

## **The Roles of Family Planning in the Promotion of Maternal And Child Health in Nigeria**

By

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### ***Abstract***

*Family planning is the social and medical service that allows individuals and couples to anticipate and attain their desired number of children and determine the gaps between pregnancies. Despite tremendous efforts being made by Federal Ministry of Health of Nigeria in collaboration with NGOs to control the high population growth and reduce the incidences of maternal and child morbidity and mortality through various family planning programmes and campaign; the issue of family in the country remain controversial as many people denied the service particularly in northern parts. Hence, it is against this problem that this paper reviewed the roles of family planning in preventing maternal morbidity and mortality among women of child bearing age in Katsina state.*

*The finding of this paper revealed that family planning plays a vital roles in preventing maternal mortality and morbidity as it pavement unwanted pregnancy and abortion, prevents STDS/HIV and finally promotes the health status of both mother and the baby. The paper also revealed that misconceptions about family planning services, poor cultural belief, lack of awareness of health implication of inadequate spacing, as well as afraid of adverse side effects of some family contraceptives are leading factors to noncompliance to family planning services. Based on this review it was concluded that family planning plays significant roles in preventing maternal mortality and morbidity. It was also recommended among others that awareness programmes should be carried about regularly through radio and television stations to enlighten the public about roles of family planning in promoting the health of both mothers and babies.*

**Key words:** Family planning, maternal health, child health

## 1.0 Introduction

According to World Health Organization (2019), Family Planning is the activity that allows individuals and couples to anticipate and attain their desired number of children and the spacing and timing their birth. According to Fawole (2019) family planning is one concept that has widely been misunderstood to the extent that many are quick to dismiss any mention of it. Consequently; they lose the opportunity to understand it gain the attendant benefit. It is achieved through use of contraceptive methods and the treatment of involuntary infertility. A women's ability to space and limit her pregnancies has a direct impact on her health and well – being, as well as on the out-come of each pregnancy. To some people especially northern parts of Nigeria, it connotes the threatening implication that they will no more bear children, while to others still it means that they will no longer enjoy maximum sexual relationships. These are far from the truth. Family planning rather help people to exercise significant control over the number of children to have, when to have them and how to stop having them without jeopardizing the opportunity for meaningful sexual relationship between the couples. Family planning has to do with individuals or couples making the choice as to if and when to have children as well as the number of children they choose to have.

Nelson (2021) defined family planning as system of limiting family size and the frequency of child bearing by appropriate use of contraceptive techniques. Lawtence, (2006) sees family Planning as a health services that keeps couples decide whether to have children and if so, when and how many.

Family planning services are defined as —educational comprehensive medical or social activities which enable individual to determine freely the number and spacing of their children and to select means by which this may be achieved (Bajos, 2019). These matters are influenced by external factors such as marital situation, career consideration, and financial position, any disabilities that may affect the ability to have children and raise them, beside many other considerations.

Fawole (2018) state that the methods used to achieve family planning are called —Birth Control Methods, they vary in types and usage. Some are contraceptives. Contraceptive

are devices used or pills taken to prevent pregnancy. They are not to be use without medical advices from competent and qualified medical personnel.

Adinma (2021) suggested that family planning does more than enabling women and men limit family size, it safeguards individuals' health and right, and improve the quality of life of couples and their children. Family planning is an important strategy in promoting maternal and child health. It improves health through adequate spacing of births and avoiding pregnancy at high risk material age and parities.

Family planning is one of the most basic essential healthcare services that promote and ensure reproductive health. Reproductive health is a complete well-being in all matters related to human reproductive system and its functions and process (World Health Organization, 2019). Enabling couples to determine whether, when and how often to have children is crucial to reproductive healthy family, for example, it help in preventing pregnancy related health risk, preventing abortion and it's complications, reducing maternal and infant mortality rates, as well as preventing Sexually Transmitted Infections (STD) including HIV. Early childbearing and other behaviours can have health risks for both women and their infants. In fact, waiting until a woman is at least 18 years old before trying to have children improve maternal and child health. Moreover if additional child is to be conceived is considered healthier for the mother, as well as for the succeeding child to wait at least 2 years after the previous birth before attempting to conception (USAIDS, 2017).

A number of contraception methods are available for family planning. There are natural methods and various chemical based methods, each with particular advantages and disadvantages. Natural methods to avoid pregnancy that involve vaginal intercourse include the Withdrawal and Calendar Based Method, which have little upfront cost and are readily available. Other natural methods including Locational Amenorrhea Method, long-acting reversible contraceptive methods such as Intrauterine Device (IUD) and Implants are highly effective and convenient requiring little user action. Other contraceptive methods available include: Combine Oral Contraceptives (CDCS), Progestin Only Pills (POP), Progestin Only Injectable, Patch, Vaginal Rings, Male Condoms, Female Condoms, Vasectomy and Tubal Ligation. According to world health organization (2011) each year estimated 800,000 women die of complication due to pregnancy, childbirth or unsafe abortions which can be decrease through family planning programmes.

Nonetheless, the low percentage of individuals using family planning services suggests that either some women are not planning their pregnancies deliberately or they are experiencing problems accessing this type of services (Klerman, 2016). Family planning in Nigeria is one of the pillars of safe motherhood where women can access services that would prevent unwanted pregnancies (Godwin, 2019). In Nigeria, family planning services are frequently delivered in clinics with little or no connection with medical facilities. The utilisation of these services in Nigeria is low when compared to the high fertility and population growth rate in Africa, high fertility translates into high population, and the growth rate was estimated to be between 2.5 and 3.0 per cent per annum (Oyedokun, 2017). Moreover, Osemwenkha (2014) further stated that it is likely that the utilisation of family planning services can alter the population growth rate, reports have shown that contraceptive knowledge, and usage is very low in Nigeria, hence the reason for the high fertility and increased population.

The underutilisation of family planning methods in these regions is attributed to low literacy and low socio-economic status of women; and spousal communication on family planning that has also been found to influence contraception use (Oyedokun, 2017). Again, a study by Chacko (2021) found that the number of living sons a woman has also influences her contraceptive use. The resultant effect of underutilisation of these services is a leading cause to the high prevalence of teenage pregnancy and maternal deaths in Africa.

According to Cleland, et al. (2020) family planning services are necessary for the widespread of adoption of preconception care for planning pregnancies and counselling. The potential of family planning services is to promote preconception care which is limited by underutilisation of these services and adequate attention to preconception care during the reproductive years is dependent on the woman and man planning their pregnancies, not only in respect to their timing but also on healthrelated factors that would maximize their chances for a healthy pregnancy and healthy infant.

### **Non-Compliance to Family Planning Services in Nigeria**

Despite tremendous efforts being made by Federal Ministry of Health of Nigeria in collaboration with both National and International Health Agencies to control the high population growth and reduce the incidences of maternal and child mortality, unwanted

pregnancies and induce abortion to thereby improve reproductive health among women of reproductive age through various family planning programmes and campaign; Nigeria still continues to be the most populous country in Africa with the population of more than 182 million people, and seventh most populous country in the world (Population Reference Bureau, 2017).

The indices of family planning in Nigeria is poor with the total fertility rate of 5.5, any contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR) at 15%, and a 16% unmet need for family planning, while in Katsina state the unmet need for family planning is 29.50% based on MICSS 2017 health statistics. These poor reproductive health and family planning indices contribute to high rates of maternal and child mortality. Unintended pregnancies are among the leading factors that fuel population growth that impedes Nigeria's efforts to meet the social needs of its citizen and achieve national development goal. Moreover, one of the major reasons for the unmet needs for family planning is male-partners dis-approval of the use of any family planning method especially in Northern part of the country (Henry, 2015). In 2017, over 2 million unintended pregnancies, 735, 000 unsafe abortions, and 12,000 maternal deaths were averted. In the light of the advances made in the National FP indices since 2012, the FGON in collaboration with its partners, updated its commitment at the 2017 FP summit to achieve a mCPR of 27% among all women by 2020 and increase its annual allocation for contraceptives to US\$4M. The data from Katsina inclusive.

Moreover, among other factors responsible for noncompliance to family planning in northern Nigeria include misconceptions about the services, poor cultural belief about family planning, lack of awareness of health implication of inadequate spacing , as well as afraid of adverse side effects of some family planning contraceptives (Ahmed, 2020).

Contraceptive use was lowest in northern Nigeria with 2.5% and 3.5% in the North West and North East region using modern contraceptive method respectively, and with unmet needs at 18-21% (National Population Commission, 2019). Child spacing is a critical factor which influence the outcomes of pregnancy. Further preventing the series of pregnancies provides a greater possibility of reducing maternal, fatal, infant, and childhood morbidity and mortality (Wallace, 2019).

Lawal (2021) stated that resistance to family planning and child spacing in Nigeria particularly in Katsina state has been deeply rooted in the cultural prejudices and wrong interpretations of religious injunctions. In spite of the immense benefits of family planning and child spacing to individuals and the nation, plus all efforts being made by Katsina State Ministry of Health to increase the knowledge of family planning among the community members, there are still large numbers of women in across the state who would like to stop or delay pregnancies but are not using any family planning methods (Bishir, 2017). It is based on the background that this study attempts to investigate the knowledge, attitude, and practice (KAP) of households towards family planning in Katsina State.

### **Importance of Family Planning**

Family planning prevents about one-third of pregnancy related to deaths; as well as 44% of neonatal deaths. At least two (2) years between births is needed to prevent adverse Pregnancy outcomes including high rate of malnutrition and stunting in children (UNICEF, 2019). When women adhere to World Health Organization recommended minimum inter birth interval of thirty three (33) months between two consecutive live births, the incidence of maternal and child morbidity rates reduce. Thus, prevention of rapid series of many pregnancies provides greater possibility of reducing maternal, fetal, infants and childhood mortality (World Health Organization, 2021). Other benefits of family planning are discussed as follows

#### **Prevention of Unwanted Pregnancies**

When a couple has good understanding of family planning as a concept and put it to a proper use, they are able to prevent unwanted pregnancies (Okoye, 2020). There are many couples who have given birth to children after they have desired to stop due to their ignorance or misuse of family planning methods, such mistakes will be avoided when couples use family planning method properly (Fawole, 2019).

#### **Prevents Abortion and its related complication**

Chandhick (2019) suggested that the use of family planning prevents the incidences of abortion and its attendant complications. Many people often resort to committing abortions

when unwanted pregnancy is likely to bring them in to disgrace or simply expose them to a health hazard. In such instance, they consider abortion as a way out without giving a deep thought to its attendant repercussions. Abortion is not advisable and is better to be avoided except when recommended by qualified medical doctor. Fawole (2019) viewed that It is always possible and better to starts life all over again rather than to resort to abortion which may terminate one's life or bring life-long agony. Since family planning prevents untimely and unwanted pregnancies, the incidences of abortion are eliminated.

#### · **Promotion of Meaningful Sexual Relationship**

Fawole (2019) noted that family planning practices removes the fear of unwanted pregnancies and abortion. As a result couples are able to enjoy safe sex, and are also able to meet each other emotional needs without one or the other seeking for satisfaction outside the matrimonial home.

This promotes love, joy and peace in the family.

#### · **Prevention of Premature Aging**

Wallace (2019) suggested that women who have many children appear older than their real age. Only few women who enjoy proper care, attention and better nutrition can maintain good health and structure under such pressure. Many studies revealed that women who enjoy good health and body structure even at their old age are those who maintain adequate spaces between pregnancies.

#### · **Reduces Maternal and Child Mortality**

According to world health organization (2018) family planning has achieved tremendous results in reducing the maternal and childhood mortality rates globally. For instance, it has been discovered that a women who has more than 4 children stands higher risk of dying during pregnancy and childbirth. Similarly, the use of contraceptives has reduced the incidence of unwanted pregnancies among teenagers especially girls less than 18 years who are more likely to suffer adverse event like prolong obstructed labour and abortions which are leading causes of maternal mortality. In the same vein, such under-age girls are more likely to deliver preterm or low birth weight babies who have less chances of survival (World Health Organization, 2013).

#### · **Promotion of the Health of Mothers and Children**

UNICEF (2009) documented that it is desirable that a gap of at least two to three years exist between childbirth to guarantee good health for both mother and the baby. A good

gap will ensure that the mother regains her strength before another pregnancy as poor health during pregnancy tells much on both the mother and the baby in the womb. Similarly, adequate gaps ensure that the baby enjoys long and complete breastfeeding and proper care from the mother. It is also a burden for a pregnant mother to have to carry another baby on her back because it is still too young to be left behind at home. To this extent, giving adequate gaps between childbirth will be a relief to mother and a great advantage to the baby (Fawole 2018).

### **Reducing Teenage and Adolescents Pregnancies**

Pregnant adolescents are more likely to have preterm or low birth weight babies. Babies born to adolescents have higher rates of neonatal mortality and morbidity. Many adolescent girls who become pregnant have to leave school. This has long-term implications for them as individual, their families and communities (World Health Organization, 2018).

### **Helps to Prevent STDs/ HIV**

Improve access to condoms, both male and female, reduces the rate at which STIs. Including HIV, are spread. Moreover, the extent that HIV positives women are better able to prevent unplanned pregnancies and births, they are also helping to reduce the rate of new HIV infections (Bishir, 2017). However, family planning reduces the risk of unintended pregnancies among women living with HIV, resulting in fewer infected babies and orphans. In addition, male and female condoms provide dual protection against unintended pregnancies and against STIs including HIV (Fawole 2018).

### **Help To Control Population**

Uncontrolled childbirth is likely to lead to population explosion either in the nuclear family, the extended family, or the nation in general. For example, some nuclear families are too large for a car they own such that going out or travelling together constitute a problem. Some cannot enjoy good comfort in the accommodation they occupy, while many lack the resource to afford good education and other good things of life for all members of the family. Some extended families are too large such that many of the children and grandchildren do not know themselves. God forbids that they meet themselves at no-man's-land and marry (Fawole, 2019). Family planning is a key to slowing unsustainable

population growth and the resulting negative impacts on the economy, environment, and national and regional development efforts (World Health Organization, 2013).

#### · **Empowering People and Enhancing Education**

Family planning enables people to make informed choices about their sexual and reproductive health. Family planning represents an opportunity for woman to persuade additional education and participate in public life, including paid employment in non-family organizations. Additionally, having smaller families allows parents to invest more in each child. Children with fewer siblings tend to stay in school longer than those with many siblings (World Health Organization, 2018).

#### · **Gives the Family a Focus**

According to Fawole (2019), the ability to regulate the size of the family makes it possible for couples to manage the present and to plan for the future. It is even possible to plan for future. It is even possible to plan for unborn child since he/she has been part of the plan from the onset with a regulated family size, implementing family plans is easy and if there will be changes, they are usually manageable, and the family lives with a define focus. All the above have direct or indirect bearing with knowledge of reproductive health and practice of planning. According to the 2011 MTS women who are currently using a family planning method were set to have a met need for family planning. Henry V. *et-al* (2013)

#### - **Family Planning and Reproductive Health**

A woman's ability to choose if and when to become pregnant have a direct impact on her health and well-being. Family planning allows spacing of pregnancies and can delay pregnancies in young women at increased risk of health problems and death from early childbearing. It prevents unintended pregnancies, including those of older women who face increased risks related to pregnancy complications. Evidence suggests that women who have more than four (4) children are at increased risk of maternal morbidity and mortality (Wallace, 2019).

However, family planning can prevent closely spaced births, and ill-timed pregnancies and births which contribute to some of the world's highest infant mortality rates. Studies proved

that infants of mothers who die as a result of giving birth also have a greater risk of death and poor health (UNAID, 2017).

Moreover, the use of family planning helps reduce the incidences of abortion and its complications. Every year, worldwide, about 42 million women with unwanted pregnancies choose abortion, and nearly half of these abortions, 20 million are unsafe. Some 68,000 women die of unsafe abortions annually, making it one of the leading causes of maternal mortality (13%). Of the women who survive unsafe abortion, 5 million suffer long-term maternal health illness. However, by reducing rates of unintended pregnancies, family planning drastically reduces the needs for unsafe abortion (World Health Organization, 2017).

In addition, one of the major strategies adopted for the Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV/AIDS (PMTCT) is the prevention of unwanted pregnancies among women who have been diagnosed and found with HIV. Contraceptive methods help to prevent pregnancies among this group. In addition, male and female condoms play vital roles in preventing STIS including HIV (World Health Organization, 2019)

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that;

Despite significant roles played by family planning services in promoting maternal and child health; poor cultural belief, lack of awareness of health implication of inadequate spacing, misconceptions about family planning services, as well as afraid of adverse side effects of some contraceptives prevent many people from practicing family planning especially in Katsina state, northern Nigeria

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made;

1. Health awareness programmes should be carried out regularly through mass media such as radio and television to educate households about importance of family planning and various contraceptives available
2. Government should provide adequate contraceptive in the hospitals and primary health care centres free of charge to motivate couples to practice family planning

3. Health workers should double their efforts in educating women about benefits of family planning especially during antenatal care services and routine immunization
4. Traditional rulers should be utilized by government to increase awareness of people especially in rural areas about the benefits of family planning to both mothers and babies.
5. Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs) should help in raise funds and resources, obtain technical aid including medical supplies and contraceptive, arrange counselling and exchange of information as well as make suitable arrangements for training of personnel in family planning in Katsina state and Nigeria.
6. Future researcher are should conduct more researches on the significance of family planning in promoting maternal and child health in Nigeria.

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