**Extended abstract for Population Association of America Annual Meeting 2019**

**Non-marital fertility in Nigeria: levels, patterns and associated factors**

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## Introduction

Many countries around the world have been experiencing fertility transition and Nigeria isn't left out of this as evidenced by the reducing fertility level. The TFR of Nigeria currently stands at 5.5 which is lower compared to the high levels experienced some decades back (PRB, 2018). Major contributors to the TFR have been summarized as the proximate determinants of fertility working in tandem with a number of socio-economic characteristics. These proximate determinants of fertility are marriage or the proportion married, contraception, postpartum infecundability and induced abortion (Bongaarts, 2005).

Marriages have always been universal and early in many sub-Saharan African societies until recent observed changes like the reduction in the proportion married. Marriage in the past was considered important for the onset of sexual activities and fertility and all these are inextricably linked (Musau, Kisovi, & Tonui, 2012). But recent evidence from a number of African societies has shown that marriage is no longer important for the onset of fertility due to a high number of births occurring outside of formal marital unions (Musau et al., 2012; Nzimande, 2005; Palamuleni & Adebowale, 2014; Udjo, 2001), this can be explained by the increasing wave of emancipation experienced by women in terms of more educational opportunities, gender equality and women empowerment. In Nigeria for instance, the proportion married of women married remained unchanged for a five year period of 2088-2013 at 69% while these women remain sexually active and in the face of unmet needs for contraception (National Population Commission & ICF International, 2014). The fact that these women remain sexually active while not in formal union could results in out of wedlock birth which comes with a number of disadvantages for both the mother and the child if the necessary programs and policies are not available to cushion the effect. Non-marital births has been described to be of two types; that is, births among young women who have never been married and births among those who were divorced or widowed at the time of birth.

Studies on non-marital fertility in Nigeria has majorly focused on teenage or adolescent fertility with one major exception focusing on premarital fertility in sub-Saharan Africa using Nigeria as one

of the countries of reference (Palamuleni & Adebowale, 2014). Majority of evidence in literature on non-marital fertility in sub-Saharan Africa comes from Southern Africa with studies reporting that South Africa has the highest level of non-marital fertility in the region at 58% (Gerenne, Tollman, Kahn, Collins, & Ngwenya, 2001; Maluleke, 2017; Musau et al., 2012; Nzimande, 2005). Given the paucity of evidence on non-marital fertility in Nigeria, this study attempts to examine the level, patterns and correlates of non-marital fertility in Nigeria using the data from the 2013 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey.

**Data and Methods**

The Study utilized data from the 2013 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey. Several restrictions were made in the data to arrive at the desired sample size of women who have had one live birth and have never been married. The weighted analytic sample of this study included 9, 195 women who have never being married and have had at least a live birth. The analysis was done at three stages including univariate to determine the level of non-marital fertility, bivariate level using the bivariate table to examine the pattern of non-marital fertility and multivariate analysis using the logistic regression to examine the factors associated with non-marital fertility in Nigeria. The logistic regression was employed because the dependent variable was dichotomous in nature i.e. 1= never married woman has given birth and 0= never married woman has never given birth. The independent variable for the study were selected based on reviewed literature. All the data analysis was performed using Stata 14.

**Findings of the study**

**Table1: Percentage distribution of non-marital fertility by selected characteristics**

|  | Non-Marital fertility | |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **No** | **Yes** |
| **Age group** | | |
| 15-19 | 5290 (97.50%) | 136 (2.50%) |
| 20-24 | 1979 (89.58%) | 230 (10.42%) |
| 25-29 | 855 (85.72%) | 142 (14.28%) |
| 30+ | 457 (81.13%) | 106 (18.87%) |
| **Type of place of residence** | | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Urban | 5094 (94.82%) | 278 (5.18%) |
| Rural | 3487 (91.21%) | 336 (8.79%) |
| **Level of Education** | | |
| No Education | 654 (97.00%) | 20 (3.00%) |
| Primary | 772 (88.68%) | 99 (11.32%) |
| Secondary | 5862 (93.19%) | 428 (6.81%) |
| Tertiary | 1294 (95.05%) | 67 (4.95%) |
| **Ethnic group** | | |
| Yoruba | 1584 (95.21%) | 80 (4.79%) |
| Ibo | 2051 (93.27% | 148 (6.73%) |
| Hausa/ Fulani | 1389 (99.88%) | 2 (0.12%) |
| Others | 3557 (90.23%) | 385 (9.77%) |
| **Religion** | | |
| Catholic | 1543 (94.03%) | 98 (5.97%) |
| Other Christians | 4306 (90.06%) | 475 (9.94%) |
| Islam | 2675 (98.52%) | 40 (1.48%) |
| Traditionalists/ Others | 57 (98.46%) | 1 (1.54%) |
| **Work Status** | | |
| Not working | 5695 (95.98%) | 239 (4.02%) |
| Working | 2886 (88.49%) | 376 (11.51%) |
| **Wealth Index** | | |
| Poorest | 495 (94.39%) | 29 (5.61%) |
| Poorer | 981 (91.35%) | 93 (8.65%) |
| Middle | 1781 (90.42%) | 189 (9.58%) |
| Richer | 2311 (93.23%) | 168 (6.77%) |
| Richest | 3013 (95.69%) | 136 (4.31%) |
| **Region** | | |
| North Central | 1357 (96.03%) | 56 (3.97%) |
| North East | 787 (95.27%) | 39 (4.73% |
| North West | 1431 (98.31%) | 25 (1.69%) |
| South East | 1679 (93.08%) | 125 (6.92%) |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| South South | 1615 (85.58%) | | 272 (14.42%) | |
| South West | 1713 (94.6%) | | 98 (5.4%) | |

**Table 2: Logistic regression model showing the factors associated with non-marital fertility in Nigeria**

| | Odds Ratio | CI Lower | Upper |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Age group** | | | |
| 15-19 | 1.00 | | |
| 20-24 | 4.24** | 3.32 | 5.42 |
| 25-29 | 6.72** | 4.81 | 9.39 |
| 30+ | 8.91** | 6.04 | 13.14 |
| **Type of place of residence** | | | |
| Urban | 1.00 | | |
| Rural | 1.20 | 0.88 | 1.63 |
| **Level of Education** | | | |
| No Education | 1.00 | | |
| Primary | 0.99 | 0.55 | 1.76 |
| Secondary | 0.72 | 0.39 | 1.31 |
| Tertiary | 0.28** | 0.14 | 0.54 |
| **Ethnic group** | | | |
| Yoruba | 1.00 | | |
| Ibo | 0.70 | 0.37 | 1.31 |
| Hausa/ Fulani | 0.04** | 0.01 | 0.21 |
| Others | 1.05 | 0.62 | 1.79 |
| **Religion** | | | |
| Catholic | 1.00 | | |
| Other Christians | 1.56** | 1.08 | 2.23 |
| Islam | 0.75 | 0.43 | 1.30 |
| Traditionalists/ Others | 0.36 | 0.04 | 2.93 |
| **Work Status** | | | |
| Not working | 1.00 | | |
| Working | 1.56** | 1.24 | 1.95 |
| **Wealth Index** | | | |
| Poorest | 1.00 | | |
| Poorer | 0.60** | 0.36 | 0.98 |
| Middle | 0.43** | 0.26 | 0.73 |
| Richer | 0.26** | 0.15 | 0.43 |
| Richest | 0.17** | 0.10 | 0.30 |
| **Region** | | | |
| North Central | 1.00 | | |
| North East | 1.49 | 0.90 | 2.47 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| North West | 1.45 | 0.57 | 3.70 |
| South East | 2.15** | 1.10 | 4.17 |
| South South | 3.38** | 2.22 | 5.14 |
| South West | 2.16** | 1.17 | 3.98 |

** $p < 0.05$

The findings of the study reveal that the level of non-marital fertility in Nigeria is low at 7%. The pattern of non-marital fertility in Nigeria from table 2 shows that non-marital fertility is lowest in the Northern part of the country especially in the North West region, the pattern further reveals that non-marital fertility is lowest among the Hausa/Fulani ethnic group. By other socio-demographic characteristics, non-marital fertility is highest among women with secondary education. Women in the rural areas have the higher percentage of non-marital fertility than their counterparts in the urban areas. Furthermore, the bivariate analysis showed that non-marital fertility is lowest among the richest population based on the household wealth index, for the age, non-marital fertility is highest among women older than 30 years of age.

Finally, the result logistic regression reveals that age of the women, ethnic group, religion, level of education, work status, wealth index and region of residence are the significant predictors of non-marital fertility in Nigeria and these were all significant at $p < 0.05$. Older women above 30 years of age are the most likely to have non-marital fertility, the odds of non-marital fertility decreases as women get more educated, tertiary women are the least likely to experience non-marital fertility. Women in the South South region of the country are the most likely to have non-marital fertility compared to women from other regions of the country in Nigeria. Women residing in the rural areas of the country are more likely than those in the urban areas to have non-marital fertility. Economically active women i.e. those who are working are more likely to have non-marital fertility compared to those who are not working.

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