

# Generational Variations in Purpose of Childbearing among Ever-Married Women and Implications for Contraceptive Behaviour in Idanre Town Ondo State

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## Abstract

*Demographic literature is abundant on the factors accountable for rapid population growth in Nigeria. However, knowledge about the likely implicit changes in the demographic imaginations of women in Nigeria is scanty. Hence, this study employed a qualitative methodology to explore the generational variations in the purpose of childbearing and implications for contraception among ever-married women within the social exchange framework in Idanre Town. The objective was to examine the implicit changes taking place in the demographic imagination of rural women by comparing three generations of women. The research team conducted 25 in-depth interviews (IDI) among purposively sampled ever-married women in April 2019. The data were content analysed. The analysis suggests that the purpose of childbearing varied across the three generations. The younger generation was less likely to indicate the desire to depend on children for their future survival compared to the middle and older generations. As a result, younger generation women would embrace contraceptives more than the other generations. Therefore, the exploration undertaken here suggests that the demographic imagination of the younger generation of women in the Town was undergoing implicit and noticeable changes that may continue to promote modern contraception in the population. Policies to facilitate female education and employment must continue to be the focus of policymakers in order to drive sustainable elevation of modern reproductive behaviour in Nigeria, especially in rural areas.*

**Keywords:** *Changes, Demographic Imagination, Contraceptive Behaviour, Idanre*

## Resume

*La littérature démographique est abondante sur les facteurs responsables de la croissance démographique rapide au Nigéria. Cependant, les connaissances sur les changements implicites probables dans l'imagination démographique des femmes au Nigéria sont rares. Par conséquent, cette étude a utilisé une méthodologie qualitative pour explorer les variations générationnelles dans le but de la maternité et les implications pour la contraception chez les femmes déjà mariées dans le cadre des échanges sociaux à Idanre Town. L'objectif était d'examiner les changements implicites qui se produisent dans l'imaginaire démographique des femmes rurales en comparant trois générations de femmes. L'équipe de recherche a mené 25 entretiens approfondis (IDI) parmi des femmes célibataires échantillonnées à dessein en avril 2019. Le contenu des données a été analysé. L'analyse suggère que le but de la procréation variait à travers les trois générations. La jeune génération était moins susceptible d'indiquer le désir de dépendre des enfants pour leur survie future que les générations moyennes et plus âgées. En conséquence, les femmes de la jeune génération adopteraient davantage les contraceptifs que les autres générations. Par conséquent, l'exploration entreprise ici suggère que l'imaginaire démographique de la jeune génération de femmes de la ville subissait des changements implicites et perceptibles qui pourraient continuer à promouvoir la contraception moderne dans la population. Les politiques visant à faciliter l'éducation et l'emploi des femmes doivent continuer à être au centre des préoccupations des décideurs afin de favoriser une élévation durable du comportement reproductif moderne au Nigéria, en particulier dans les zones rurales.*

**Mots clés:** *changements, imagination démographique, comportement contraceptif, idanre*

## Introduction

The population of Nigeria was estimated to be 201 million by mid-2019, and the natural growth rate is still as high as 2.5% (Population Reference Bureau (PRB), 2019). According to the PRB estimates, at this rate of growth, the population is estimated to be well over 400 million by mid-2050 in the absence of urgent and effective control measures. Use of any contraceptive methods remains as low as 17% while only 12% of sexually active women of reproductive age is currently using a modern method (National Population Commission and NCF Int., 2019). The consequences of this fertility behaviour are enormous. The economic, health and social consequences of the population growth are taking an impactful toll on the country already (Otolorin, 2019).

The implications of the picture of the population behaviour painted above have motivated scientific efforts to seek a reliable explanation. Demographic literature is abundant on the factors accountable for the population situation. More so, the literature is awash with evidence that the demographic behaviour of rural dwellers in Nigeria is a significant factor in the increasing population growth rate in the country (Wusu, 2016;

Wusu and Amoo, 2016; National Population Commission and NCF Int., 2019). In contrast, knowledge is limited about implicit changes and the context of the changes occurring in the demographic imaginations of rural women in Nigeria, who are vital in the reproduction activities. There is no known study (at least known to the authors) that have examined generational differences in childbearing purpose in Nigeria. Except for a relatively recent study among young women that considered the implications of gender revolution for their fertility goals, which alluded to a gradual departure from older women fertility behaviour (Wusu and Adedokun, 2017).

Childbirth is one of the most critical events in a woman's life in Africa. It marks a turnaround when a woman drops educational pursuit and career-building for motherhood and parenting (Wusu and Adedokun, 2017). Fulfilment of marriage is a function of the presence of a child in the home. Also, the joy of motherhood is near-universal in society. In a study that examined the importance of childbirth after the suspension of the one-child policy in China, Zeng and Hesketh (2016) investigated women's opinion on the decision to suspend the policy; most women approved of the policy. Many women were not sure about having a second child, but a substantial proportion of them felt pressured to have two children for the good of and as an obligation to the family. However, they also felt that caring for two children was burdensome and that they would have to sacrifice a lot in terms of freedom, energy and money.

In Nigeria, for instance, in Yoruba culture, the respect accorded a woman or a wife depends on the position she occupies, and a woman who is a mother attracts the highest honour because people revere motherhood in Yoruba culture (Makinde, 2004). Childbirth is a significant event in Nigeria, as childbirth is an earnest expectation in every newly formed home in society. A married man with children commands much respect compare to the one with no children. Therefore, women in a marital relationship are under obligation to bear children for their husbands because the level of regard given to them is associated with how they fulfil their responsibilities in such a relationship. In all the geopolitical regions of Nigeria, the importance associated with childbearing are similar, there is a high cultural value placed on childbearing but individual fertility goals and purposes vary (Adebowale, 2019).

Studies on family and reproductive health behaviour have pointed out various ways in which society has been changing owing to the influence of globalisation (Wusu and Isiugo-Abanihe, 2006). The transformation effect of globalisation, which has been promoting cultural diffusion is resulting to the adoption of new social attitudes, norms, values and traditions by individuals in society especially among the younger generation (Wusu and Adedokun, 2018; National Research Council, 2001). Westernisation has brought various ideas and values leading to the neglect of traditional beliefs about the purpose of childbearing and the popularity of contraception is soaring (Adebowale and Palemuleni, 2014). For instance, a study in the Democratic Republic of Congo reported that a quarter of women had an unmet need for family planning and that

modern contraceptive use was three times higher among urban women than rural women (Muanda, Ndongu, Messina, and Bertrand, 2017). The study examined some of the barriers to modern contraceptive use in rural areas, which include poor spousal communication, sociocultural factors, the desire for a large family, fear of side-effects and a lack of knowledge. Thus, the demographic literature in Africa has not well explored the purpose of childbearing and the implications for contraceptive behaviour. This study design aimed to contribute to the demographic literature and fill this gap.

The study employed a qualitative methodology to explore the context of the generational variations in the purpose of childbearing of ever-married women in Idanre Town, Ondo State. The study objective was to examine the generational variations in the purpose of childbearing and implications for contraceptive behaviour in the Township.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study employed the social exchange theory as the theoretical framework. A sociologist called George C. Homans developed the social exchange theory as a family of conceptual models (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). All social exchange conceptual models treat social life as involving a series of sequential transactions between two or more parties (Mitchell, Cropanzano, and Quisenberry, 2012). Exchange of resources in society goes through a process of reciprocity, whereby one party tends to repay the good (or sometimes bad) deeds of another party (Gergen, 1969; Gouldner, 1960). The quality of these exchanges is sometimes a function of the relationship between the actor and the target (Blau, 1964a).

Social exchange theory shows that the interaction between two people may vary along with the estimates of expected rewards and the costs. Rewards could be pleasures, satisfactions, and gratifications a person enjoys from participating in a relationship (Thibaut and Kelley, 1959).

In essence, social exchange theory involves a conscious cost-benefit analysis of social behaviour that actors engage in as they indulge in social interaction. According to social exchange theory, in their constant interaction with others, actors keep their interest in mind. Thus, any relationship with others is an exchange with a benefit in mind, which could be positive or harmful.

In the context of this study, in most cases, people marry or get engaged in childbearing, targeting the benefits likely to accrue to them after nurturing the children. By looking up to children to bring forth success to the family, women are expecting benefits from the cost incurred to groom the children from childhood to adulthood and believes that benefits gotten from them far out-weighs the cost of nurturing them. The theoretical framework suggests that economic considerations and personal benefits are the

motivations for childbearing.

In Yoruba culture, this type of cost-benefit analysis is represented by *onjeomo*, which is the benefit of bearing the cost of raising a child. Women who believe in *onjeomo* as the benefit of childbearing and rearing are not likely to embrace family planning to space and limit the number of children they have. They may sustain the opinion that the more extensive their family size, the higher their *onjeomo*. In particular, if such women maintain the negative attitude mentality that does not attach importance to giving the children quality training, the cost of rearing may be ignored in their childbearing lifestyle. Also, in societies with the tradition of sharing childrearing cost among extended family members women are likely to focus only on the benefits of childbearing since they do not solely bear the cost (Wusu and Isiugo-Abanihe, 2006; Wusu, 2012). Such women maintain primordial demographic imagination and tend to sustain reproductive behaviour that engenders high fertility level and rapid population growth.

On the other hand, women who do not expect such benefits from children are likely to embrace family planning to space childbirths and limit family size. In a population with a large number of women in this category, the purpose of childbearing may be to actualise some other goals rather than economic benefits, family planning is likely popular among them. Owing to changing social and economic realities in society, women may gravitate towards such reproductive conviction, thus experiencing changes in their demographic imagination (Wusu and Isiugo-Abanihe, 2006).

The main question explored in this study, therefore, is what type of cost-benefit analysis do women consider in Idanre Town? Are women given to the cost-benefit analysis associated with childbearing in the Idanre Town? What kind of demographic imagination is prevailing in Idanre? How do such imaginations vary across the generations of women identified in this study?

## Data and Methods

Idanre is one of the largest towns in Ondo State, Nigeria. Idanre has an estimated population of 178,053 in 2019 (projected based on 2006 census data, using a 2.5% growth rate). Idanre Town has three settlements fused within three kilometres, producing a Town stretching between rocks on either side up to the famous Idanre hill, which is known for its tourist attraction. According to oral presentation at the King's Palace, Idanre Town is the headquarters of Idanre Local Government (LGA). There are about 450 medium and small size villages under the LGA. According to the Ministry of Solid Minerals, Idanre LGA has the largest forest reserve in the country. The Idanre Local Government is predominantly agrarian. Some of its agricultural products of commercial value include cocoa, palm kernel/oil and rubber.

This study employed a qualitative methodology to explore the context of the generational variations in the childbearing goals of women of reproductive age in Idanre Town, Ondo State. The research team conducted 25 in-depth interviews (IDI) among purposively sampled ever-married women across the Town in April 2019. In line with the principles of qualitative methodology, the women interviewed were selected purposively. The purposive selection was carried out by each sub-team among three age categories, namely 20-39, 40-59, and 60 and above. We employed the categories to capture the young generation (20-39 years of age), middle-age generation (40-59 years of age) and older generation (60 or higher years of age). In the Town, the research team crisscrossed to capture the general sociology of the community. The team consists of 14 final year undergraduates, a Graduate Assistant and the Lead researcher. Before the data collection exercise, the Lead researcher trained the research trainees on how to conduct IDI. We engaged the study themes during the training session. The research team Lead discussed the themes with the research trainees for them to grasp a comprehensive understanding. While in Idanre, the research trainees, under the leadership of the team Lead, formed groups of twos in conducting the IDIs. In each group, a member (the facilitator) guided the discussion to ensure focus on the themes, while the other person did the recording and note-taking. Each research group obtained permission from study participants to record the interview.

Two themes were paramount to the research team during the fieldwork — first, childbearing purpose. Childbearing purpose was explored among the interviewees to assess their reason(s) for engagement in reproduction. We sought to answer two questions in the interviews. First, ‘what are the generational differences among the three generations of the study participants concerning why they got involved in childbearing?’ Second, ‘what are the implications of the childbearing purpose of the study participants for their contraceptive behaviour?’

The data generated through IDIs were content analysed. First, each group transcribed the recorded interviews and after comparing the transcription with notes taken during the interview each team prepared a mini-report and submitted same (along with the raw transcribed data) to the team Lead. The submitted interview data from each sub-team formed the basis of the analysis conducted. We went through the data to generate categories consistent with the study objectives, also noting memorable quotes used in demonstrating the findings, as evidence to support data discussion.

#### *Ethical considerations*

The study team obtained verbal permission from each study participant before starting each interview and confidentiality was critical in the field study. Each participant was at liberty to stop the interview and withdraw her participation at any stage. Team members informed each participant of this liberty before commencement of interview. The team

also obtained express permission before recording the interview. In addition, the comfort of the participants was paramount all through the interviews.

## Findings

Table 1 presents the background characteristics of the study participants. Majority of the participants were in the young and middle-age generations in the context of this study. As shown in the table, ten (10) study participants were in the younger generation category, twelve (12) were in the middle-age generation and three (3) in the older generation. The table also reveals that most of those interviewed had secondary education or higher. Christianity appears the religious affiliation indicated by the vast majority of the study participants. Also, most of the participants were self-employed, and the majority indicated parity lower than 5.

**Table 1: Social and demographic characteristics of study participants**

Characteristics	N (Frequency)
Age (generations)	
20-39 (younger generation)	10
40-59 (middle-age generation)	12
60 and higher (older generation)	3
Highest Education	
None	3
Primary	4
Secondary and postsecondary	18
Religious Affiliation	
Christianity	22
Islam	3
Occupation	
None	2
Self-employed	20
Employee	3
Parity	
1-2	10
3-4	11
Five or higher	4

*Source: Fieldwork, Idanre 2019*

## Purpose of Childbearing

The data showed that there were six significant categories of views expressed by the study participants concerning the purpose of childbearing. The six categories of the purpose of childbearing identified include 'to have errand agency', 'prevention of loneliness', 'childbearing is important to every woman', 'having someone to take care of me during old age', 'the joy of motherhood and 'the need to perpetuate family name'. Table 2 shows the number of times the interviewees mentioned the categories of childbearing purpose in the study. It is apparent that errand agency and importance of childbearing to women were the most mentioned purposes among younger generation women. Among the middle age generation women, the most frequently mentioned purpose of childbearing was the expectation that their children would help take care of them in the future. The same purpose was given by the sole participant in the older generation that discussed the subject matter.

**Table 2:** Number of study participants who indicated the categories of the purpose of childbearing

Purpose of Childbearing	Number of Study Participants		
	Younger Generation	Middle-age Generation	Older Generation
To have errand agency	4	2	-
Prevention of loneliness	1	2	-
Childbearing is important to every woman	4	3	-
Having someone to take care of me during old age	3	5	2
The joy of motherhood	1	-	-
The need to perpetuate family name	1	-	-

In the content analysis of the IDI data, we observed that the six categories of the purpose of childbearing were widespread among the study participants in the younger generation. It is also of note that women in the younger generation group were the only one that mentioned the joy of motherhood and the need to carry on the family name as purposes of childbearing. In contrast, among the middle age generation, almost all the study participants in this category reported that the chief purpose of childbearing



to them was to have persons who would take care of them in their old age. Among the older generation, out of the three women in this category that agreed to participate in the study, two participants agreed that their primary goal for childbearing was to have children that would take care of them in their old age.

The drive to have persons to send on errands is one of the six categories of the views expressed as the purpose of childbearing in the study setting. This goal was only mentioned among the younger and middle-age generation study participants. For instance, a 25-year-old study participant in the younger generation group believed that her principal purpose of childbearing was to have someone to send on an errand. Related to the first purpose is the drive to have children in order to avoid loneliness in life. The 25-year-old participant thought that when a woman has children around her, she is not likely to suffer the feeling of loneliness. Given the above, the study participants believed that childbearing is a vital assignment a woman has to undertake.

The goal of childbearing is that one needs to have a child. Another essential reason is to have someone to send on errands, and a woman will not feel lonely when she has children around her. (A 25-year-old participant, Idanre Town)

The most popular purpose of childbearing that was common to the three generations of women was the concern for future security. They all voiced out that one crucial reason for bearing children was to have a sufficient number of children that would take care of them in both immediate and remote future. However, childbearing to have care givers in the future was more prevalent among ever-married women in the 40 – 59 years and 60 years or higher age groups than the younger women. For instance, a 45-year-old woman expressed her purpose for childbearing that she would become the responsibility of her children in her old age. Another ever married woman (aged 50) argued that the purpose of having children was for them to take adequate care of their parents in old age. Thus, childbearing as a means of assuring a secured future was very common among women of 40 to 59 age group. Another participant in the oldest generation emphasised the importance of the purpose of having children to have care givers in old age.

My childbearing goals are for future purpose. Children serve as a peace of mind to their parents. When I start getting old, they will be in a position to help me. I believe that when you take care of your children they will also take care of you in the future. I will become their responsibility. They will change the condition of the family by building new houses and buying cars for me. (A 45-year-old study participant, Idanre Town)

After the birth of children we take excellent care of them because a well-trained child would take care of the parents and put a smile on their face at old age. When parents are getting older, they usually need the help of their children. (A 50-year-old study participant, Idanre Town)

I have four children and I am okay with that number. My purpose of childbearing is to have people that will take care of me at old age, people that will help me when I need help at an old age after they have finished education and secured a well-paid job. (A 60-year-old study participant, Idanre Town)

## Contraceptive Behaviour

Similar to the observation in the purpose of childbearing in the study sample, we identified four major categories of the perceptions of the study participants concerning contraceptive behaviour. The categories include 'contraception helps women to realise their desired family size', 'contraception helps women to space their births', 'it enables women to take good care of themselves', and their children' and 'contraception is not good, so I did not use.'

The content analysis revealed that most of the younger generation women expressed the opinion that was in favour of contraception. Only one out of the ten younger generation participants mentioned a negative aspect of contraceptives. A 25-year-old woman believed that the use of contraceptives was right and those who had started childbearing would find it very useful. She did emphasise that the use of contraceptives enabled women to space their children, which helps them to take care of themselves and their children. Moreover, another study participant, a 30-year-old woman, corroborated that the use of contraceptives helped her a lot. She said the use of contraceptives allowed her to space her children. As a result, according to her, she did not have children anyhow. The two study participants expressed the opinion that the use of contraceptives helped them to achieve their family size, predicated on their desire to give the best training to their children.

The use of contraceptive is good, especially for those who have started giving birth. It helps in child spacing and also gives me the time to take care of myself and the kids. It has positively affected my family size; I gave birth to the exact number of children I am capable of taking care of because I wanted to give them the best education. (A 25-year-old study participant, Idanre Town).

The use of contraceptive has helped me a lot. It has helped in spacing my children and I do not just give birth anyhow. I just wanted to give birth to the number of children I can take care of, I just wanted a perfect family. (A 30-year-old study participant, Idanre Town).

In contrast, a 38-year-old participant opposed contraception because the childbearing goal is a function of the number of children desired by the husband and how he treated her.

I do not believe in contraceptives; the number of children a woman should have should be a function of how the husband takes care of her and also depends on the number of children the husband desires. (A 38-year-old study participant, Idanre Town).

The middle and older generations expressions were mostly centred on the unacceptability of contraceptives. They believed that contraception is not right and they did not use at all during their childbearing days. In particular, out of the twelve study participants in the middle generation age group, nine thought that contraceptive use was not good, and they did not use any while they were bearing children. For instance, a 44-year-old participant justified her opposition to contraception with the biblical injunction that women should multiply and it would be disobedience to that instruction to embrace contraception. However, a minority (three) among the middle generation mentioned that contraceptives enable women to space their children and consequently take good care of themselves and their children. Another study participant, a 50-year-old in this generation, believed that contraceptive use was beneficial to her.

Even God, our creator asks us to go ahead and multiply, and who are we to go against God's rules. I am not a party to contraceptive use in childbearing. (A 44-year-old study participant, Idanre Town)

I believe in contraceptive as it helped me reduce the number of children, and with the way things are, I cut my coat according to my size. The use of contraceptive has helped women to space and reduce the number of children they have; it also helps in keeping a good body shape. Having too many children makes a woman lose her actual body shape. To me, these are the reasons women started using contraceptives. (A 50-year-old study participants, Idanre Town).

Similar to the pattern of perception on contraceptive behaviour in the middle generation, out of the three interviewed among the older generation, two said contraceptive use was not good and they did not use any methods at all. Only one of the older generation highlighted that they were aware that contraceptives were helping

women these days to realise their family size desires, but she did not use while she was bearing children.

I do not have what to say about contraceptive use, but I believe that most women use it as a source of avoiding pregnancies when they have reached their desired number of children. I did not use contraceptives, even when I was younger- there was nothing known as contraceptives as at then (A 60-year-old study participant, Idanre Town).

## Discussion

This study has examined the generational variation of the purpose of childbearing and implications for modern contraception among ever-married women within the social exchange framework in Idanre Town. The main objective of the study was to explore the generational variations in the purpose of childbearing and the implications for contraceptive behaviour among three categories of ever-married women. It is insightful to note that among the six categories of childbearing purpose observed, the expectation of future benefits from children was familiar to the three generations of women. In the parlance of the social exchange theory, the rational tendency of women to engage in the analysis of cost and anticipated benefits or rewards that may accrue from their involvement in reproduction would usually influence their childbearing behaviour (Mitchel et al., 2012).

However, an implicit but striking generational variation in the purpose of childbearing emerged in the analysis. While nearly all women in the older and middle generations opined the expectation that their children would shoulder their responsibility in the future, the younger generation of women opinions spread across the six categories of the purpose of childbearing, this finding suggests implicit changes are occurring to the demographic and reproductive imagination of the younger generation of women in the Town. Even though this generation of women still consider childbearing important, the purpose of bearing children to secure their future in old age did not capture the attention of the majority of them compared to the situation with the middle and older generations of ever-married women in the setting. It is plausible to explain the implicit changes to the demographic imagination of the younger generation of women in terms of their educational background and the influence of cultural diffusion owing to the globalising world (Adebowale and Palemuleni, 2014; Wusu, and Adedokun, 2018).

Obviously, for childbearing, the social exchange theory's position on the rationality of human beings was stronger among the middle and older generations of women. The degree of the cost-benefit analysis influence on the purpose of childbearing may be related to the tenacity of primordial reproductive beliefs among women of the older

generation. Also, when women in the older generations had children, the influence of globalisation may not be as impactful as it is with the younger generation. Therefore, the social exchange hypothesis, as far as reproduction is concerned, may be subject to the influence of social and economic changes as well as cultural diffusion. Thus, the influence of the socio-economic factors may account for the generational variations in the purpose of childbearing among the three generations of women much more than the rationality hypothesis of social exchange theory (Husan and Dutta, 2016).

Concerning the implications for contraceptive use, especially as it affects modern contraception, the findings suggest that the younger generation of ever-married women were more inclined to use than the middle and older generations. Maybe because the younger generation of women were likely more educated, exposed and mostly self-employed, and would consider alternative means of survival in the future rather than depending solely on children. Such women may realise that because of their purpose of childbearing, the cost of having too many children, given the increasing opportunity cost of childrearing and the dwindling chances of spreading childrearing cost among extended family members, embrace contraception (Wusu and Isiugo-Abanihe, 2006; Wusu, 2012; Zeng and Hesketh, 2016). In contrast, their middle and older generations counterparts were more opposed to contraceptive use in their expressions because of their limited access to education and employment opportunities, and they depended mostly on their children for sustenance. Consequently, the number of children was their emphasis and contraception was not an option for them. Hence, they maintained a negative attitude toward contraceptives.

## **Conclusion**

The study concludes that the purpose of childbearing varies across the three generations of women. The younger generation was less likely to depend on children for their future survival compared to the middle and older generations. As a result, younger generation women embraced contraceptives more than the older generation women. Therefore, the exploration undertaken here suggests that the demographic imagination of the younger generation women was undergoing implicit and noticeable changes that may promote modern contraception in the country soon. The generational variation in contraceptive behaviour may stem from the differences observed in the childbearing purpose of the study participants. Policies to push forward engines of social change affecting women such as female education and employment must continue to attract the focus of decision-makers in order to drive sustainable elevation of modern reproductive behaviour in Nigeria, especially in rural areas.

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