2003)

This research was fully based on women because they are the focus of this problem in African countries especially the Nigerian society. The desire of women for children is sometimes stronger than self-interest in beauty and figure and may be stronger than the claims of a career but in men it is less intense. Human sub-fertility and infertility have been sources of personal misery and even of national crisis since the beginning of time. It is regarded as a disgrace to womanhood, as a mark of divine displeasure, as grounds for divorce, polygamy and even for compulsory suicide in some communities. Hence it becomes imperative to explore the perceptions of women of childbearing age on causes and consequences of infertility.

Purpose of the study

To explore the perceptions of women of childbearing age (15-45years) on causes and consequences of infertility.

Hypotheses

1. There is no statistically significant association between the age of women under study and their perception on causes and consequences of infertility.
2. There is no statistically significant association between the age at marriage of women under study and their perception on the causes and consequences of infertility.
3. There is no statistically significant association between religion of women under study and their perception on the causes and consequences of infertility

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design

Descriptive design was used to examine the perception of women of childbearing age on causes and consequences of infertility.

Research setting:

The research was carried out in a primary health centre in Osogbo, Osun State Nigeria in 2007. It is a health centre approved for use in training health care professional.

Target population

All women of childbearing age between 15-45years attending antenatal clinic, immunization center and those that delivered in the community health center.

Sample and Sampling technique

A sample frame of 40 reproductive women was drawn out of the target population using purposive sampling technique.

Inclusion criteria

The study includes women who are within 15-45 years and are willing to participate in study

Research instrument

The data for the study was collected using a self-developed questionnaire which was validated by expert in the field of study.

Method of data analysis

Data generated in the study were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics in the form of frequency and percentages while T-test formed the inferential statistic at 0.05 level of significance

RESULTS

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of the respondents (n= 40)

Characteristics	Group	Percentage	Frequency
Age	15-20	5.0	2
	21-25	42.5	17
	26-30	30.0	12
	31-35	17.5	7
	36 and above	5.0	2
Marital Status	Married	100.0	40
Religion	Islam	65.0	26
	Christianity	35.0	14
Education	No formal	2.5	1
	Primary	20.0	8
	Secondary	55.0	22
	Tertiary	22.5	9
Occupation	Civil servant	15.0	6
	Self employed	67.5	27
	Unemployed	17.5	7
Age at marriage	15-20	25.0	10
	21-25	55.0	22
	26-30	17.5	7
	31-35	2.5	1
Age at menarche	12-15	37.5	15
	16-19	55.0	22
	20-23	7.5	3

Table 1 shows that majority of the respondents, 42.5% were between 21 and 25 years, 30% were between 26 and 30 years, 17.5% were between 31-35 and 36 and above constituted only 5%. All the respondents 100% were married, 65% of the respondents were Muslims while 35% were Christians. Majority of the respondents 55% had secondary education, followed by 22.5% with tertiary education while 20% had primary school education and 2.5% had no formal education. Majority of the respondents 67.5% were self employed, 17.5% were unemployed, while the remaining 15% were civil servant. Majority of the respondents 55.0% were married at the age of 21-25 years, 25.0% between 15 and 20 years, 17.5% between 26 -30 and 2.5% between 31-35.

Table 2: Perception of the respondents on causes and consequences of infertility

Variable	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Irregular sexual intercourse can result in infertility	50.2	24.8	20.0	5.0
Irregular menses can lead to infertility	59.7	2.4	18.5	19.4
Older women who have never conceived can get pregnant	37.2	52.2	10.6	-
Unsafe abortion can lead to infertility	80	20	-	-
Fibroid can lead to infertility	74.0	16.0	5.8	4.2
Sexually transmitted diseases can cause infertility	19.0	40.2	35.0	5.8
A man can be responsible for the inability of his wife to get pregnant	65.0	21.4	10.3	3.3
Low sperm count cause infertility	87.3	10.0	2.7	-
The use of family planning methods can cause infertility	19.0	30.1	45.2	5.7
Promiscuity can lead to Infertility	65	24.5	10.5	-
Infertility can lead to divorce or separation of couples	35.0	50.0	13.7	1.3
Inability to bear children can lead to extinction of that family name	37.0	30.5	20.5	12.0
Lack of children can lead to the husband's family inheriting his property after his death.	82.2	10.3	5.0	2.5
Infertility can lead to polygamy or polyandry	45.0	52.5	2.5	-
Long period of infertility lead to loss of hope, lack of joy and happiness in the family	66.5	11.0	17	5.5
Secondary infertility may lead to over pampering of the only child and may lead to juvenile delinquency	31.8	10.7	32.2	25.3
Infertility can lead to suicide attempt	35.0	12.5	30.5	22.0

Table 2 shows that majority of the respondents 75% irregular sexual intercourse with spouse can result in infertility while 2.5% disagree. 62.1% opined that irregular menses can lead to infertility while 37.9% disagree. 89.4% of the respondents said older women who have never conceived can get pregnant while 10.6% said they cannot. All the respondents believed that unsafe abortion can lead to infertility. Majority of the respondents 90% believed that fibroid can cause infertility while 10% believed otherwise. 59.2% said sexually transmitted diseases can cause infertility while 40.2% disagreed. 86.4% of them said a man can be responsible for the inability of his wife to get pregnant while 13.6% said no to it. 97.3% of them said low sperm count can cause infertility while 2.7% said it can't cause it. 49.1% of them agree that the use of family planning can cause infertility while 50.9% disagree. 89.5% of the respondents believed that promiscuity can lead to Infertility while 10.5% believed otherwise. Majority of the respondents 85% believe that infertility can lead to divorce while only 15% did not believe so. Most of the respondents 67.5% believe that inability to bear children can lead to extinction of that family name while 32.5% did not believe so. 92.5% of the respondents agree that lack of children can make the husbands' family inherit his property after his death while 7.5% disagree. 97.5% of the respondents believe that infertility can lead to polygamy or polyandry while 2.5% said it cannot. 77.5% of the respondents believe that prolong infertility can lead to loss of hope, lack of joy and happiness in the family while 22.5% did not. 42.5% of the respondents agreed that secondary infertility can lead to over pampering of the only child and may lead to juvenile delinquency while 57.5% of them said it cannot. 47.5% of the respondents believe that prolonged infertility can lead to suicide attempt while 52.5% of them said it cannot.

Table 3: Shows associations of selected variables and perception on causes and consequences of infertility

Variable	T-calculated	T-table	df	Remark
Age	2.54	4.30	2	No significant Association
Religion.	7.64	4.30	2	Significant Association
Age at Marriage	2.56	4.30	2	No significant Association

Hypothesis 1: Since t calculated (2.54) is less than t table (4.3), there is no significant thus the null hypothesis is accepted. Therefore there is no significant difference between the age of women under study and their perception on causes and consequences of infertility.

Hypothesis 2: Since t calculated (7.64) is greater than t table (4.3) the null hypothesis is rejected; therefore there is a significant difference between the religion of women under study and their perception on the causes and consequences of infertility.

Hypothesis 3: Since t calculated (2.56) is less than t table (4.3) the null hypothesis is accepted; thus there is no significant difference between the age at marriage of women under study and their perception on causes and consequences of infertility.

DISCUSSION

From the data collected, majority of the respondents were adult (21 years and above) and literate thus the information given can be regarded valid. All the respondents were married and majorities were married at the age of 21-25 years. This implies that majority of the respondents married early.

Majority of the respondents opined that irregular sexual intercourse with spouse, irregular menses, unsafe abortion, fibroid, sexually transmitted diseases, low sperm count, late marriage especially above 30years of age and promiscuity can result in infertility. According to Kumar and Clark (2004), inadequate intercourse, hostile cervical mucus and vaginal factor are uncommon causes of infertility. Also, Decherney and Nathan (2003) stated that having an increased number of sexual partners lead to greater potential for exposure to sexually transmitted diseases which can predispose to infertility.

Majority of the respondents 85% said that infertility can lead to divorce; while few respondents believed that once they are married whatever happens they cannot divorce. Nevertheless, in Nigeria most of the marriages were dissolved because there were no children. According to Araoye (2003), infertility causes marital disharmony, which often leads to divorce. Majority also said that infertility could lead to polygamy and polyandry. This is in line with the statement of Araoye (2003) that women are often blamed for the infertility and men engage in polygamy in an attempt to have children. Majority of the respondents believed that lack of children can make the husband's family inherit his property after his death, since there is no child to neither claim the husband's property nor bear his name thus the family's name maybe forgotten, since there is no child to continue to bear the name.

Majority of the respondents believed that long period of infertility can lead to loss of hope, lack of joy and happiness in the family. This agrees with Fraser and Cooper (2003) that the complex investigations and prolonged treatment associated with infertility result in grief that has been compared with a roller coaster of hope and despair.

The findings of this study revealed that there is no significant difference in the age of women, age at marriage of women under study and their perception on the causes and consequences of infertility with t -calculated < t tabulated. The findings also revealed that there is significant difference in the religion of women under study and their perception on causes and consequences of infertility with t -calculated > t -tabulated.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that irregular sexual intercourse, irregular menstruation, untreated sexually transmitted diseases, late marriage especially above 30years of age, fibroid, low sperm count, unsafe abortion, and promiscuity were factors contribute immensely to increase infertility rate.

The research study also revealed that that infertility could result in divorce or separation of couple which can lead to extinction of that family name, husband family can inherit his property after his death, polygamy or polyandry, loss of hope, lack of joy and happiness in the family as the consequences of infertility. Although infertility is not common among the respondents they could recognize infertility as a serious problem in the society due to their experience with those that are involved in the problem.

Children are God's heritage and those that have them are full of joy, happiness and peace. Therefore, it is very crucial to give sound family life health education to women, teenagers and adolescents; with emphasizes on causes, prevention and management of infertility.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the finding from this research the following are the researcher's recommendation

- Couples should cultivate the habit of living together so as to have frequent sexual intercourse in order to achieve conception.
- Teenagers and adolescents should be monitored by their parents so as not to get themselves involved indiscriminate sexual intercourse through peer group influence to avoid future regrets.
- family life education should be given to the public especially women and adolescents
- The government through health publications, mass media, nurses, social workers, community health extension workers should health educate the community on the causes, consequences and prevention of infertility.
- Early diagnosis and prompt treatment of sexually transmitted diseases should be made in order to prevent complications that can lead to infertility in the future.

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