

Fertility Decision Making Among the Ijesa of Southwestern Nigeria

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Abstract

Fertility decision making between the husband and wife is important in determining the fertility level in a given population. In patriarchal society, such as Ijesaland in Nigeria, this becomes very imperative due to interrelationship between husbands and wives. This paper examined who between the husband and wife is taking fertility decisions among the Ijesa of south-western Nigeria. In other words, this paper examined the major fertility decision maker between the husband and wife among the Ijesa sub ethnic group of the Yorubas. It also examined the type of decisions being jointly made between the husband and wife in the study area. A cross-sectional survey design using qualitative and quantitative techniques was employed, involving a random selection of 17 enumeration areas and 1,594 ever-married women of childbearing age. Structured questionnaire, focus group discussion guide and in depth interview guide were used to elicit information from the respondents. The findings show that husbands are more involved in making fertility decisions in the study area. In essence, husbands' desire in matters relating to number of children and when to have them supersedes that of the wives. The study concluded that since the majority of fertility decisions rest with the husbands in the study area, this could result to high fertility, which may in turn affect the health of the women in the study area negatively.

Background

Fertility decision making between the husband and wife is important in determining the fertility level in a given population. Among the factors that influence fertility decision is educational level and the type of occupation that women engage in. There is a correlation between the educational level of the women and a couple's fertility (Leon, 2004; McCrary and Royer, 2011). According to Cleland and Rodrigues (1988) many studies provided evidence of this. They went on to say that the educational level of the man correlates less well into fertility. Indeed, world fertility survey data indicate strong associations between women's education and marriage age, desired family size and contraceptive use in developing countries. Data of 30 countries show an average total fertility rate of 6.9 children per woman among those with no education, three children more than among women with seven or more years of schooling. This is also the contention of Le Vine *et al.* (1991) when they posited that researchers have shown that more education works indirectly to reduce fertility in a number of ways. This includes delayed marriage which increased the chance that a woman will never marry. Moreover, it reduces family size by stimulating aspirations for a higher standard of living and increased investments in fewer children; by preparing women for empowerment, especially in the formal sector; and by exposing women to new knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding contraceptive use. This assertion is in line with suggestion of Caldwell (1982) that education prepares women to respond to more opportunities, challenges traditional values and weakens the authority of the old over the young, as well as of men over women. To him, women's education is also the most influential variable in the improvement of child health and reduction of infant deaths (Caldwell, 1986a, b).

Some studies have attempted to assess how education may influence women's personal attitudes and their role in reproductive decision making (Isen and Stevenson, 2010). Cochrane, Leslie, and O'Hara (1982) found, for instance, that education not only delayed the wife's age at marriage, but also increased husband-wife communication and knowledge, and improved attitudes and access to birth control all of which were negatively related to fertility.

The importance of individual attitudinal changes, in their own right and in combination with other factors has been frequently emphasized in analyses of the channels through which formal education operates (Cochrane *et al.* 1982). According to Le Vine (1982) and Le Vine *et al.* (1991) several plausible models of the impact of schooling on the attitudes and later behaviour of girls have been set out. These include the cognitive growth model, which assumes that schooling endows the girl with an expanded awareness of means – end relationships in her environment and the capacity to see it in novel contexts as she encounters them, the self-development model, which posits that schooling bolsters the self-esteem, sense of personal efficacy, and belief in internal control of persons in a position of subordination and compliance, and the identification model, which hypothesizes that girls are exposed to a new kind of interaction with the adult teacher, which they later imitate as mothers (Le Vine, 1982). All of these models describe the impact of education on fertility behaviour.

From the above, it could be seen that women's education is primary determinant of her contraceptive knowledge and use. However, there are other factors apart from formal education that influence this. These include other forms of training as adult literacy programmes, informal education, and exposure to extension services which are more difficult to measure (Dixon-Mueller, 1993).

Although there is a relationship between female education and fertility, according to Sen, Germain, and Chen (1994), focusing narrowly on female education has had at least three questionable consequences. First, it has masked the multi-faceted nature of gender relations of power that subordinates women to the will of others – in households, villages, communities, labour and other markets and *vis-a-vis* the state. These relations determine women's access to material and non-material resources, their ability to control their bodies and their lives, and their decision making capability. Second, an overemphasis on formal education downplays other aspects of gender relations and disparities that affect women's reproductive health and their health generally. Third, the emphasis on education alone ignores the state responsibility to provide reproductive health services, clean water, sanitation and other basic needs that also critically affect reproductive outcomes. They went on to say that while education can certainly help reduce some power imbalances, the millions of highly educated women who have little reproductive control bear testimony to the fact that education ("schooling") is not enough.

There is also a correlation between women's work and reproduction as mentioned earlier (Joshi, 2002). Dixon-Mueller (1978) and Safilios-Rothschild (1982) confirmed that there is empirical evidence that employment of women outside the home has the potential to reduce women's dependence on others just as it increases the chances of the desire to space or limit births. It also provides alternative sources of social identity and support; increases women's desire to delay marriage; motivates women to terminate unsatisfactory relationships. Dixon-Mueller (1978) and Safilios-Rothschild (1982) went on to say that while economic activity generally provides women with a resource base, its influence on women's reproductive decision making is determined largely by the underlying institutional structures that govern the value of women's labour in any society and the conditions under which women engage in economic activity. The relationship between gainful employment and greater reproductive and sexual choices is dependent on a myriad of factors, such as type of occupation, income, motivation, whether the woman works for someone or is self-employed, duration and continuity of work, and whether the work is full or part-time.

Youssef (1982) confirmed that empirical observations suggest that the impact of women's non-domestic work on fertility differs by type and magnitude of remuneration, workplace, type of activity and occupation, but there has been little consistency in either the strength or the direction of the observed relationship. He said further that investigations of the association relate fertility to the gender division of labour in society, the demand for female labour, and the economic opportunities available to women. According to Bruce and Dwyer (1998), where pressure for economic survival forces women to take up market employment, in such situations, women's employment may do little, if anything, to strengthen their capabilities to implement their reproductive preferences.

Mason and Palam (1985) have a different view about women's work and fertility by asserting that it is the "household opportunity structure", through which it accumulates status and resources, rather than role conflicts between "mothering" and "working" that determines the relationship between women's work and fertility. Wainerman (1981) holds a similar view by saying that available evidence is insufficient to determine whether women who enter the labour force bear fewer children than others or whether women with fewer children tend to have higher level of labour force participation.

It has also been argued that in some contexts, independent earning by poor women does appear to affect traditional gender relations within the household, enhancing women's participation and voice in decisions. Empirical evidence of the research carried out on poor rural South Asian women supported this (Nelson, 1979; Amin and Pebley, 1990; Mahmud, 1993). Research in a number of developing countries that assess women's control over earnings, not just their employment, concludes that control over income is a better predictor of demand for children and subsequent fertility (Kirtz and Mankinwa-Adebusoye, 1993). Mahmud (1993) supported this by showing that poor rural women in Bangladesh with greater control over their own incomes and greater access to husband's incomes tend to limit births through modern contraceptives more frequently than women who depend entirely on their husband's earnings. According to Kirtz and Mankinwa-Adebusoye (1993)

survey data on currently married women in Nigeria reveal that women's control over earnings has a strong negative effect on the demand for children.

According to Riley (1997) gender inequality is reflected in the demographic processes to varying degrees and in different ways. The strength of the gender/ demographic change relationship usually depends upon the gap in power signified by male and female differences in education, employment and other spheres. In many societies, the children women produce are an important source of power. But when women have alternative sources of power – from jobs, money or political representation - for example, -their dependence on children as a source of power decreases. Fertility is likely to decline. She went on to say that how these processes are linked differs among societies and can change over time. Researchers are still exploring the nature of this link, but existing evidence suggests that the way that gender is organised in a society may influence the timing and pace of fertility change.

Reproduction is a central factor in all women's lives. It helps shape the organisation of most social institutions, and gender in particular. Apart from other factors that appear to influence fertility - such as urbanisation, and the consequent shift from extended to nuclear family pattern, etc – gender plays a crucial role. It both affects and is affected by these broader social and economic transformations. Women tend to have more power relative to men in societies with low rather than high fertility. Education and employment, for example, often accord women wider power and influence, which enhance their status. But attending school and working often compete with child-bearing and childrearing. Women may choose to have fewer children in order to hold a job or increase their education.

Feyisetan and Togunde (1988) note that women in monogamous family whose first marriages had not been dissolved as at the time of the survey have significantly lower fertility than their counterparts in polygynous unions. The study also found that negative correlation exists between women's education and fertility. The observed relationship between female education and fertility tends to suggest that education is a variable that can be manipulated to achieve lower fertility (Feyisetan and Adewuyi, 1988). An increase in education could engender reduced fertility and the impact appears to become stronger as education increases.

One of the central issues involved in evaluating the effects of women's education and work on demographic variables is whether and how they give women power. The ways that education and work affect a woman's power to make decisions about health care, about contraception, or about the timing and number of children they have, will influence fertility.

This paper examined who between the husband and wife is taking fertility decisions among the Ijesa of south-western Nigeria. In other words, this paper examined the major fertility decision maker between the husband and wife among the Ijesa sub ethnic group of the Yorubas. The paper also examined decisions that are jointly making by both the husband and wife. Examining who is responsible for fertility decision making is important in order to achieve desired female family size goals among others. Therefore, there is the need to explore who is responsible for fertility decision making among the Ijesa of south- western Nigeria.

A cross-sectional survey design using qualitative and quantitative techniques was employed. A multistage sampling technique, which involved purposive selection of four Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Atakumosa West (346), Ilesa-East (448), Ilesa-West (450) and Obokun (350) with the predominance of the Ijesa was used. A random selection of 17 enumeration areas and 1,594 ever- married women of childbearing age was carried out. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data on socio-demographic characteristics, fertility decision making, and women empowerment. Qualitative data were elicited from six Focus Group Discussions and 18 in-depth interviews conducted among different categories of men and women. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, and qualitative data were content analysed using thematic approach.

Findings

Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Data were collected from 1,594 respondents comprising women of childbearing age who are ever married in Ijesaland. Education can help to empower women by equipping them with the information and means to function effectively, especially in the modern world. With regard to levels of education, more than half of the respondents (64.5%) have secondary school education, while 15.6 per cent of the respondents have tertiary education (Table

4.1). The fact that the majority of the respondents (80.1%) have secondary school education and above is an indication that these women are likely to be empowered which may have negative effect (i.e. decrease) on their fertility. It is interesting to note that only a small proportion of the respondents (2.8%) have no formal education, an indication of high educational attainment in the study area.

The age of the respondents show that early marriage is not a common phenomenon in the study area. This could be seen clearly from the fact that only 7.7 per cent of the respondents are below 25 years. The largest percentages of the respondents are within the ages of 30 to 34 (35.3%), followed by those in the age bracket of 25 to 29 years, (about 25%). The mean age of the respondents as at the time of the survey is 33 years.

The largest proportion of the respondents is Protestants (42.9%). In all, the majority of the respondents are Christians (82.4%) as against 14.7 per cent that are Muslims. This shows that the study area is dominated by Christians. The result further shows that the majority (87.0%) of the respondents are in marital union (living with their husbands). This indicates the stability of marital union in the study area. Women in the study population are most likely to stick to their husbands regardless of whatever problem(s) may be confronting the marital union.

The data reveal that respondents have been married for an average of nine years. This may be responsible for the mean number of children that the respondents have, three children per woman. The mean age of the respondents (33years), the mean age of the husband (39 years), together with the mean years of marriage and the mean number of children, are indications that the population as the time of the survey is relatively a young population.

With regard to form of marriage, majority of the respondents contracted what could be termed 'formal' form of marriage of different types. The largest percentage of the respondents (45.6%) contracted church marriage, and this is followed by those who contacted traditional marriage (29.2 %) and court marriage of 15.6 per cent. Only 0.2 per cent of the respondents contracted what could be termed 'non-formal' type of marriage. This type of marriage includes "elopement" as well as "ashante" forms of marriage. The fact that the majority of the respondents contracted formal type of marriage may be responsible for the low rates of separation and divorce, the stability of marital union in the study area.

In relation to the type of conjugal union, only 31.1 per cent of the respondents have husbands who are married to more than one wife, that is, in polygynous union. In essence, one could conclude that monogamy is prevalent in the study area.

This is in line with some respondents opinions that polygyny has given way to monogamy in Ijesaland. Some of the respondents put their opinions this way:

...I just observed that people generally are not going the way of our old "papas", as far as polygamous family is concerned. You know in the olden days our old "papas" may have like 3 to 5 wives and all of them will bear children. They had intention of taking them to farm and some other things, but if anyone tries it today such will have cause to regret it. (**IDI, Headmaster**)

What I can say about family structure in Ijesaland is that mostly they are operating on the wheel of monogamy. So, they prefer a single wife...they just married a single wife. But religiously, we Muslims that are dwelling in Ijesaland prefer polygamy...nothing hinders us especially as Muslim not to operate on the wheel of polygamous family. (**IDI, Islamic Religious Leader**)

Some respondents who shared the above views compared what the family type used to be in the olden days in Ijesaland to what it is now; they put their opinions as follows:

In the olden days we have polygamous set up, as I said the other time principally to help them on farming work and their business (Osomaloo). But nowadays people tend to have monogamous family, one wife one husband, because of economic situations that do not allow marrying many wives. (**IDI, Vice Principal**)

In the olden days men were having three to four wives because of prestige and work. But nowadays such idea is not all that common. Though in the olden days most women were given out to men as gift to consolidate friendship and relationship between men, but now it is not so
(IDI, Female Pastor)

Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Background Characteristics

Characteristics	N	%
Highest Level of Education		
No formal education	46	2.8
Primary	271	17.0
Secondary	1028	64.5
Tertiary	249	15.6
Total	1594	100
Age		
Below 25yrs	123	7.7
25-29yrs	394	24.7
30-34yrs	563	35.3
35-39yrs	231	14.5
40-44yrs	219	13.7
45-49yrs	64	4.1
Total	1594	100
Religious' Affiliation		
Roman Catholic	241	15.1
Protestant	684	42.9
Pentecostal	389	24.4
Islam	235	14.7
Traditional	33	2.1
Others (such as Eckankar)	12	0.8
Total	1594	100
Marital Status		
Married	1387	87.0
Separated	108	6.8
Divorced	39	2.4
Widowed	60	3.8
Total	1594	100
Form of Marriage Contracted		
Traditional	465	29.2
Church	727	45.6
Islam	151	9.5
Court	248	15.6
Others	3	0.2
Total	1594	100
In Polygynous Union	495	31.1
Currently working	1550	97.2
Occupation		
Trading	869	56.1
Farming/Fishing	132	8.5
Teaching	139	9.0
Office work (clerical and administration)	112	7.2
Professional	38	2.5
Artisan	207	13.4
Others	53	3.4
Total	1550	3.4

		100
Main Reason for Working		
Economic necessity	431	28.4
Financial independent	852	56.1
Complement husband pay	142	9.3
Make new friends	3	0.2
Pursue own career	80	5.3
Others	11	0.7
Total	1519	100
Employment Status		
Employer	191	12.0
Employee	295	18.5
Self- employed	998	62.6
Apprentice	10	0.6
Unpaid family worker	36	2.3
Unemployed	64	4.0
Total	1594	100
Job compatibility with childbearing		
Yes	1118	77.3
No	254	17.6
Don't Know	222	5.1
Total	1594	100
Spend Most of Money On		
Self	96	6.0
Food	167	10.5
Children	859	53.9
Other household items	364	22.8
Savings	9	0.6
Give to husband	10	0.6
Give to other relatives	11	0.7
Others	78	4.9
Total	1594	100

In the olden days polygamous family was the order of the day, but nowadays it is very rare, say few people that are still operating polygamous family. But what is common now is monogamous where we have one wife and husband with minimum of 2 or 3 children at least and at most 4 children. That is the approved family structure even by the law of our land now.
(IDI, Male Pastor)

An opinion expressed by a FGD participant is illuminating and it shows how rampant monogamous family type is in the present day Ijesaland:

Let me just site the example of three neighbours in this area. The baal4e of this area has a monogamous family, our immediate neighbour is also a monogamous family, and like that they are monogamous family. Mostly, the type of family that operates here is monogamous family.
(FGD Female ages 15-34)

Employment in different types of occupation potentially empowers women by providing financial independence, alternatives sources of social identity, and exposure to power structures, independent of kin networks (Dixon – Mueller, 1993). The majority of the respondents (97.2%) are working during the time of the survey. The fact that

over 97 per cent of the respondents are engaged in one form of work or another can be a factor enhancing their empowerment.

It could be observed from the table that the majority of the respondents (56.1%) are traders. The proportion of respondents who are artisans (13.4 %) is next to those who are traders. Teachers and farmers are next with 9.0 and 8.5 per cent respectively. Other white collar respondents are few with 7.2 per cent.

The majority of the respondents (56.1%) indicated that the main reason why they are working is to be financially independent, this can enhance their levels of empowerment. Following this is the 28.4 per cent of the respondents whose primary reason for working is economic necessity. Only a small proportion of the respondents (5.3%) are working to pursue their career, it is assumed that this proportion is likely to be more empowered than others since they can decide to work to pursue their career. The fact that this category of people want to pursue their career will also have effect on their fertility behaviour because career pursuance is not always compatible with childbearing, and this may help in reducing children ever born by the women, and eventually lead to fertility reduction.

In terms of the employment status of the respondents, majority of them (62.6%) are self-employed, this is in line with previous result that shows that the majority of the respondents are either traders or artisans. As discussed above, this result further indicates that 18.5 per cent of the respondents are employees, most likely of the government, since majority of them are teachers. About 12 per cent of the respondents are employers of labour. Regarding the number of working day per week, respondents work for about six days per week on the average and also spend about nine hours per day on their job. The above scenario is possible because most of the respondents are self-employed, thereby they may be staying longer hours on their job.

It is not surprising that the vast majority of the respondents (77.3%) claimed their job is compatible with childbearing. The previous results show that the majority of the respondents are traders and artisans who are self-employed. Premised on this, there will be no need to ask for maternity leave, they have control over their time. The implication is that it can lead to high fertility among these groups of respondents. Only 17.6 per cent of the respondents are of the opinion that their work is not compatible with childbearing. These are likely to be respondents that are employees, majority of whom are in the teaching profession.

In line with the above, there is also a correlation between women's work and reproduction as noted by (Joshi) 2002, Dixon-Mueller (1978) and Safilios-Rothschild (1982). They affirmed that there is empirical evidence that employment of women outside the home has the potential to reduce women's dependence on others just as it increases the chances of the desire to space or limit births. It also provides alternative sources of social identity and support; increases women's desire to delay marriage; motivates them to terminate unsatisfactory relationships. Dixon-Mueller (1978) and Safilios-Rothschild (1982) further asserted that while economic activity generally provides women with a resource base, its influence on women's reproductive decision making is determined largely by the underlying institutional structures that govern the value of women's labour in any society and the conditions under which women engage in economic activity. The relationship between gainful employment and increased reproductive as well as sexual choices is dependent on a myriad of factors, such as type of occupation, income, motivation, whether the woman works for someone or is self-employed, duration and continuity of work, and whether the work is full or part-time.

The majority of the respondents (53.9%) spend most of their money on their children (feeding, clothing, school fees, etc.). This was followed by those who are using their money to purchase other household items (22.8%). Noteworthy in this result is the fact that though the women are working (at least significant percentage of them), this has not translated to impressive savings among them. The result shows that only 0.6 per cent of the respondents are saving money for future use. This indicates subsistence living as a result low income.

Fertility Decision-making among the Respondents

Table 2 shows the fertility decision-making of the respondents. The issues considered range from desired number of children at marriage, through the number of children at present, decision regarding number of children to discussion regarding number of children between husband and wife. The table indicates that the largest percentage of the respondents (34.7%) were of the opinion that the number of children they would like to have depends on the "will of God." This is surprisingly high, which together with 20 per cent who never discussed the

issue, indicates that the majority of the respondents (54.7%) gave non-quantifiable response to the question on desired number of children at marriage. Isiugo-Abanihe (1997) engaged this issue and found out that most women depend on the will of God with regards to number of children to have.

The interviews conducted during the course of this research buttresses this assertion of God's will. In this regard some respondents have this to say:

I will say it is God that decides that even if you plan before you get married. During courtship you have planned that this is the number of children you will have and both of you agreed, many at times we have seen people settled for three or four maximally and the reason behind this is economic meltdown. People will say they will have number of children they can adequately support financially, to give them good education and to be prepared for the future which is very good. I have a friend that has four children already which they have planned to have, next one they have which they did not planned for are four children at a time, so let conclude that it is God's plan. I have a neighbour about two houses away from here and they had a set of twins as their first born and they were expecting (Idowu) as Yoruba, instead of that they had another set of twins. And what is their income? The wife is earning nothing. The husband is a security man in one company in Ilesa. **(IDI Female Principal)**

The ideal family size depends on the hand of God. It is God that institutes marriage and family. It is only God that can determine the number of children that a family will have. If husband and wife said that they want three children, God may not give them more than two or give them even more than four, **(IDI, Male Pastor)**

Table 2: Percentage Distribution of Respondents by their Fertility Decisions-Making

Characteristics	N	%
Desired Number of Children at Marriage		
1	1	0.1
2	8	0.5
3	101	6.3
4	339	21.3
5	188	11.8
6 and above	86	5.4S
Never discussed	318	20.0
God's will	552	34.7
Total	1593	100
Number of Children at Present		
1	173	11.4
2	417	27.5
3	477	31.5
4	231	15.2
5	163	10.8
6 and above	55	3.5
Total	1516	100
Decision Regarding Number of Months		
Husband	333	21.2
Own decision	344	21.9
Couple's decision	895	56.9
Total	1572	100
Discussion Regarding Number of Children		
Yes	799	50.1
Decision Regarding Number of Children		
Own decision	88	5.8
Husband only	277	18.1
Couple's decision	1120	73.3
Family members	43	2.8
Total	1528	100
Want to Give Birth to More Children		
Yes	862	56.0
No	369	24.0
God's will	201	13.1
Don't know	106	6.9

Total	1538	100
Number of Additional Children		
1	214	14.0
2	402	26.2
3	209	13.6
4	33	2.2
5	6	0.4
6 and above	12	0.8
Don't Know	657	42.8
Total	1533	100
Reasons for More Children		
Husband's desire	340	34.4
Own desire	224	22.6
Don't have many now	356	36.0
Pressure from family members	46	4.7
Others	23	2.3
Total	989	100
Reasons for Not Wanting More Children		
Have sufficient sumber	261	70.7
Husband does not want more	59	16.0
Own Decision	35	9.5
I Want to return to work	9	2.4
Others	5	1.4
Total	369	100
Decision if Husband Want More Child against Wife Wish		
Agree with him	602	38.8
Disagree with him	279	18.0
Change his opinion	671	43.2
Total	1552	100

Among respondents who expressed numerical desired number of children at marriage, 21.3 per cent have four children.

During the course of the interview, many respondents alluded to the fact that the desired family size among the Ijesa women is four children per woman. Many reasons were adduced for this assertion ranging from the prevailing economic situation in the country which takes the centre stage to the time needed to take care of the children, giving them sound education, bringing them up to be God fearing among others.

Some respondents emphasised the present economic condition of the country as a major reason for not having more than four children. They put their thoughts as far as ideal family size is concerned thus:

At most four children and at least three children and the reason for this are economic problems. Some who are religiously inclined might think along the line that God should give them godly children. **(IDI, Male Headmaster)**

Family size should be based on whatever the economy is saying; at least ideal family size should not exceed 3 to four children. **(IDI, Islamic Religious Leader)**

The ideal family size in Ijesaland is four children, husband and wife making six. The reason is just because whatever comes in as our income should be use to take good care of those children and we must not rear children beyond our financial ability so that those children can be okay in life and have sound education. **(IDI, Nursing Mother)**

Some of the respondents elaborated further on the role of economic situation in determining the ideal family size in Ijesaland as follows:

The family size of a reasonable couple nowadays should not be more than four children maximally because of our economic condition that is not having anything good to offer anybody. So, the case become cutting your coat according to your cloth, i.e. giving birth to

children you can easily afford to take good care of without relying on or depending on any family member for financial assistance. **(IDI, Traditional Birth Attendant)**

The ideal family size depends on the parent's economic status. Some have four if they can afford taking care of four children and this day despite the fact that some have financial ability they reduced the number of children they have to two or three. But I believe that the ideal family size is still four. **(IDI, Female Principal)**

Nowadays, the family size should be minimized. It should not be all that large because of the problem that is facing us. Some people even have only two children of which they cannot feed adequately because there is lack of job in Nigeria. Even to have a child is a problem for some because of economic situation. It is even possible not to be able to satisfied a child due to the problem that is facing us. **(FGD, Female, 35 Years and above, Educated)**

Some looked beyond the economic situation and focused on general care of the children in terms of given them the needed time, bringing them up to be God fearing, and providing good education and well-being. They expressed themselves thus:

The ideal family size in Ijesaland is 2-3 children at least, and maximum of 4 children because we need to cut our coat according to our cloth as Yoruba adage says. (omo beere osi beere). It is good to give birth to the number of children we can adequately and simultaneously provide for in the area of their education, feeding and their well-being. My own conclusion is that children are God given gift that must be managed well so that we will not invite the wrath of God upon our head. **(FGD, Female, 15-34 Years)**

Generally from the look of things, we can see some family now having about four children maximum and minimum of three. The reason why children may not be more than four is just because of the smooth running of the family. In situation whereby you have many children like about six even you yourself will not dream of taking them to good school because now people want their children to be educated, so they limit the number of children they want to have. **(IDI, Female Headmaster)**

Most people don't want to have more than two or three children that they will be able to cater for and give them quality education. If we look at it critically to have a large family size, may lead to the tendency that most of the children in such family can become wayward, joining bad gang becoming a thief, etc. **(FGD, Female, 15-34 Years Educated)**

From the Table 2, it could also be observed that more than half of the respondents (54.7%) did not have a specific desired number of children at marriage; this could have serious implications on their fertility behaviour. This could lead to unregulated number of children, unregulated child spacing, and could also affect the knowledge and use of contraceptives among the respondents.

Regarding the number of children respondents have at present, 31.5 per cent of them have three children and 27.5 per cent have two living children. The mean number of respondents' children as at the time of the study is three children per woman.

With regard to the decision of number of months a woman should wait before having another child, majority of the respondents (56.9%) alluded to the fact that the decision is jointly taken by the couple. Those respondents who take the decision solely by themselves are slightly higher (21.9%) than those whose husbands take the decision solely (21.2%). The mean number of months a woman should wait before having another child is 29 months (2 years, 5 months). This means that child spacing in the study area is about two and half years on the average.

About 50 per cent of the respondents have ever discussed the number of children they would like to have. From Table 2, it could also be observed that majority of the couples (73.3%) jointly take decision with regard to the number of children to have in their marriage. For those not jointly making the decision, the Table shows that

husbands are making decision for 18.1 per cent as against 5.8 per cent making the decision on their own. There is consensus that men strongly influence couples' childbearing behaviour (Ezeh, 1993; Bankole and Singh, 1998; Speizer, 1999). More than half of the respondents (56%) were of the opinion that they still want to give birth to more children. Only 24 per cent were emphatic that they do not want more children.

Regarding the number of additional children, majority of the respondents (about 54%) want to give birth to three children or less. On the reasons for wanting to have more children, about 36 per cent of the respondents wanted more because they do not have many at present. This is closely followed by 34.4 per cent of the respondents who wanted more children because their husband desired them.

With respect to respondents who desired to have more children, 22.6 per cent expressed affirmation. For those who do not want more children, 70.7 per cent stated that they already have sufficient number, followed by 16.0 per cent whose husbands do not want more children. The implication of this is that the decision of whether to have more children or not depends mostly on the desire of the husband. This may have negative implications for fertility behaviour as well as empowerment of women.

The above mentioned fact is buttressed by the responses of the respondents when asked what they would do if their husbands wanted them to have more children against their wish. About 39 per cent of the respondents responded they would agree against their wish, while 18 per cent stated they would disagree with their husbands. Notably, a large percentage of the respondents (43.2%) maintained that they would work to change their husbands' opinion on having another child against their wish.

Conclusion

The above findings are indications of the patriarchal nature of the study area. In essence, husbands' desire in matters relating to number of children and when to have them supersedes that of the wives (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2003). This is in line with findings that men's ideal number of children in Africa tends to be higher than women's (Short and Kiros, 2002; Westoff and Bankole, 2002; Gebreselassie, 2008). In essence, the study reveals that most fertility decision making in the study area rests with the husband rather than the wife. The result further shows the consensus in the literature that men strongly influence couples' childbearing behaviour (Ezeh, 1993; Bankole and Singh, 1998; Speizer, 1999). One could therefore conclude that since the majority of fertility decisions rest with the husbands in the study area, this could result to high fertility, which may in turn affect the health of the women in the study area negatively. High fertility would also have other negative effect on the women such as, reduced hour of work and economic dependence among others.

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