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Economic Empowerment of Women and Fertility Behaviour in Ogbia Local Government Area, Bayelsa State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated the role of women's economic empowerment on fertility behaviour using Ogbia Local Government Area in Bayelsa State as a case study. The study sought to know how different women's economic empowerment indicators can affect different fertility behaviour. The Quality-Quantity theory and Feminist patriarchal theory served as the theoretical framework for the study. The sample

selected for the study was made up of 394 women of child bearing age respondents. Data collected for the study were analysed using both descriptive statistics (percentages, mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient). Findings from the study revealed that women who are empowered economically, are more likely to have positive fertility behaviour. Based on the findings, recommendations such as; encouraging men to embrace the concept of women empowerment, government setting up small scale businesses for women to aid their empowerment etc.

Key words: Women's Economic Empowerment, Fertility Behaviour, Quality-Quantity theory, Feminist Patriarchal theory, Ogbia LGA

Introduction

The question of enhancing the status of women which is seen as a correlate to improving the society has been a burning topic in the lips of almost all global discourses. It is based on this that several international conferences, workshops, symposiums etc. regarding strengthening the very fragile status accorded to women have been held and are still holding. The World Population Plan of Action which urges 'the full integration of women into the development process, particularly by means of their greater participation in educational, social, economic and political opportunities'. It also stated that; 'The opportunity for women to plan births also improves their individual statuses' (Dixon- Muller, 1998).

Similarly, the international Population Conference of 1984 asserted that; 'The ability of women to control their own fertility forms an important basis for the enjoyment of other rights' (Dixon- Muller, 1998). Again the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action in 1994 added that; 'The empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of their political, social, economic and health status is a highly important end in itself. In addition, it is essential for the achievement of sustainable development'.

It further concluded that;

Reproductive rights rest on the recognition of the basic right of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so, and the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health. It also includes their right to make decisions concerning reproduction, free of discrimination, coercion, and violence.

In recent times particularly after the 1995 Women's Conference in Beijing, empowering Women has become a primary Policy goal. According to Dyson and Moore, Caleall and Calwell, Mason, Hogan et al, and Eswaran, apart from being an important goal in its own right, increase female autonomy has been shown to confer other benefits like; long-term reduction in fertility, higher child survival rates, and allocation of resources in favour of children in the household (Cited in Anderson and Eswaran, 2005).

Researches, policy debate, and action programmes are beginning to recognize the centrality of gender-based power relationships in influencing the decision making process by which reproduction is determined. It is based on this note that the centre of this research work seek to understand and explain the effects of women's empowerment indicators on fertility behaviour of women resident in Ogbia L. G.A Bayelsa State.

Literature Review

Studies in many parts of the world have shown that women's empowerment (that is given women more autonomy and opportunity to take control of their affairs and to reduce existing inequality when compared with men) is associated with reproductive health behaviour (Woldemicael, 2009; Upadhyay and Karasek, 2010; Wado, 2013).

A study by Solanke, Ogunjuyigbe and Shobanke (2014) in Nigeria revealed that the proportion of contraceptive use was higher among women who had partial control over own cash earnings. Again, their study revealed that women who participated in decision making in the family had a higher percentage of using contraception than those with low decision making in the family. Still, their study also showed that as educational attainment progresses from none to primary and secondary levels, contraceptive use correspondingly increase.

Wado (2013) analysing the Ethiopian Demographic and Health Survey demonstrated that dimensions of women's empowerment are associated with their contraceptive use in Ethiopia and some dimensions, including household decision making and general knowledge and awareness, are positively associated with empowerment. They concluded that women's empowerment is an important determinant of contraceptive use.

Again, a study by Upadhyay and Karasek (2010) demonstrates that several dimensions of women's empowerment and gender related factors are associated with a desire for fewer children in sub-Saharan African countries. In two of the four countries examined (Guinea and Zambia), women's egalitarian gender-role attitudes are

important in predicting a smaller ideal number of children. In one country (Mali), women's egalitarian gender-role attitudes are associated with both a larger ideal number of children and with limiting fertility to their desired number of children. In Namibia, empowerment appears to be strongly associated with having more children than desired a finding that was contrary to our hypothesis.

Several studies have examined women's empowerment effects on ideal family size preferences (El-Zeini, 2008; Isiugo-Abanihe, 1994). All found that at least some measures of women's empowerment were positively associated with smaller ideal family size preferences. For example, Woldemicael (2009) demonstrated that women who reported their husbands had all the decision-making power regarding small or large household purchases were more likely to desire large families (five or more children) compared to women who had at least some say in household decisions. Studies that assessed women's empowerment and ability to make fertility decisions (Gwako, 1997; Mason and Smith, 2003) all found significant positive associations. In Hindin's study (2000) using Zimbabwe DHS data from 3701 women, those who had no say over household purchases were less likely to have discussed their desired number of children with their partners, even after controlling for women's status variables (e.g., work status, education, literacy).

Some other studies examined associations between women's empowerment and birth intervals, but two reported the same findings using the same dataset and analyses (Al Riyami and Afifi, 2003). Among some others unique studies, five found significant associations, despite measuring birth spacing differently. They found that greater household decision-making power was associated with longer birth intervals (Upadhyay and Hindin, 2005). Some articles addressed women's empowerment and unintended pregnancy, finding inconsistent effects. In an analysis of 1200 women from urban and rural areas of the Philippines, Williams, et al. (2000) explored the effects of several domains of women's agency (i.e., women's income, education, degree of comfort in discussing sex with husband, and fatalism regarding fertility) on the likelihood of an unintended pregnancy.

In another study carried out by Kritz et al (2000) in Nigeria, showed that; 'women who were empowered in economic, social, and political dimensions had improved reproductive health outcomes; that is, empowered women had fewer children and used different methods of reproductive health.' Similarly, in a research to examine the net effect of women's autonomy on their health seeking behaviour in Ethiopia showed that women's autonomy was significantly positively associated with their use of maternal health services, even after adjusting for other individual and household variables (Woldemicael 2009).

Despite the much literature that examined the relationship between Women's empowerment and fertility behaviour, there are limited research exploring this same trend in the Niger Delta area where it has been documented that women have a higher socio-economic, political and cultural status compared to the Yorubas, Hausas and Igbos (Uzobo, Ogbanga, & Jack-Jackson, 2014, Sokari-George, 2003, Jaja 2003).

Theoretical Perspective

The Theoretical framework adopted for this study is the Quantity-Quality Theory of Fertility. The quantity-quality theory developed by Gary Becker in his '*Treaty on the family in 1960*' posits that; as income increases, households substitute fewer children of higher quality for more children of less quality. Becker conjectured that parents derive utility from both child quantity (i.e., the number of children) and the quality of children, which can be proxied by the amount spent on each child at given prices (Doepke, 2014). On this basis, Becker concludes that the income elasticity for child quality (i.e. spending per child) should be high, whereas the elasticity of quantity (i.e., number of children) should be low (Doepke, 2014). In addition to household income and the costs of children, Becker also considers knowledge of birth control (or the lack thereof) as a possible determinant of fertility.

Becker allows for the possibility that not all couples are equally skilled at controlling fertility, and he conjectures that knowledge of birth control is increasing with family income. Becker argues that variation in the knowledge of birth control explains why fertility strongly declines with income at relatively low income levels, whereas the relationship between income and fertility flattens and eventually turns upward at high income levels. In his theory, the relationship between income and desired fertility is generally positive (albeit with a low slope), but the relationship between income and realized fertility is initially declining, because lower-income households are less successful at controlling fertility. In the sense that the lack of knowledge of birth control among poorer households is assumed rather than derived from economic incentives, Becker's 1960 paper does not yet go all the way in founding fertility choice in economics (Doepke, 2014).

Methodology

This research work made use of the cross-sectional design and the non-experimental research design. the cross-sectional design was used in finding out the situation and phenomenon of women empowerment while the non-experimental research design was used in showing the relationship between the variables under study.

For the determination of sample size, this research works applied the Yaro Yemen's formula which gave 398 plus 5% level of attrition making it a total of 418 sampled population for the study.

For the purpose of selecting the sample for this study, both probability and non-probability sampling techniques were adopted. Firstly, the multi-stage cluster sampling was used to divide the area of study into three clans namely: Oloibiri, Kolo and Anyama clan. In each of these clans, the simple random sampling technique was then used to select four communities in Oloibiri clan, four communities in Anyama clan and two communities in Kolo clan, making the total number of communities selected to be ten. The simple random sampling technique without replacement was further used to ensure that communities in each clan are given equal opportunity of being selected. Secondly, the quota sampling technique was used to divide the population in the selected communities into compounds. Again in each compound, the systematic sampling technique was used to select the houses for the study, where every 3th house in each compound was selected until the target population was gotten. Finally, the purposive/judgemental sampling technique was used where the researcher selected the respondents that possess the required characteristics and information that the researcher is seeking for, in this case, women of child bearing age were used in getting our respondents.

This study made use of two sources of data collection. The first method is the secondary sources of data collection which was used to gather literatures relating to the subject under study. They include; books, journals, statistical surveys and publications, internet sources etc. The second source is the primary method of data collection, which adopted the questionnaire tool for data gathering.

For the analysis of data, frequencies and percentages were used in analysing the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents since these data are nominal and qualitative in nature. On the other hand, the data that are ordinal and quantitative in nature were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistics used for analysing the ordinal data are the mean and standard deviation that were used in measuring the level of women empowerment and fertility behaviour, while the Spearman rank correlation coefficient (Spearman Rho), through the aid of Statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) served as the inferential statistics used in testing the hypotheses in this study.

In an attempt to ensure that the instruments of data collections measure what they purport to measure; face validity type was adopted with which the assistance of experts in the field of demography and measurement and evaluation were taken into cognizance. In addition to this, a pre-test of the instruments was carried out before the

actual field study in order to assess its validity. Furthermore, to ensure that the data collected are internally consistent, the reliability coefficient of the measures of this study used Chronbach's alpha α . which obtained a variable measurement of 0.77 meaning that data collected were internally consistent, therefore the study is reliable.

Findings and Discussions

Analysis of the data below shows that, out of the 418 questionnaires administered to the respondents, 394 were retrieved and found valid for analysis. Therefore, analysis of the study was based on the 394 questionnaires retrieved and found valid for the study.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Table 1 below shows the socio-demographic characteristics of our respondents. From the table below, with regards to employment status; majority of our respondents (208) with 52.8% are currently unemployed, 122 of them (31.0%) are self-employed, while only 64 of them constituting 16.2% are employed by the Government.

Additional, our table shows that the highest number of respondents (131) with a percentage of 32.2 earns between N5, 000-10,000 per month, this is followed by 87 of them with 22.1% who earn between N11, 000-15,000, 82 of them (20.8%) earn between N16, 000-20,000, 12.2% of them (48 respondents) earn between N20, 000 and above, while only 46 of our respondents with 11.7% earn less than N5, 000 among the respondents. Still, with respect to educational level, the highest number of the respondents (169) with a percentage of 42.9 has no formal education; this is followed by 137 of them constituting 34.8% who has just primary education. 66 of them with 16.8% have secondary education, and finally only 22 respondents with a percentage of 5.6 have tertiary education.

Furthermore, in determining the age at first marriage among the respondents, the following results were obtained; Majority of them i.e. 181 consisting of 50.3% indicated that they got married between the ages of 20-24 years, 91 of them with a percentage of 25.3 got married between the ages of 15-19 years, 77 of them with 21.4% got married between the ages of 25-29 years, while only 11 of them with 3.1% got married between the ages of 30 and above years.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Socio-Demographic Characteristics	Categories	Frequencies	Percentages
Employment Status	Employed by Government	64	16.2
	Self Employed	122	31.0
	Unemployed	208	52.4
	Total	394	100.0
Average income per month	<N5,000	46	11.7
	N5,000-10,000	131	33.2
	N11,000-15,000	87	22.1
	N16,000-20,000	82	20.8
	>N20,000	48	12.2
	Total	394	100.0
Educational Level	Primary	137	34.8
	Secondary	66	16.8
	Tertiary	22	5.6
	No Formal Edu.	169	42.9
	Total	394	100.0
Age at first Marriage	15-19	91	25.3
	20-24	181	50.3
	25-29	77	21.4
	30 and above	11	3.1
	Total	394	100.0

Source: Field Work (2015)

Levels and Types of Women Economic Empowerment Measurements

Table 2 below shows the levels and types of women economic empowerment found in the area of study. From Table 4.2, the study revealed that the mean score of respondents concerning their ability to making larger purchase is 1.89 with a standard deviation of 1.37. This means that respondents' ability to making larger purchase is low. Furthermore, in measuring respondents' access and control over family resources, a mean score of 2.27 and a standard deviation of 1.51 was obtained showing that respondents access and control over family resources is still low. More so, with respect to measuring respondents' ownership of assets and lands, the study revealed that respondent ownership of assets and lands is low as a mean score of 1.82 and a standard deviation of 1.35 was obtained. Finally, in measuring the economic security of respondents, a mean score of 1.84 and a standard deviation of 1.36 was obtained showing that the level of economic security among respondents is also low.

Table 2: Women Economic Empowerment Measurements

Women Economic Empowerment Measurement	Categories	Frequency	Mean (X)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Research Decision
Ability to make larger purchase	Very High	31	1.89	1.37	Low
	High	40			
	Low	178			
	Very Low	145			
	Total	394			
Access and control over family resources	Very High	63	2.27	1.51	Low
	High	94			
	Low	123			
	Very Low	114			
	Total	394			
Ownership of assets and Lands	Very High	22	1.82	1.35	Low
	High	31			
	Low	197			
	Very Low	144			
	Total	394			
Rating of economic security	Very High	17	1.85	1.36	Low
	High	37			
	Low	211			
	Very Low	129			
	Total	394			

Source: Field Work (2015)

Measurement of Fertility Behaviour

Table 3 below shows the measurement of fertility behaviour among respondents in the study. Firstly, in measuring respondents' use of contraception, a mean score of 1.82 and a standard deviation of 1.35 were obtained thereby showing that the use of contraception among respondents is low. With regards to child spacing level among respondents, a mean score of 2.34 and a standard deviation of 1.53 were obtained thereby indicating that respondents' child spacing level is low.

Furthermore, the table revealed that respondents' level of Antenatal/Postnatal visits is low as a mean score of 1.70 and a standard deviation of 1.70 was obtained. Still, the table shows that the numbers of children respondents have is high as this item received a mean score of 2.50 and a standard deviation of 1.58. Finally, in measuring respondents' desired numbers of children, a mean score of 2.89 and a standard

deviation of 1.70 were obtained showing that respondents have a desire for high number of children.

Table 3: Measurement of Fertility Behaviour

Fertility Behaviour Measurement	Categories	Frequency	Mean (X)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Research Decision
Use of Contraception	Very High	23	1.82	1.35	Low
	High	43			
	Low	167			
	Very Low	162			
	Total	394			
Child Spacing Level	1 Year	107	2.34	1.53	Low
	2 Years	169			
	3 Years	58			
	4/above Years	40			
	Total	394			
Levels of Antenatal/Postnatal Visits	Very Frequent	21	1.70	1.30	Low
	Not V. Freq.	32			
	Not at all	147			
	Total	194			
		394			
Numbers of Children Respondents have	1-2	65	2.5	1.58	High
	3-4	128			
	5-6	149			
	7 and above	52			
	Total	394			
Desired Number of Children	1-2	62	2.89	1.70	High
	3-4	238			
	5-6	83			
	7 and above	11			
	Total	394			

Source: Field Research (2015).

Hypotheses Testing

For the testing of our hypotheses, the spearman correlation coefficient was used. This statistical tool is used to compare degree of association between two variables. If the Spearman correlation is statistically significant the two variables are strongly correlated. Conventionally the 5% level of significance is used for hypotheses testing. Hence, if the probability value of the spearman ranks coefficient is less than

0.05, the coefficient is statistically significant, we therefore reject the null hypotheses of no significant relationship and conclude that the two variables are significantly related.

Ho1: *Women employment status has no effect on the numbers of children they have.*

From table 4 below, the spearman ranks coefficient is 0.935 while the coefficient significant level is 0.000. Based on this, we therefore reject the null hypothesis of no significant relationship between women employment status and numbers of children and accept the alternate which states that women employment status and numbers of children are significantly related. Longwe, Smits, and de Jong (2013), Agüero and Marks (2008), Boushey (2008), in their studies also found a relationship between women employment status and the numbers of children women have.

Table 4: Correlations of women employment status and numbers of children

	Employment status	Numbers of Children
Spearman Rho Numbers of children correlation coefficient	1.000	.935
Sig. (2 tailed)	.	.000
N	394	394
Numbers children correlation coefficient	.935	1.000
Sig. (2 tailed)	.000	.
N	394	394

Source: SPSS Output result (2015)

Ho2: *Women access and control over family resources does not have any effect on Ante/Post-natal visits.*

Table 5 below indicated that the spearman ranks coefficient is 0.750 while the coefficient significant level is 0.000. On this note, the null hypothesis of no significant relationship between women access and control over family resources and levels of Ante/Postnatal visits is rejected while the alternate hypothesis of significant relationship is accepted. Koblinsky, et al, (2012) also made similar findings in different parts of Africa in their studies.

Table 5: Correlations of women access and control over family resources and Levels of Ante/Postnatal visits

	Access/Control over fam. Resour	Levels of Ante/Postnatal visits
Spearman Rho. Access/Control over fam. Resour. correlation coefficient	1.000	.750
Sig. (2 tailed)	.	.000
N	394	394
Levels of Ante/Postnatal visits correlation coefficient	.750	1.000
Sig. (2 tailed)	.000	.
N	394	394

Source: SPSS Output result (2015)

Ho3: *Women economic security does not have any effect of levels of child spacing.*

Table 6 below shows that the spearman ranks coefficient is 0.661 while the coefficient significant level is 0.000, signifying a rejection of the null hypothesis of no significant relationship between women economic security and levels of child spacing, while accepting the alternate hypothesis of a significant relationship between the two variables. This finding is closely related to those of Cleland et al., (2006), Longwe and Smits, (2012); and Singh and Darroch, (2012), where they all found out that different women empowerment is closely related to child spacing levels in different developing societies.

Table 6: Correlations of women economic security and Levels of child spacing

	Economic Security	Child Spacing
Spearman Rho. Economic Security correlation coefficient	1.000	.661
Sig. (2 tailed)	.	.000
N	394	394
Child Spacing correlation coefficient	.661	1.000
Sig. (2 tailed)	.000	.
N	394	394

Source: SPSS Output result (2015)

Ho4: *Women ownership of assets and lands does not have any effect on desired numbers of children*

From table 7 the spearman ranks coefficient is 0.657 while the coefficient significant level is 0.000. By implication, this means that the null hypothesis of no significant relationship between women ownership of assets and lands desired numbers of children is rejected, while the alternate hypothesis of a significant relationship between the two variables is accepted. Moghadam, (2004), and Piras and Ripani, (2005), who also found a relationship between women possession of properties and desired numbers of children in some developing provinces in Southern African. In contrast, however, Smits, Ultee and Lammers, (1996), and Boushey, (2008), found no relationship between the wealth of women and desired numbers of children in some developed societies.

Table 7: Correlations of women ownership of assets and lands and desired numbers of children

	Ownership of assets and lands	Desired numbers of children
Spearman Rho. Ownership of assets and lands correlation coefficient	1.000	.657
Sig. (2 tailed)	.	.000
N	394	394
Desired numbers of children correlation coefficient	.657	1.000
Sig. (2 tailed)	.000	.
N	394	394

Source: SPSS Output result (2015)

Conclusion and Recommendations

From findings in this study, we can conclude that women economic empowerment is intrinsically linked with fertility behaviour. This means that women who have economic empowerment (as measure with ability to make larger purchases, economic security, access and control over family resources, etc.), are more likely to have a desire for lower numbers of children, make more ante/post-natal visits, have higher child spacing levels, etc.

The study found out that the women in the area of study have very low economic empowerment (as measure with ability to make larger purchases, economic security, access and control over family resources, etc.), The study also, found out that the fertility behaviour of the women in the area of study is very poor as they have a high desire for more children, poor use of contraception, low ante/post-natal visits, and low child spacing levels.

Based on the foregoing on the conclusion reached in this study, it becomes necessary make relevant recommendations for the major actors involve in study area in this case, the women, their male counterparts, the community as well as the government (policy makers), and Non-governmental organizations on the issue of women's economic empowerment and fertility behaviour.

Firstly, the study recommends that men in the study area should be encouraged to embrace the concept of women economic empowerment by seeing it as a condition for family wellbeing, and thereby work at encouraging their wives to become more empowered.

Still, at the community level, efforts should be geared towards raising public awareness about the issue of women economic empowerment by community and religious leaders, as well as local government authorities, Non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations stimulating community action toward their support for women's empowerment. This could include media campaign targeted on the entire community or awareness campaign in settings such as schools, work places and other institutions.

Government can play the role of supporting women in setting up small scale businesses with soft loan facilities, provision of education for women, giving women equal rights and privileges, encouraging women to be more visible in political arena, establishing of skill acquisition centres for women, organizing vocational trainees and the need for government to subsidize female education at the higher institution.

Finally, various NGOs that promote women's right, and positive reproductive behaviour and health should deem it necessary to carry their programs to the rural area where most of the violations against the rights of women take place. This to a great extent will give the women an awareness of their inalienable rights and privileges while the oppressive men who are bent on the subjugation of the women are persecuted.

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