POLYGYNY AND FERTILITY LEVELS IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract
In Nigeria, polygyny has been implicated as one of the determinants of fertility levels. To understand the effects of the practice on fertility levels in the state, this study was undertaken. The specific objective was to examine the effect of polygyny on fertility levels in Benue State, Nigeria. Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) was adopted in the study. The study used cross-sectional research design, with Benue state as the study area. The population of the study were all adults. The formula by Cochran was used by the researcher to determine the sample size of 1,174 respondents. Multistage sampling techniques were used in the study. Questionnaire and Key Informant Interview (KII) guide were used. Face and content validity and test-retest type of reliability was used. The data were analysed with descriptive statistics and inferential statistical tools as well as manual content analysis. The findings showed that for majority of the respondents, polygyny provided many wives and thus reduced the frequency of sexual intercourse between the husband and the wives. Furthermore, polygyny encouraged child birth and enhanced early marriage. The practice encouraged sexual abstinence and gave room for exclusive breastfeeding. Generally, it enhanced birth spacing and limiting and gave prestige to husbands and also enhanced child survival. The study concluded that polygyny has influenced the level of fertility in Benue State. The study recommended among others the choice of polygyny is determined by individual, family and socio-cultural factors. To checkmate its influence on fertility levels, those factors must be addressed, including demand for children, child preference, social pressure and self-discipline. This could be achieved through sustained awareness creation through formal and informal mechanisms.

Keywords: polygyny, fertility levels, Benue State, Nigeria

Introduction

Polygyny refers to a man being married to more than one woman. There is also informal polygyny which is often referred to as 'outside wives' or 'private polygyny'. Informal relations such as extra marital affairs and the phenomenon of "sugar daddies" (where women have temporary/casual sexual relations with older men and experience economic gain in return) are not official and are thus associated with informal polygyny. Informal polygyny refers to the situation in which a man can be legally married to a woman but at the same time forms a domestic and sexual union with another woman (Naksomboon & Mondain, 2013). While formal polygyny may be practised more in rural than urban areas, informal polygyny is practised in Nigerian urban areas.

In some cultures, children born out of unofficial unions can only obtain a formal status if their father legitimizes their claim to their lineage. Oftentimes women who are involved in informal polygynous unions have a lower social and economic status than their husbands and his legitimate wife. A man's motivation to enter into an informal union is often to gain prestige, while a woman's

motivation is economic. Although the union may not be official, the informal relationship will still bring the man prestige amongst his peers (Kwaghga, 2023). Furthermore, informal polygyny is economically driven for men as it does not come with economic burdens as high as formal polygynous marriages. For example, in the informal polygynous union, bride wealth is not paid and the actual marriage ceremony itself does not take place. Hence, if formal polygyny does not pose economic constraints for men, it is likely that most men would be formally polygynous.

Polygyny is a subset of marriage, thus the motivations for polygyny overlap with the motivations for one to go into marriage. The main motivations for polygyny are reproduction, social prestige, socio-economic reasons and religion (Saumu, 2019). The clearly defined sex roles in Nigeria relegate men as the financial providers of the household and restrict women's roles as mothers and wives. This creates a situation where many women are heavily dependent on her husbands for economic support. Moreover, women's social status and sex roles are lower than those of men in Nigeria. For instance, women in Nigeria have limited access to property and can have more access to land through marriage. Traditionally, men have influence over resource production and sex roles, and polygynous marriage is a production of such a social organization. Long term perceptions of polygyny as a common and acceptable marriage choice, paired with the evident gender disparity, allow polygyny to survive.

The main motivations for polygyny in Nigeria are socio-economic and are related to reproduction. These two motivations are interrelated with each other and can be explained by kinship systems and the economic gain possible through polygyny. The kinship system relies heavily on the existing bonds between individuals in the family and it is through these bonds that people are able to prosper economically, politically and achieve a higher social status (Naksomboon & Mondain, 2013). The roots of the kinship system are based on the notion that family members are to support one another in times of need. The existence of the kinship system is based on family bonds, networks and the expansion of family members. Kinship systems and the cult of ancestry are the roots of such high pressure for fertility in the Nigerian society. Therefore, they are influencing the motivations to enter into polygynous marriages in Nigeria.

Polygyny coincides with the kinship system as large families are favoured, since it allows the male lineage to continue. In Nigeria, reproduction and economic expansion are related. Also, children are highly valued and the large family fits with the traditional kinship system in various ways. First, societal pressure on women's fertility, which is rooted in traditional beliefs, motivates women to enter into polygyny. In the case that the wife is infertile, it would be socially advantageous for her to remain married rather than to divorce. Thus, a woman in a monogamous marriage would allow polygyny if she is infertile, and in the case of infertility even a Christian monogamous Nigerian woman would allow her husband to take additional wives. Infertile women are faced with social stigma, challenges in their marital lives and difficulties remarrying in Nigeria. Thus, children are perceived as a blessing while infertility is seen as a curse (Naksomboon & Mondain, 2013). Consequently, when facing infertility, husbands and wives are willing to acquire "all necessary measures" to undo this curse, such as religious ceremonies, consulting medical specialists and entering into polygynous unions. Polygyny is a better alternative for women in Nigeria, compared to being divorced or allowing her husband to have mistresses.

Moreover, men`s economic motivation for polygyny is linked with the traditional agrarian system. Modern Nigeria still practises traditional farming in rural regions. In the Northern region, the Fulani's main professions are farming and pastoralism. In this region, polygyny is practised more than in other regions. Wives in the Nigerian culture have a domestic responsibility in the household. In households with an agrarian-based occupation, women's labour is crucial as their responsibility

lies in domestic work as well as farming (Kwaghga, 2023). Through polygyny men are able to maximize women`s economic and reproductive capabilities in the form of additional labour from wives and children. Women`s economic motivation for entering into polygyny may be related to the gender dynamics where they have to take care of the household as well as farming. Through polygyny, women in an agrarian society in Nigeria may gain a form of autonomy (Ware, 1979). The entering of additional wives into the family unit signifies a sharing of responsibility and women are less burdened in their everyday lives. For women, the division of labour is the main advantage of polygyny and they benefit from more leisure time.

For women in Nigeria, polygyny may be a better alternative financially than their husbands having mistresses. Women would rather enter into polygyny than their husbands having extramarital affairs and "three quarter of women in a survey would prefer additional wives rather than mistresses" (Ware, 1979) as they claimed that mistresses were more difficult to control than wives. However, for women, additional wives and children signify that they have to share resources with each other; whereas if they are in monogamous marriages, women will be able to accumulate more resources. Also, if a wife in a polygynous union has more children than her co-wives, she will have more access to the household resources than the others. In that sense, women have economic gain through reproduction as well and this leads to intense competition and often conflicts between co-wives. In a society which respects seniority as in Nigeria, senior polygynous wives gain higher social and domestic status over junior wives.

In Nigeria, there has been some arguments on the state of fertility transition; but with the current Total Fertility Rate (TFR) of 5.3 (National Population Commission (NPC) 2019), it is obvious that the expected level of fertility transition has not been achieved. In Nigeria, there appears to be high fertility among many families. A high fertility rate, which is defined as a TFR of 5.0 or higher, is characterized, among others, by health risks for children and their mothers, food insecurity, high unemployment rate, slow economic growth and environmental threats. Considerable evidence from economically advanced countries indicates that reduced fertility rates foster economic development and social well-being of the citizenry. The fertility level is undoubtedly conditioned by the cultural, health, political, demographic and socio-economic setting. Proximate and socio-demographic determinants of fertility such as current marital status, polygyny, age at first marriage, first sexual intercourse and recent sexual activity, postpartum amenorrhea, abstinence, age at first birth as well as use of contraceptives, education, place of residence and wealth index have been found to significantly affect fertility patterns (Alaba, Olubusoye & Olaomi, 2017). Fertility levels may be spatially clustered because fertility decisions spread across space. Communities that share boundaries are likely to display similar fertility behaviour, and thus spatial autocorrelation is possible

According to United Nations projections, Nigeria is expected to be at the threshold of reaping a potential demographic dividend (the economic growth due to the increase in the share of a country's population in the working ages and the corresponding decline of those in the non-working ages), following the expected decline in its dependency ratio from 88 dependents per 100 workers in 2010 to only 69 dependents per 100 workers by 2050 (United Nations, 2013). Likewise, the median age of the total population is anticipated to increase from 17.8 in 2013 to 21.4 years by 2050 and 32.6 years by 2100 (UN, 2013). The potential demographic dividend requires more than just declining fertility; it also requires full employment of the working-age population. Moreover, even with fertility decline, Nigeria's population will continue to grow due to population momentum. But continued fertility decline is a prerequisite for any demographic dividend.

In the last decade, many researchers and observers have suggested that Nigeria is one of the African countries in which the fertility transition (a shift from high, fluctuating fertility rates to low,

controlled fertility rates) has been stalling, although this fertility stall is debatable (Kwaghga, 2018). There is a great deal of uncertainty about Nigeria's fertility trajectory (e.g., fertility rate projections by the United Nations predict continued decline while many authors argue that fertility decline is likely stalled). This uncertainty reflects data quality issues.

In Nigeria, fertility levels have remained relatively stable (average TFR of 5.5) till date. Millions of couples and other categories of people who hitherto had no chances of birth have been granted opportunity to have children. An analysis of fertility estimates of Nigeria shows that; the country had a Crude Birth Rate (CBR) of 50 births per a thousand (50/1000) between 1965 and 1966 with a TFR of 6.60. The TFR was 6.50 in 1970. It rose to 7.30 between 1971 and 1973, and declined to 7.00 in 1975. It further declined to 6.43 between 1978 and 1982 and then rose to 7.40 between 1983 and 1986. Also, the TFR stood at 6.20 between 1987 and 1990, 5.40 in the years 1992 and 1994, 5.20 between 1995 and 1999 (Kwaghga, Shimakaa & Chinta 2018, Otieno, Agwanda & Khasakhala 2019). The National Demographic and Health Surveys of 2003, 2008, 2013 and 2018 show that the country had a TFR of 5.7, 5.7 and 5.5, 5.3 respectively. The TFR of 5.3 is 0.2 children per woman less than that reported in the 2013 NDHS (5.5 each) (NPC, 2019). These differ significantly from the UN and NPC projections of 5.16 and 5.18 between year 2000 to 2005, 4.76 and 4.91 between 2005 to 2010, and 4.37 and 4.63 between 2010 to 2015 (Kwaghga & Dewua, 2020). Consequently, this study examined polygyny and its effects on fertility levels in Benue State.

Research questions

1. What is the effect of polygyny on fertility levels in Benue State.

Research hypothesis

H0: Polygyny has no significant effect on fertility levels in Benue State, Nigeria.

Conceptual clarifications

Polygyny: It refers to a man being married to more than one woman. There is also informal polygyny which is often referred to as 'outside wives' or 'private polygyny'. Informal relations such as extra-marital affairs and the phenomenon of "sugar daddies" (where women have temporary/casual sexual relations with older men and experience economic gain in return) are not official and are thus associated with informal polygyny. Informal polygyny refers to the situation in which a man can be legally married to a woman but at the same time forms a domestic and sexual union with other women (Naksomboon & Mondain, 2013). This definition was adopted in this study.

Fertility level refers to the total number of children born by an individual or a couple. It is conventionally measured by TFR which is the total number of children a woman would give birth to at the end of her reproductive age if she conformed to the age-specific fertility rates of her cohort. It is usually measured per woman.

Fertility trends in most of the developed world in the late 1990s showed a substantial decline to two children or fewer from the traditional six children per woman. Despite the declining fertility rate, the total fertility rate (TFR) is still high in sub-Saharan Africa. In sub-Saharan Africa, the TFR is five children per woman on the average, whereas countries like Chad, Mali, Niger and Nigeria record over six to seven children per woman. Among sub-Saharan African countries, Nigeria is generally known as the most populous country in Africa with a population of over 174 million in 2013, which is approximately one-sixth of the total African population (Alaba, et al., 2017). The population increased to over 206 million in 2020.

Polygyny and fertility levels

In their study on beauty, polygyny, and fertility: theory and evidence, Cahu, Fall and Pongou (2014) found that an attractive woman is more likely to find a high-status husband. The authors showed that the contagious effect of polygyny on individual fertility proceeds from fertility itself being contagious in the sense that the number of children that an individual produces is positively affected by the number of children produced by other individuals in his/her neighbourhood. This is because the number of children determines the "prestige rank" of parents. Therefore, as an individual's neighbours produce more children, the rank of those individual decreases, inciting him/her to produce more children in order to maintain his/her social rank. This contagious effect of fertility implies that in polygynous societies, exposure to polygynous men and their large number of children incites individuals to produce more children than they otherwise would have if they had only monogamous neighbours.

In another study, it was found that polygyny leads to higher fertility and age gaps than monogamy, and to a positive price for women, while the equilibrium bride price under monogamy is negative (Tertilt, 2003). The study also found that the capital-output ratio is lower under polygyny. The reason is that under polygyny, investing in wives and selling children is an alternative investment strategy that crowds out investment in physical assets. It revealed that banning polygyny decreases fertility by 30%, compared with a 40% difference in the data.

Similarly, a study in sub-Saharan Africa revealed that enforcing monogamy lowers fertility, shrinks the spousal age gap, and reverses the direction of marriage payments. The capital- output ratio and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita increase. The reason is that when polygyny is allowed, high bride prices are needed to ration women. This makes buying wives and selling daughters a good investment strategy that crowds out investment in physical assets. It concluded that banning polygyny decreases fertility by 40%, increases the savings rate by 35% and increases output per capita by 140% (Tertilt, 2003).

According to the 2018 NDHS, 31% of currently married women report that their husbands have multiple wives (NPC, 2019). However, in 2013, 33% of currently married women were married to men who are in a polygynous union. These figures are similar to those reported in the 2008 NDHS (NPC, 2014). Polygyny has implications for frequency of exposure to sexual activity and therefore fertility. In Nigeria, men are heads of the household and have power and authority over their wives and children. Through polygyny, men gain social prestige and economic help in the form of wives and children (Naksomboon & Mondain, 2013, Isiugo 1994). According to Isiugo (1994), regardless of a man's financial status in Nigeria, children represent accomplishment and contentment and are fundamental for men to achieve a higher social status. Additional members in the form of children can signify added economic burden on the household, yet having many children is valued. The kinship system and patrilineal system in Nigeria are reflected in the gender imbalance which plays a part in making reproduction the motivation for polygyny.

Theoretical framework

Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)

The theory was propounded by Ajzen and Fishbein. Ajzen and Fishbein (1970) and (1980) proposed this framework initially in the 1970s and further furnished it in 1980. According to TRA individuals' intentions are crucial to developing certain attitudes that trigger whether the expected behaviour would take place or not. Attitudes can be positive or negative based on the beliefs people have about the outcomes of specific actions. The theory of reasoned action suggests that a person's behaviour is determined by his/her intention to perform the behaviour and that this intention is, in

turn, a function of his/her attitude toward the behaviour and his/her subjective norm. The best predictor of behaviour is intention and it is the cognitive representation of a person's readiness to perform a given behaviour.

The people around a person influence whether or not he/she participates or intends to participate in any behaviour strongly. In the case of polygyny, partners, relations, significant others and health officers have a lot of roles to play. Significant others expect the degree to which someone wants to conform to others' behaviours or expectations. People may also be inclined (or not inclined) to participate in a behaviour based on their desire to comply with others. The practice of polygyny has evolved overtime due do rational actions of the people to solve their everyday problems. The engagement in polygyny practices can, therefore, be deliberate and planned. The reasoned action theory, thus, explains the attitude, intention and behaviour of people towards polygyny.

Methodology

The area of this study is Benue State, Nigeria. Benue State is largely a rural area with a TFR of 4.5. The fertility level in the state is the second lowest in the North Central after the FCT with 4.3 followed by Plateau State with 4.7. It has also witnessed a relatively sharp decline in TFR from 5.9 in 2008 to 4.5 in 2018 (NPC, 2019), while Nigeria as a whole has recorded a negligible decline from 5.7 to 5.3 within the same period.

Study design: This study adopted cross sectional survey research design. The design helped the study to explore the effects between the variables examined.

Population of the study: The population of the study was all adults in Benue State. The projected population of Benue State as at mid-2021 was 6,671,019.

Sample size determination; The sample size determination formula by Cochran was used to determine the minimum sample size of the study. Cochran's formula ($N = Z^2 P (1 – P)/d^2$) of sample size determination for unknown population using a prevalence of 50% for involvement in polygyny and 50% for non-involvement. The choice of 50:50 was due to non-availability of researches on prevalence of polygyny in Benue State, Nigeria. The calculated sample size was 1067. To handle attrition rate, ten percent (107) was added to the computed sample size to give 1067+ 107 = 1174. Therefore, the sample size used in this study was 1,174 respondents.

Sampling techniques: A multistage sampling technique was used in the study. A cluster sampling technique was used to divide the study area into clusters using the existing internal structure within the state. Using this structure, thirteen (13) clusters were selected for the study. This was done to ensure a fair coverage of cultural diversities and differences that may exist within the state. These included Katsina Ala, Ukum, Kwande, Konshisha, Buruku, Gboko, Gwer East, Makurdi, Otukpo, Okpokwu, Apa, Oju and Agatu LGAs. In the second stage, proportional sampling technique was used to determine the representative sample size per cluster. It was done using the formula Y=N/n×SS/1. In all these clusters, the Primary Health Care Household (PHCH) listing within the council wards was used to get households where respondents were selected. The number of households selected was determined using the formula X=SS/NCW. The selection of the respondents was done using simple random sampling technique

Instruments of data collection: The instruments used in this study were questionnaire and Key Informant Interview (KII) guide. A questionnaire with close-ended questions with a scoring system (from 1-5) was used to elicit data from one thousand, one hundred and seventy-four (1,174) respondents. KII was used to conduct interviews with key informants to gain deeper understanding

of the subject under study. These were conducted in their residence. It was conducted with thirty-nine (39) key informants who were selected to provide deeper information in the study

Procedure of data collection: The data in this study were collected by the researcher with support from 13 selected and trained research assistants. The research assistants were holders of Bachelors (B.Sc.) and Masters (M.Sc.) degree in Sociology. The researcher trained the research assistants on the objectives of the study and the instruments of data collection.

Validation of instruments: The study utilized face and content validity of the instruments. The first test of validity was done by ensuring that the instruments captured the objectives of the study. Secondly, the questionnaire and key informant interview guide were presented to experts in the field of sociology for validation. One of the experts was a demographer. The questionnaire and key informant interview guide were presented to the experts for scrutiny with respect to their scope, coverage, content relevance and clarity. The necessary corrections were done to ensure that items measured the purpose for which they were designed.

Reliability of instruments: This study utilised a test-retest type of reliability. Test-retest reliability indicates the repeatability of test scores with the passage of time. Test-retest reliability measures the consistency of results when one repeats the same test on the same sample at a different point in time. Three local government areas not sampled for the study were used. The researcher visited Tarka, Konshisha and Ogbadibo Local Government Areas and administered the instrument to the respondents under close supervision. All the copies administered were collected and analyzed using Cronbach Alpha coefficient method of estimating reliability. The result indicated a reliability coefficient of 0.88, which indicates that the instrument is reliable.

Techniques of data analysis: The data collected in this study were qualitative and quantitative and thus analysed with descriptive and inferential statistical tools as well as manual content analysis. Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to collate the data. The analysis was done at the following levels:

The univariate analysis was done using frequency distribution tables, mean and standard deviation. A statement with a mean above 2.50 was accepted. The responses were reported in counts and percentages, especially socio-demographic data and other quantitative variables. The univariate analysis involved the use of descriptive statistics to examine the background characteristics of the respondents. The bivariate analysis was done using Pearson's R. The multivariate analysis was used to explain the association between postpartum practices and fertility levels. The multivariate analysis was done using binary logistic regression model to test relationship among variables. The dependent variable was recoded into a binary (low fertility-1-4 children and high fertility-5 children and above) to achieve this purpose. A mixed method (triangulation) approach was employed in analysing the data. The qualitative data was analysed using manual content analysis.

Ethical considerations: Respondents were informed that they had the right to decline participation or to withdraw from the study at any time they wished. Respondents were also informed there were no penalties or loss of benefits for refusal to participate in the study, or for withdrawal from it. Participation in the study was therefore voluntary. Consent of respondents were sought before administration of questionnaires and confidentiality of information were assured as copies of the questionnaire were anonymously filled. Efforts were made to avoid harm or risk to respondents as a result of their participation in the study. The analysis was done without any form of bias.

Findings

Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents.

The findings of the study revealed an average age of 31.9 years. This implied the youthful nature of people in the study area. Majority of the respondents had secondary education followed by those who attained tertiary education. This portrayed the extent of formal education among women in Benue State. Also, most of the respondents were Christians. Benue State is generally dominated by Christians of different denominations with numerous churches. This result confirmed the true religious life of the women. In terms of sources of livelihood, farming constituted the main source of living of the respondents, followed by employment in private establishments. Interestingly, a larger proportion of women in Benue state are farmers who eke a living from agriculture. The inability of governments over the years to employ citizens in the formal sector of the economy and the low level of education have pushed many into the informal sector where employment opportunities exist.

The estimated income of the respondents per annum showed a majority earned less than N200, 000 per annum. This showed the low financial status of women in the state. Many of the respondents had between one to four children. This relates with the findings of 2018 NDHS (NPC, 2019) which also implied the probability of decline in the next NDHS. With regards to the population in households, most of the households had populations of seven people and above, followed by those with four to six persons. This implied the extended nature of families and large households prevalent in the area. In terms of marriage type, a higher percent of the respondents was in polygynous marriages. Findings on the place of residence of respondents showed most of them lived in rural areas. Benue State is largely rural, with relatively fewer persons dwelling in urban areas. Findings on ethnicity revealed the Tiv tribe was higher followed by Idoma. The state is majorly populated by these two ethnic groups. The data is summarized in table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Socio demographic variables of respondents

Variable	Categories	Frequency (N=1125)	Percent
Age	31.9 (Mean)		
	15-19	33	2.9
	20-24	130	11.6
	25-29	323	28.7
	30-34	256	22.8
	35-39	196	17.4
	40-44	111	9.9
	45+	76	6.8
Educational attainment	No formal education	113	10.0
	Primary Education	99	8.8
	Secondary education	492	43.7
	Tertiary education	421	37.4
Religious affiliation	Christianity	1087	96.6
	Islam	28	2.5
	Traditional	9	0.8
	Others	1	0.1
Source of livelihood	Farming	570	50.7
	Government work	130	11.6
	work in private establishment	265	23.6
	self employed	160	14.2
Estimated annual income	less than N200,000	631	56.1
	N201,001-N400,000	297	26.4
	N401,001-N600,000	130	11.6
	N601,001 and above	67	6
Number of children	One to four children	934	83
	Five to six children	149	13.2
	Seven and above	42	3.7
People in households	One to four people	217	19.3
	Five to six children	348	30.9
	Seven and above	560	49.8
Family type	Nuclear family	588	52.3
	Extended family	523	46.5
	Others	14	1.2
Marriage type	Monogamy	409	36.4
	Polygyny	674	59.9
	Single	42	3.7
Place of residence	Rural	651	57.9
	Urban	474	42.1
Tribe	Tiv	765	68.0
	Idoma	265	23.6
	Igede	54	4.8
	Agatu	22	2.0
	Etulo	6	0.5
	Other tribes	13	1.2

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The data in Table 4.2 showed the relevant socio-demographic characteristics of respondents covered in the study. This was necessary in understanding the nature of respondents and their relevance in providing useful information necessary in addressing the study objectives. It also

had implications on the findings and its generalizations. Analysis of these characteristics showed the suitability of the respondents and validity of findings.

Polygyny among respondents

Polygyny was examined as one of the postpartum practices in Benue State. For majority of the respondents, polygyny provided many wives and thus reduced the frequency of sexual intercourse between the husband and the wives. Furthermore, polygyny encouraged child birth and enhanced early marriage. The practice encouraged sexual abstinence and gave room for exclusive breastfeeding. Generally, it enhanced birth spacing and limiting and gave prestige to husbands and also enhanced child survival. The findings are presented in table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Ratings of responses on polygyny among respondents

SN	Polygyny and fertility levels	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	Std.
1	It provides many avenues fo sexual favours for my husbanc	284	342	198	220	81	3.47	1.256
2	It causes competition fo children among wives	322	417	166	194	26	3.72	1.121
3	It reduces the frequency o intercourse	261	395	204	218	47	3.54	1.163
4	It leads to less children pe woman	164	293	231	367	70	3.10	1.187
5	It encourages child birth	216	391	233	252	33	3.45	1.121
6	It encourages early marriage	156	219	341	332	77	3.04	1.148
7	It encourages sexua abstinence	157	296	224	359	89	3.06	1.206
8.	It gives room for exclusiv breastfeeding	203	282	226	303	111	3.14	1.272
9	It enhances birth spacing anc limiting	220	280	221	325	79	3.21	1.248
10	It delays pregnancy and chil birth	209	263	210	359	84	3.14	1.256
11	It gives prestige to the man	239	382	210	229	65	3.45	1.195
12	It enhances child survival	158	257	319	305	86	3.09	1.167

Source: Field Survey, 2024. (N=1125). Key: Std -standard deviation

The findings in table 4.2 show the different ways the respondents rated polygyny in the study area. All the means were above the accepted point of 2.50, showing the acceptability of the postpartum practices. The values of standard deviation were between 1.1 and 1.2, which shows how close the values are to the mean.

Test of hypothesis

Polygyny and fertility levels

The third hypothesis used in this study was "polygyny has no significant influence on fertility levels in Benue State, Nigeria". Findings on the Pearson correlation of polygyny and fertility levels in Benue State revealed a significant correlation of the variables. Correlation among other variables were significant at 0.01 and 0.05 levels. The findings are presented in table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Pearson Correlation between polygyny and fertility levels in Benue State

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1.	Number of children born	1											
2.	It provides avenues for sexual satisfaction	0.097											
3.	It brings competition for children	-0.0	0.500										
4.	It reduces frequency of sexual intercourse	-0.0	0.405	0.495									
5.	It leads to reduced numbe of children	-0.0	0.253	0.359	0.468								
6.	It encourages child birth	0.0	0.315	0.436	0.333	0.237							
7.	It encourages early marriage	-0.0	0.249	0.336	0.268	0.317	0.413						
8.	It encourages sexual abstinence	0.0	0.241	0.228	0.320	0.474	0.117	0.283					
9.	It gives room for exclusiv breastfeeding	-0.0	0.191	0.275	0.251	0.348	0.170	0.358	0.521				
10.	It enhances birth spacing and limiting	-0.0	0.104	0.279	0.333	0.426	0.206	0.248	0.539	0.634			
11.	It delays pregnancy and child birth	0.076	0.240	0.237	0.337	0.451	0.163	0.191	0.469	0.476	0.549		
12.	It gives prestige to the ma	0.079	0.265	0.272	0.168	0.164	0.328	0.174	0.223	0.120	0.208	0.270	
13.	It enhances child survival	0.0	0.249	0.234	0.210	0.283	0.250	0.243	0.412	0.326	0.348	0.368	0.383

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

As shown in the table 4.3, most of the aspects of polygyny examined correlated with fertility levels significantly at 0.01 and 0.05 levels. By implication, these values indicated a significant positive relationship of the variables. Thus, the null hypothesis "polygyny has no significant effect on fertility levels in Benue State, Nigeria" was rejected and the alternate accepted.

The findings from qualitative data corroborated the result from quantitative data. In the words of a 42-year-old woman with five children from a polygyny home from Tiv;

> Men do not just marry wives for the sake of it. One of the reasons is to have the needed number of children, especially the preferred sex. I have five children so far because my husband wanted male children and I also needed females. So, this has given us these children and we are still counting. The other wife has four girls and she has opportunity to give birth to more children in order to endear our husband. This has contributed to the number of children we have.

Furthermore, a 40-year-old mother of three children from a polygynous home in Tiv asserted;

> Polygyny in itself does not bring about many or fewer children. It is the fertility and health status of the couple in polygynous homes that influence fertility levels. My husband and I wanted to have many children but my deliveries are all through caesarean operation. So, we are hindered by it in our quest to have many children.

For a 38-year- old mother with four children in a polygynous home from Tiv;

> There is a silent competition among us (wives) even for children born. There is the "battle" to outperform each other and please the husband and significant others. This has implications for fertility levels. Even though the husband is shared among wives, menstruation and ovulation periods differ among wives. This does not significantly

> adversely affect fertility. Polygyny activates and regenerates sexual lives of couples, thereby increasing fertility levels – all things being equal.

In addition, a 37-year-old mother of three children in a polygynous home from Igede opined;

> When I give birth to a child, the sexual desires of my husband are shifted to my co wives. Due to this scenario, he is usually not in a haste to return to me. This gives me more time to care for my health and new born. I am able to exclusively breastfeed as a result and cannot conceive shortly after birth. Often, the child is weaned and during this period, there is sexual abstinence hence no conception occurs. This has helped me to have longer birth intervals for at least two years.

Also, a 45-year-old mother of six in Ihugh, Vandeikya LGA, asserted that:

> Having many wives does not necessarily translate to many children. My husband has four wives. Two of them have never given birth. I have six children and the other wife has two. So, it is the ability of the wives to give birth that influences the number of children in the family. In fact, the desire for children and child preferences are some of the reasons for polygyny.

Similarly, many other key informants expressed similar views. For them, the act of having wives solely does not affect fertility level in the area. Generally, findings from KII showed correlation of polygyny and fertility levels in Benue State. It was found to have encouraged child birth, enhanced child survival, given prestige to men, enhanced birth spacing and brought about competition for children among co-wives. These are similar to the result from quantitative data.

Discussion of findings

The practise of polygyny was found among the respondents. From the findings, polygyny affected fertility levels in different ways. Firstly, it encouraged competition over children, gave prestige to the husband and ensured child survival. Its contagious nature propelled others to participate in it, thus encouraging high fertility levels. Secondly, it reduced frequency of sexual intercourse, enhanced birth spacing and limiting, encouraged sexual abstinence, delayed pregnancy, and thus reducing fertility levels among women. A previous study revealed that the main motivations for polygyny are reproduction, social prestige, socio-economic reasons and religion (Saumu, 2019).

According to a study by Tertilt (2003), when polygyny is allowed, high-status husbands naturally attract other women; this implies that female beauty increases the likelihood of entering into a polygynous relationship. A woman in a polygynous relationship produces fewer children than a woman in a monogamous relationship as long as the preference for reproduction relative to consumption is not too strong. However, the societal practise of polygyny increases aggregate fertility through two distinct channels: (1) by increasing the number of marriages; and (2) by triggering fertility contagion: a woman, whether involved in a monogamous or polygynous relationship, produces more children as polygyny becomes more prevalent in her neighbourhood.

The study by Tertilt (2003) concluded that a woman involved in a polygynous relationship has fewer children than a woman involved in a monogamous relationship. This effect is robust to the inclusion of a range of controls. It clearly follows from these analyses that, while polygyny prevalence positively affects individual fertility (regardless of whether a woman is involved in a monogamous or polygynous relationship), being married to a polygynist negatively affects fertility. However, in absolute value, the former effect strongly dominates the latter effect, so that the societal practise of polygyny positively affects individual and aggregate fertility. Similarly, a study found

polygyny leads to higher fertility and age gaps than monogamy, and to a positive price for women, while the equilibrium bride price under monogamy is negative.

Having more than one wife allows the nursing mothers to abstain from intercourse as she can be isolated from her husband, thus permitting uninterrupted breastfeeding. It also prevented unwanted pregnancy. Polygyny enabled the husband to satisfy his sexual urge with another wife who is not nursing a baby. This prevents early return to sexual activity by the women and helps in birth spacing and also limits the number of children the woman has (Kwaghga et al, 2021). Although the man may have many children from different wives, the practice reduces the number each woman could have, and given that TFR is measured per woman not man.

Conclusion/recommendations

Polygyny affects fertility levels in different ways. Firstly, it encouraged competition over children, gave prestige to the husband and ensured child survival. Its contagious nature propelled others to participate in it, thus encouraging high fertility levels. Secondly, it reduced frequency of sexual intercourse, enhanced birth spacing and limiting, encouraged sexual abstinence, delayed pregnancy, and thus reducing fertility levels among women. The choice of polygyny is determined by individual, family and socio-cultural factors. To checkmate its influence on fertility levels, those factors must be addressed, including demand for children, child preference, social pressure and self-discipline.

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