

## **Socio-cultural perception and implication of childlessness in Nigeria.**

**Author: Latifat D.G. Ibisomi**

**Demography and Population Studies Programme,  
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.**

Marriage as well as childbearing is almost universal in Nigeria. High premium is traditionally placed on having children. Hence, desired number of children in the country is high. This study made use of information collected from 24 focus group discussion (FGD) sessions conducted across the country to explore the way people perceive childlessness and the implications it has for a man, woman and couple.

This study being national in scope, participants for the focus group discussions were drawn from the South Eastern, Northern and South Western geographical zones of Nigeria. These three zones were selected because they depict the three main ethnic tribes in Nigeria. The Hausa is in the North, The Ibo in the South East and the Yoruba in the South West. The FGD sessions were conducted at both rural and urban areas and the participants were men aged 35 to 59 and women aged 35 to 49 years. The participants were further stratified by level of education. In total, there were 8 sessions in each of the zones

The discussion sessions show that adherence to one religion or the other is universal in Nigeria and this has a profound influence on the way of life of the people including reproductive issues. Religious beliefs and injunctions came out as one of the reasons for

the high number of children that people desire. The sessions also show that it is customary to have children in all the cultures especially for lineage continuation and securing inheritance. The sentiments attached to having children culturally include the prestige and respect accorded to parents in the community. It also includes some of the roles (such as representation) that the children perform for their parents in the community.

Another important reason for desiring high number of children is expected old age care and provision. Majority of the discussants indicated the care they expect to have from their children in terms of love, company and being there to render any assistance they might require in general. This consideration transcends region, residence, gender and education differentials among the discussants. The family business need also came up among other reasons.

Given this scenario, childlessness of individuals or couple is a highly sensitive issue. The perception of people regarding childlessness especially in a woman is often derogatory and judgmental. Childlessness also has a number of socio-economic as well as cultural implications. Some of the discussants are even of the opinion that for someone that has no child, it is better the person was not born.

The study shows the need for reproductive health policies and programmes to further assist individuals and couples (in particular, those experiencing infertility problems) to achieve their reproductive intentions.