

Infertility as Predictor of Marital Disharmony among Married People in Igala-land

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between infertility and marital disharmony among married persons in Igala land in Kogi state. A cursory look at many Igala childless home revealed that they are riddled with marital crises. Thus, this work is a descriptive survey. The population of the study is 1020 childless male and female Igala married persons. Purposive sampling and a sample of 108 was used for the study. The krijche and morgan sample specification was used for the sampling. Mean and standard deviation were used for answering the research question, the hypothesis of the study was subjected to the independent t-test at 0.05. Finding of the study revealed significant relationship between infertility and marital disharmony. The work recommended that couples should be patient with one another as children are God's gift. Couples should also embrace the use of IVF as an alternative means to child bearing.

Keywords: Infertility, Marital disharmony, Predictor, Married people, Igalaland

Introduction

Igala tribe is a socio-cultural group among the settlers within the confluence of the two Nigerian rivers of Niger and Benue. James (2018) affirmed that the tribe belongs to the Kwa sub-group of languages with

enormous characteristics of Bantu sub-group of the same Niger-congo. The Igala speaking people is situated in today's Kogi state in the middle-Belt region of Nigeria, and is in fact the largest ethnic group in the state (Usman, 2013). The 1991 population census of Nigeria projected the Igala population to approximately two (2) million people. The Igala ethnic nationality is about the 8th largest ethnic group of the over 250 ethnic nationalities in Nigeria, (FRN, 2006). Igala is the name of the people as well as their language. “Abo-Igala” meaning, People of Igala with common ancestral origin.

The Igala speaking people attach considerable recognition to marriage and its practices, similarly, Aiyetan & Kolapo (2005) posit that in most culture, tradition and religion, mature men and women are considered to be incomplete without a spouse, except those on religious obligations that have decided to completely abstain from any sexual relationship, such as the reverend fathers and sisters and chief priests of some traditional deities and goddesses. Thus (James, 2018) admonishes that it is culturally important for every Igala sons and daughters to get married to the opposite sex who are not related by blood. This practice is considered to be a lifelong commitment to each other signified by contracts and sanctioned by couples, their parents and the society.

Marrying in Igala tradition and customs is an honour and custom fulfilment to the celebrants, the family circle and the society. This orientation is captured in the opinion of Hurton and Hunt (1964) & James (2017) they informed that, “Marriage is an approved social pattern whereby two or more persons of opposite sex establish a family. Marriage to the Igala person therefore, it is tied to their cultural, religious and purposeful commitment. Traditionally, marriage in the Igala speaking tribe is based on gender relation that prescribed the leadership of the husband

over the wife. It is sacred, voluntary and permanent, enacted to be of mutual agreement.

In the Igala context, marriage is seen basically as a process of procreation and as such a successful marriage guarantee peaceful and joyful atmosphere in the home which is most suitable for bringing up healthy and happy children. In general terms, the cardinal focus of every married person with the Igala tribe inclusive is to give birth to young ones who will take after them. Okon, (2010), therefore, affirms that it is a stable relationship in which a man and woman are socially permitted without loss of standing in community to have children. This justifies that in every marriage, the cardinal point is for procreation, and that completes the joy and harmony in the matrimonial home. This assertion proof that, marriage is meant to be enjoyed and not endured. It is endured, when marriage is plagued with uncertainties, infertility and marital crises. It becomes a mirage, when the relationship is beclouded with uncertainty. The desire to give birth to children in conjunction to this belief is universal. Succinctly, in Africa, and the Igala speaking area, there exists the belief that given birth to children is the demonstration of the consummation of marriage. Thus, procreation of children is deemed important in the Igala speaking area because, it is expected that, the children keeps the family lineage running, most especially male children. Thus, Miller (2011) says most people rates childless couples are significantly less fulfilled than men and women with children. To the Igala person, possession of children is status symbol or personified. This function is normative as other intention to marriage is secondary. This is in fulfilment to Gods command in the holy books, (the Bible, the Quran and traditional beliefs), in Genesis chapter 1 vs 28, God says "be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it". The Quran admonishes that Allah created men and women so that so that they

can provide company and to love one another, procreate children and live in peace and tranquillity to the commandments of Allah and the tradition of his Messenger, prophet Muhammed. (SAW). (Quran, 30 vs 21). In a situation of infertility in marriage, sharia permitted polygamous marriage. Succinctly, women are naturally averse to polygamy, thus, prompting marital disharmony. In the biblical concept from the Old Testament (Holy Bible, Genesis Chapter; 2 vs 24), equally clarifies that marriage involves spiritual, emotional and physical closeness, hence a common biblical saying that “a man shall leave his parents and shall cleave unto his wife and become one flesh” to multiply the world as started by Adam and Eve. Similarly, (Holy Bible, Genesis, Chapter; 2vs 18-22), asserts that, the family which is a product of marriage provide the basis for the building of the society.

This commandment runs short of expectation, as some are unable to fulfil this obligation as some could not get married, or married without children as a result of inability to impregnate a woman or the woman's inability to conceive a baby over a twelve months' period despite regular unprotected sexual intercourse after marriage. However, whatsoever contradicts this aim is tantamount to anarchy and disharmony in the marital domain. A major contributory factor to the matrimonial unrest is the unmet fertility found in either of the couple.

Infertility and Marital Disharmony

Those that are married for over one or two years without pregnancy or a fruit of marriage are considered to be infertile for one reason or the other. Thus, infertility is the inability to achieve pregnancy after a year of regular sexual relations or the inability to carry a pregnancy to a live birth. Christopher, (2020), put that the effect of infertility was driven primarily by feelings of moral outrage, anger, disapproval and disgust towards the

childless couples. Infertile individual experienced greater dissatisfaction among themselves and their marriages. This situation is sometimes attributed to women even when the man is to be blamed. And this usually results to a major conflict in most marriages. Should one of the couple become fed up with the situation and decide to have children outside the marital home, it frequently results in marital disharmony.

A common condition of female infertility is an inability to get pregnant and have a successful pregnancy. This is typically designed after a woman has tried to get pregnant through an unprotected sex for twelve months without success. Like other tribes, the Igala speaking people have related factors that are linked to woman's risks of female infertility. These include general health conditions, genetic or inherited traits, life style choices, age, evil attack; spiritual husband (Oko-Ikpakshi), long term infections and misdemeanor of abortion are all contributing factors to infertility among women. Likewise, the males are not left out of been link to infertility. Men who cannot impregnate a woman are considered to be infertile. This condition are considered to emanate from genetic aberration such as low sperm count (oligospermia), inability to produce sperm (azoospermia), long term infection, evil attack and spiritual wife (oya-Ikpakashi) among others. This assertion is buttressed by the opinion of Eizegerg, Park, Hollenberk, Lipshultz, schatzkin and Pletcher, (2011), who were of the pinion that infertility for men is most often caused by low or no sperm count and blockage of tubes that transport sperm and infertility in women on the other hand is caused by a range of other factors such as problem with ovulation, blockage of fallopian tubes and physical damage of the uterus. Generally, this situation has become a major challenge in marital homes with a prevalence percentage in an average of six (6) persons of one hundred (100) among the Igala speaking people (Field survey, 2022).

Whatever form of infertility, either primary (not given birth at all) or secondary (once given birth or conceived) is detrimental to matrimony of the married couples most especially the woman (Sohrabuad, 2005). In the Igala speaking tribe, the prevalence of infertility is 6% with primary infertility at 2% and secondary at 4%. (Field survey, 2022)

Infertility causes emotional distress for couples especially to the women who suffer the major social stigma of societal perceptions in most of the cases than the men. To corroborate this assertion Fidao, 2004 & Obiyo, (2016) affirmed that the infertile woman exhibits significantly higher psychopathology in the form of tension, hostility, anxiety, and depression, self-blame and suicidal ideation. Among the Igala tribes and other African tribes, women who cannot get pregnant are verbally or physically abused in their own homes, deprived of their inheritance, sent back to their parents, ostracized, looked down upon by society, or even have their marriage dissolved or terminated if they are unable to conceive (Vanbalem, Cain, 1986, Ahmed, 1987).

Infertility is perceived to create room for infidelity as both couple no longer trust each other especially the man who prefers to have a concubine or take another wife rather than looking for solution or the woman who wish to proof the husband wrong by having extra-sexual relation with another man who she is not legally married to. Similarly, the interest and interference of family members sometimes contribute to this disharmony. In the Igala speaking area, childless couples are disengaged from taking part or engaging in some traditional and ancestral ceremonies. Example of such is the Ibegu festival. A complementary situation is that of (James, 2017) who posits that in some communities in the southern Nigeria, pregnancy and child-birth are pre-requisite for entry into the stage of mature woman-hood and childless women are referred to as "man". In

similar ways in Ghana's ways of life and how children are valued makes it more difficult for a childless couple to cope with infertility. Couples who are infertile are stigmatized and disallowed to take leading roles in the society and other ancestral ceremonies (Ademola, 2002).

Over the years marriage instability has affected the growth and development of many Igala and Nigerian homes. The absence of love and trust, anti-social vices, socio-cultural and sex related conditions occasioned by infertility have contributed in no small measure to marital instability among married couples. Onucheyo, (2007) & Miachi, (2012) lend their opinion to this as they observed that this has manifested in the increasing rate of divorce and separation in the society which are social phenomenon either created by the husband or the wife or both. Onyia & Aniche, (2002) and Fidado, (2004), stated the causes of marital instability to include, childlessness, unsatisfactory sexual relation, rumour and family fractionalization. Linus, (2012) equally asserts that desperation on the part of female folks leads to marital instability.

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no empirical study has been carried out on infertility and marital disharmony among married people of Igala extraction. This study revealed that infertility resulting to marital disharmony was more prevalent among divorced married person in Igala speaking tribe compared to other causes of divorce or separation (Field survey, 2022), though largely under-reported due to the private nature of the phenomenon. Some of the studies on infertility tend to establish a psychotic cause for the inability to conceive, thus, this study attempted to identify some of the psycho-social consequence of infertility among the Igala speaking people of Kogi State.

Concerns

The fundamental purpose of marriage is to give birth to children

and ensure the continuous existence of the society. This is in obedience to the commandment of God both in the Bible, the Quran and the traditional religion. This is not just limited to the three dominant religions alone as all other religious affiliation equally sanctioned the procreation for the continued existence of the society. Thus, couples who are married are expected to give birth to children after a year or two of marriage. This feat has become impossible for some married couple who are fertility unmet either by nature or by abnormality.

The society is witnessing couples who have not given birth or have given birth once and could not give birth after one year of marriage. This has led to constant running from pillar to post, from clinics to prayer houses and herbal homes by those that are married but yet to have the fruit of marriage, while some get solutions to their problems, to others, the situation remains the same. Thus, this situation has given rise to social and psychological problems on both couples. This has resulted in the couple having family squabbles resulting to court cases, domestic violence and subsequently separation or divorce. Thus, this study investigates the extent to which infertility has caused disharmony among couples and its consequences to the couple and the society.

Research Question and Hypothesis

To what extent does infertility causes marital disharmony among couples?

There is no significant difference in the opinion of respondents on the extent to which infertility causes marital disharmony among couples.

Methodology

This work is a descriptive survey. It is purposive sampling methods that seek information by visiting hospitals and clinics (public and privates), courts, prayer houses and the church. The population of the study is

comprised of men and women within the age bracket of 18-50 who are unable to get child among the Igala speaking tribe of Kogi State. The target population is one thousand and twenty married and divorced men and women, (1020) the sample of the study is one hundred and eight respondents (108) using the sample specification chart of krejchic and Morgan (1970). A structured closed questionnaire, close interviews and observations was conducted on the respondents. The instrument was validated by medical experts, and religious clergy and psychologists. The analysis of the study was done using the independent t-test at an alpha of 0.05 to find the association between infertility and marital disharmony. The reliability coefficient of the instrument is 0.87 and standard value of 0.90 respectively.

Analysis

Table 1: The extent to which infertility causes marital disharmony among married couples

S/N	Item Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	SD
1	Couples that find it difficult to have a child after one year of marriage enjoy peace in their home.	34 31.5%	00 0%	14 13.0%	60 45.5%	3.8704	.33346
2	Couple that cannot have a child in their marital relationship becomes object of ridicule to neighbours	39 36.1%	69 63.9%	00 0%	00 0%	3.3611	.48256
3	Couples that cannot bear a child enjoy marriage stability.	14 13.0%	60 45.5%	34 31.5%	00 0%	3.8704	.33746
4	Childless couple always enjoy sex in their homes	00 0%	00 0%	94 87.0%	14 13.0%	1.8704	.33746

S/N	Item Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	SD
5	Couples that cannot bear a child always quarrel and seek for divorce	00 0%	66 61.1%	42 38.9%	00 0%	2.6111	.48977
6	Childless couple always live happily	00 0%	00 0%	67 62.0%	41 38.0%	1.3796	.48756
7	Couples that cannot bear a child always attempt or have extra marital engagement	14 13.0%	00 0%	52 48.1%	42 39.9%	1.8704	.94812
8	Men that do not bear a child from the wife always consider additional wives	14 13.0%	00 0%	52 48.1%	42 39.9%	1.8704	.94812
9	Couples that do not have a child attracts external interference from friends and relatives.	00 0%	00 0%	28 25.9%	80 74.1%	1.2593	.44027
10	Childless couples always sees one another as suspect and responsible for the problem.	00 0%	00 0%	39 36.1%	28 25.9%	2.5000	1.24180

Response rate as presented in table one showed that the respondent totalling 74 representing 58% agreed to an assertion that couple who find it difficult to bear a child after one or more of unprotected sex enjoy absolute peace in their homes. This response has the means of 3.8704 and standard deviation of .33346. In another development, the second item which posited that couple that cannot bear a child in a legal marital relationship becomes an object of ridicule to neighbours, with all respondents totaling 108 representing 100% in agreement with the means of 3.3611 and a standard deviation of .48256. Item number three posited that couples that cannot bear a child enjoys marital stability, in this direction 74 respondents representing 58% disagreed with the mean of 3.8704 and standard deviation of .33704. An item on the table posit that childless couple enjoy

sex relationship in their homes, to this respondents totaling 108 representing 100% disagreed with the mean response of 1.087104 and standard deviation of .33746. 66 respondents Out of 108 representing 61% agreed that couple who find it difficult to bear a child always attempt extra marital engagement with a mean response of 1.8704 and standard deviation of .94802 respectively. Couples that do not have a child attracts external interference from friends and relatives, this opinion generated agreed response of 108 out of the 108 respondents with the mean response of 1.2593 and standard deviation of .44027. While the assertion that Childless couples always sees one another as suspect and responsible for the problem generated 67 respondents representing 62.0% with the mean of 2.500 and standard deviation 1.24180 respectively. From the foregoing responses shown on the table, it is save to conclude that infertility among married couple in the Igala speaking tribe generates crises that affect marital stability.

Test of Null Hypothesis

Hypothesis: There is no significant difference between the opinion of male and females on infertility and marital instability among married couple in Igala speaking tribe.

Table 2

T-test statistics to find significant difference on the opinion of male and females on infertility and marital instability among married couples in Igala speaking tribe.

Effect of Infertility and marital stability among married Igala couples	Gender	N	Mean	St/d	Std/err	Df	t-cal	t-crit
	Male	208	28.489	1.324	.1892	416	.636	1.96
	Female	208	28.322	1.395	.1816			

Result of the independent t-test revealed that there is no significant difference in the opinion of respondents on the effect of infertility on marital instability among married couples in Igala land. Reason being that the P-calculated value of 1.165 is higher than the 0.05 alpha, while the t-calculated value of .636 is lower than the t-critical value of 1.96. Hence the hypothesis is retained.

Findings

- Childless couple encounter marital disharmony.
- Marital disharmony leads to psychological and social unrest among such couples.

Interview Report

- Joy is elusive in the home of couple that could not bear a child.
- Families without a child become an object of ridicule in the society.
- Childless couples are prone to divorce at the least provocation.
- Childless couple can lead to prostitution and polygamy.
- The home of childless couple is always beset with suspicion of infidelity.

Result from Observation

- About 75% of childless couple don't last in marriage; consequently 25% manage the situation in spite of the pain.
- Most childless couple attribute the blame on the women
- They are exposed to social stigma
- Relatives of childless couple mainly contribute to their unstable homes, which often lead to fractionalization of the home.
- Childless couples are constant visitors to health centres, religious centres and tradi-medical homes for solutions

Discussions

The findings revealed significant relationship between the opinion of male and female on infertility and marital disharmony among the Igala married person in Kogi State, Nigeria. The study showed that infertility is a major contributor to marital instability. One of the essences of marriage is procreation which provides a basis for the family as the building block of every society. If a man is unable to impregnate the wife, such woman will not want to stay and if the woman is unable to conceive a pregnancy, the man will not want to endure the situation. The result implies that infertility breeds lots of problem in the marital home which invariably leads to marital disharmony. This finding lay credence to the opinion of Okhakhume (2016), which shows that people with poor marital satisfaction experiences disharmony.

Afolabi (2011) equally alighted with this finding to a great extent, that there is significant relationship between infertility and marital disharmony. Findings from the interview conducted share similar opinion as generated from the structured questionnaire of the study. Thus, Onucheyo (2007) & Miachi (2012) lend their opinion to this as they observed that this has manifested in the increasing rate of divorce and separation in the society which are social phenomenon either created by the husband or the wife or both. Similarly, Onyia & Aniche (2002) and Fidaao (2004), put the causes of marital instability to include childlessness, unsatisfactory sexual relation, rumour and family fractionalization. Linus (2012) equally asserts that desperation on the part of female folks leads to marital instability.

Conclusion

Most previous studies predominantly focused on medical context and others on psycho-social and sexual perspectives, while this work

focused on the social consequences of infertility on the stability of marital homes. Both quantitative and qualitative methodologies were explored for the work. The pain associated with infertility is a concern throughout the world particularly the Igala speaking people. The result of the work implies that infertility among couple will likely lead to increase marital disharmony. The reason for this finding indicates that when there is no satisfaction in marriage, such homes are likely to be characterized by crises. The implications of social, cultural and biblical factors attached to children make childlessness couples go through intense pains, loss of faith, anger, frustration and disharmony.

Recommendations

This work recommended that:

- i. Couples should exercise patience with one another as children are free gifts of God.
- ii. Couples should embrace the use of IVF as an alternative means to child bearing.

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