

**PERCEIVED SOCIO-CULTURAL IMPACTS OF  
CHILDLESSNESS ON MARRIED COUPLES IN ZARIA LGA  
OF KADUNA STATE, NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT:** This study assesses the perceived socio-cultural impact of childlessness among married couples in Zaria LGA of Kaduna State, Nigeria. *The study explores* public perception of the causes of childlessness among married couples; sociocultural implications resulting from childlessness on married couples and contributions of family members towards mitigating the impact of childlessness on married couples. This Descriptive study engages 400 respondents through the use of a multi-stage cluster sampling method. The study found that childlessness is considered to be a medical problem, as such identified low sperm count (male), ovulation factor (abnormal menses for females), damaged uterus (female), fibroid (female), and STDs (both male and female) as the significant medical problems attributed to childlessness. The study also revealed that as a result of childlessness, the husband's mother mostly compels the husband to take another wife. The relationship between the wife/husband and their in-laws is strained. On the contributions of family members towards mitigating the impact of childlessness on married couples, findings show that the wife's relatives and her friends play positive roles. The study recommends a need for community education and awareness implemented through community-wide educational programs, especially for newly wedded couples emphasizing the medical aspects. In-laws and relatives from both sides should have shared feelings of empathy and concern for both couples and explore alternative strategies collectively towards ameliorating the problem rather than attributing blame to either of the couples that might lead to a strained relationship.

**Keywords:** Childlessness, Married Couples, Socio-Cultural Impacts, Married Couples, Zaria LGA

## **INTRODUCTION**

Marriage is considered a legally recognised means of incorporating new individuals into society. It not only unites two distinct persons in a bond of love and companionship, but also guarantees the perpetuation of the human species through procreation (Obioma & Manus, 2019). In the case of a marriage that does not result in the birth of children, it is seen as unfruitful due to childlessness. The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2018) reports that over 186 million individuals worldwide experience childlessness as a result of infertility. Infertility is a condition that affects the reproductive system of both males and females. It is characterised by the inability to conceive a pregnancy after engaging in frequent unprotected sexual intercourse for a period of 12 months or more. According to the World Health Organisation

(WHO, 2018), in Africa, more than 85% of infertility cases are caused by illnesses, which is higher than the global average of 33%. Additional concerns encompass inadequate nutrition, untreated sexually transmitted infections, and a previous record of at least one botched abortion. In around 50% of infertility cases, the husband's oligozoospermia is a contributing factor (Oyesola, 2022).

The high prevalence and global increase of childlessness have been realized through dependable statistics. Report has it that in sub-Saharan Africa, approximately 32% of couples are childless and face significant pressure to conceive and address the social stigma leading to a complex and heated situation (Fehintola, et al., 2017). Childless couples experience harassment and social exclusion. Prior to a comprehensive understanding of conception, childlessness was commonly attributed to women, which further contributed to the significant negative emotional and social consequences associated with being unable to have children.

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

Across the globe, and specifically among African cultures, the term "childlessness" evokes curiosity and elicits sympathy, particularly for couples who have been unable to conceive for a minimum of two to three years. Children are highly esteemed by Africans to the extent that their absence in a marriage leads to persistent conflicts, miscommunication, and distrust within the marital relationship (Oyesola, 2022). However, very little is known about the social impact of childlessness on married couples because there are inadequate empirical researches that examine the phenomenon in Nigeria (WHO 2018).

More so, early studies conducted on this phenomenon in Nigeria were carried out in the Western and Southern part of the country (Fehintola et.al. 2017; Egharevba & Oboh 2020; Alabi 2022; Oyesola, 2022). This also indicates the need for such studies in the North. In traditional Hausa societies in general, and Zaria in particular, marriages are initiated with the sole aim of procreating and nurturing family successors, and where conception is absent, a woman is considered infertile without further laboratory test to identify either of the partner responsible. This problem has continued to pose serious depression among married people and it is against this backdrop that this study examines the perceived socio-cultural impact of childlessness among married couples in Zaria LGA of Kaduna State.

### **Research Objectives**

The broad objective of the study is to assess the perceived socio-cultural impacts of childlessness on married couples in Zaria LGA of Kaduna State. The specific objectives are;

1. To understand the public perception of the causes of childlessness among married couples in Zaria LGA of Kaduna State.
2. To explore the sociocultural implications resulting from childlessness on married couples in Zaria LGA of Kaduna State.
3. To examine the contributions of family members towards mitigating the impact of childlessness on married couples in Zaria LGA of Kaduna State.

### Research Design

The study employed the use of a cross-sectional survey method. It allowed the researcher to collect an array of abundant data from the respondents by administering structured questionnaires on the individuals that were randomly sampled through the use of probability sampling techniques.

### Study population

The target population of the study were married individuals (male and female) randomly sampled. Data from the United Nations-World Population Prospects put the current metro area population of Zaria in 2022 to be 749,000.

### Sample size and sampling procedure

Data from the United Nations-World Population Prospects indicate the population of Zaria in 2022 to be 749,000. Taro Yamane's online sample size calculator (2022) guided the selection of the sample size. The sample size calculator guided the research to Four Hundred respondents. The sample size was determined based on a 5% margin of error, a 95% confidence level, and a 50% response distribution. Given that Zaria is divided into four primary regions, a total of one hundred questionnaires were delivered in each of these locations. Questionnaires were distributed to respondents that were randomly sampled using probability sampling techniques. Respondents were selected using the multi-stage cluster sampling where each of the areas was subdivided into streets and each street into households. Ten streets were selected from each of the four areas at an interval of two streets using a stratified sampling technique. Ten respondents each were drawn from each of the ten selected streets; making a total of 100 respondents from each of the four main areas.

## RESULTS

### Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The section presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents surveyed in the fieldwork. The questionnaires were distributed to only married individuals hence there was no need to capture the marital status of the respondents. Issues to be discussed include the sex of the respondent, age category, religion, level of education, occupation and area of residence.

**Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

<b>Sex of respondent</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Female	205	54.5
Male	171	45.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Age category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
18-28	80	21.3
29-38	85	22.6
39-48	135	35.9

49 and above	76	20.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Religion</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Islam	231	61.4
Christianity	94	25.0
African Traditional Religion	51	13.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Level of Education</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Qur'anic	90	23.9
Primary	19	5.1
Secondary	63	16.8
Post-secondary	204	54.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Civil Servant	96	25.5
Self-employed	113	30.1
Unemployed	142	37.8
Others specify	25	6.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Area of residence</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Zaria City	86	22.9
Tudun Wada	97	25.8
Gyallisu	103	27.4
Dan Magaji	90	23.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: field survey, 2024

Table 1 shows information on the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. Based on the information generated, the study findings revealed that more than half of the respondents (54.5%) were females. This is unconnected to the fact that whenever any issue about childlessness is being discussed, females are focal persons in such context and, as such have relevant and vital information to provide as it reflects on the daily plights they are confronted with in their matrimonial homes. More than a quarter of the respondents (35.9%) were between the ages of 39-48 depicting a long period of childlessness and experience sharing the daily trauma they were confronted with. The majority of the respondents (61.4%) practiced Islam as their respective religion; this is due to the nature of the study area where a majority of the population in the region was Muslims. More than half of the respondents (54.3%) have post-secondary qualification which is a result of the study area sitting at the country's citadel of learning with different institutions of higher education. More than a quarter of the respondents (37.8%) were unemployed while (30.1%) were self-employed. The residential area was mostly distributed among Zaria city, Tudun Wada, Gyallisu and Dan Magaji.

**Table 2: Public perception on the causes of childlessness among married couples in Zaria LGA of Kaduna State**

<b>Is childlessness a medical problem?</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Yes	270	71.8
No	100	26.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Medical factors responsible for childlessness</b>		
Sexual dysfunction (male)	10	3.7
Low sperm count (male)	100	37
Sexual Enhancement drugs used by male	29	11
Ovulation factor (abnormal menses for females)	27	10
Damaged uterus (female)	23	9
Fibroid (female)	20	7
STDs (both male and female)	61	22
<b>Total</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field survey, 2024

Table 2 discusses the public perception of the causes of childlessness among married couples in Zaria LGA of Kaduna State. The study found that more than half of the respondents (71.8%) consider childlessness as a medical problem. Based on this, more than a quarter of the respondents (37%) attributed childlessness to low sperm count (male) to be the major medical problem causing childlessness among couples. Ovulation factor (abnormal menses for females), damaged uterus (female), Fibroid (female), and STDs (both male and female) were a few other medical problems attributed to childlessness.

**Table 3, Contributions of family members towards mitigating the impact of childlessness on married couples in Zaria LGA of Kaduna State.**

<b>Individuals who mostly assist childless couples in seeking a solution to the plight of childlessness</b>		
Husband's relatives	43	11.4
Wife's relatives	210	55
Wife's Friends	76	20.2
All of the above	14	4
Others	33	8.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field survey, 2024

To identify the persons that mostly assist childless couples in seeking a solution to the plight of childlessness, the findings of the study hierarchically arranged the people that mostly assist to include the wife's relatives with more than half (55%) of the total respondents agreeing to it, wife's friends (20%) and the husband's relatives (11%). This is simply because the wife is always blamed first in the case of childlessness in any marriage which is why the wife's relatives are always the first in finding a solution to the plight of their daughter.

**Table 4: perceived sociocultural implication of childlessness on married couples in Zaria LGA of Kaduna State**

<b>Married couple mostly blamed for the case of childlessness</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Husband	59	15.7
Wife	168	44.7
Both couples	149	39.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>The reason a particular partner is mostly blamed in the event of childlessness</b>		
Physical absence of pregnancy	83	22.1
Erectile dysfunction	83	22.1
All of the Above	186	49.5
Others	24	6.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Couple mostly stigmatized (either husband or wife) in the event of childlessness</b>		
Husband	67	18.1
Wife	123	33.2
Mother-in-law	84	22.6
Father-in-law	39	10.5
Co-wives	10	2.7
All of the above	33	8.9
Others	15	4.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>371</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>The plight of childless couples in a community</b>		
Isolation	108	28.7
Stigmatization	113	30.1
Abuses	117	31.1
Open confrontation	86	22.9
Scornful laughter	116	30.9
Gossiping	118	31.4
All of the above	67	17.8
Others	10	2.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>371</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>The fate of childless marriage among couples</b>		
Social exclusion in the society	127	33.8
Verbal and physical abuse	112	29.8
Marital instability	177	47.1
Divorce	122	32.4
Others	19	5.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>371</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field survey, 2024

Table 4 discusses the Socio-cultural implications resulting from childlessness in married couples in Zaria LGA of Kaduna State. Almost half of the respondents (44.7%) revealed that the wife is mostly blamed in the event of childlessness among couples while more than a quarter

of the respondents (39.6%) attributed the blame to both couples. The implication of such is that the husband is mostly exonerated. Almost half of the respondents (49.5%) attributed that the reason a particular partner is mostly blamed in the event of childlessness is mostly when there is a physical absence of pregnancy for the females and erectile dysfunction for the males. The study identified certain plight of childless couples and these include isolation, stigmatization, abuses, open confrontation, scornful laughter and gossiping. In addition to the aforementioned, the study revealed that the fate of childless marriage among couples includes marital instability, social exclusion in society, divorce and verbal and physical abuse. The majority of the respondents (69.1%) revealed that the husband is usually compelled to take a second wife.

**Table 5: Sociocultural implication resulting from childlessness on married couples in Zaria LGA of Kaduna State**

<b>The individual that mostly compels the husband to take another Wife</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
His mother	145	45.6
His father	30	9.4
His siblings	61	19.2
His friends	62	19.2
Others	20	6.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>318</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>nature of the relationship between the wife and her in-laws in the case of childlessness</b>		
Strained relationship	275	73.1
Good relationship	101	26.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>The nature of the relationship between the husband and his in-laws in the case of childlessness</b>		
Strained relationship	253	67.3
Good relationship	123	32.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field survey, 2024

Table 5 also discusses the sociocultural implications resulting from childlessness on married couples in Zaria LGA of Kaduna State. Study findings show that almost half of the respondents (45.6%) revealed that the husband's mother mostly compels the husband to take another wife. On the nature of the relationship between the wife and her in-laws in the case of childlessness, the majority of the respondents (73.1%) revealed that the relationship is strained on the one hand, the majority of the respondents (67.3%) revealed that the nature of the relationship between the husband and his in-laws in the case of childlessness is also strained.

## DISCUSSION OF MAJOR FINDINGS

The study aimed at assessing the perceived socio-cultural impact of childlessness on married couples in Zaria LGA of Kaduna State: public perception of the causes of childlessness among



married couples; sociocultural implication resulting from childlessness on married couples and contributions of family members towards mitigating the impact of childlessness on married couples. To achieve the objectives of the study, questionnaires were designed and administered to respondents randomly selected. It was explored that several socio-demographic characteristics have a significant influence on childlessness and its socio-cultural impact on married couples in Zaria LGA of Kaduna State. These include sex, age category, religion, level of education and occupation. A significant finding from the study (58.8%) considers childlessness to be a medical problem, as such identified low sperm count (male), Ovulation factor (abnormal menses for females), damaged uterus (female), Fibroid (female), and STDs (both male and female) as the significant medical problems attributed to childlessness. This corroborates the findings of Kenny (1967: 703 in Obioma and Manus, 2019), and Egharevba & Oboh (2020), who asserted that the cause of infertility could be found in either the husband or the wife or even due to conditions that are attributable to both of them.

However, more than half of the respondents agreed that individuals that mostly assist childless couples in seeking a solution to the plight of childlessness are the wife's relatives and her friends. A commensurate number of the respondents (44.7%) revealed that the wife is mostly blamed in the event of childlessness, the husband is mostly exonerated in any case of childlessness among couples, and the wife is always considered to be at fault. These findings align with the research conducted by Nwosu and Friday (2015), which suggests that childless women face significant challenges. They are typically held responsible for their inability to have children, and being a mother is frequently seen as the only option for a woman to establish stability within her husband's family and community.

On the nature of the relationship between the wife and her in-laws in the case of childlessness, a substantial number of the respondents (73.1%) revealed that the relationship is strained. More so, a significant number of the respondents (67.3%) revealed that the nature of the relationship between the husband and his in-laws in the case of childlessness is also strained. This is in agreement with Terwase Audu Takim Asu Ojua et al., (2013) who attributed that there was a loss of status by the wife in the presence of the husband's relatives and the immediate community. This was further supported by Donkor, (2008) who lamented that sometimes the man could be given an ultimatum by his family. If no pregnancy occurs within the designated time frame, the marriage could be dissolved. The husband's family could force the wife out of the man's house and bring in another woman, and the pressure could be from both families.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the comprehensive assessment of perceived socio-cultural impact of childlessness on married couples in Zaria LGA, Kaduna State, has revealed a multifaceted landscape of challenges. The major findings from this study underscore the intricate interplay of medical and family factors that contribute to the complexities surrounding childlessness. Medical factors emerged prominently as contributors to childlessness, with identified issues such as low sperm count in males, ovulation factors and damaged uterus in females, as well as conditions like fibroids and sexually transmitted diseases affecting both genders

The gender dynamics surrounding childlessness were starkly evident in the findings. Women were disproportionately blamed for childlessness, often facing societal pressure and stigma. In



cases where childlessness persisted, husbands were sometimes compelled to take second wives, often influenced by the opinions of their mothers. The strained relationships between wives and in-laws, as well as husbands and in-laws, further highlighted the social ramifications of childlessness within family contexts.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. There is a need for community education and awareness implemented through community-wide educational programs especially for newly wedded couples or during conjugal ceremonies to dispel myths and misconceptions surrounding childlessness, emphasizing the medical and genetic aspects.
2. There is a need to establish accessible and exclusive medical clinics or counselling services to address infertility issues and provide guidance on available treatments.
3. Husbands should be compassionate towards their wives in the case of childlessness and assure the wives they share collective grief towards their barrenness, the husbands should be emphatic in all forms of relationship and revive the love and affection shared during courtship.
4. In-laws and relatives from both sides of husband and wife should display shared feelings of empathy and concern to both couples and explore alternative strategies collectively towards ameliorating the problem of childlessness faced by the couples, rather than attributing blame to either of the couple that might lead to a strained relationship.

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