POPULATION PRESSURE AS IT AFFECTS FARMERS' WELLBEING AND IMPLICATION FOR DEVELOPMENT IN NGOR OKPALA LGA IMO STATE.

Anyoha N. O. and Chikaire J.
Department of Agricultural Extension,
Federal University of Technology, , Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria*
E-mail – ndypaschal 2004@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

This study dealt with population pressure as it affects farmers' well being in Ngor Okpala Local Government Area of Imo State, Nigeria**.** Random sampling technique was adopted in selecting 5 communities from the study area, 3 villages were randomly selected and from each voltage four households were selected thus making a total of 60 respondents. Primary data were collected through the use of questionnaire and data analysis was by use of frequency distribution, percentages, mean scores and regression. Findings of the study revealed that about 55% of the respondents had a family size between six and ten persons. It was found out that the mean score of all the eight listed effects of large family size on farmers' wellbeing were above the cut-off point of 3 and were all accepted by farmers as affecting their wellbeing. Marital status, age, family size, education and farmers' income significantly contribute to their level of perception of the effects of large family size on their wellbeing. It was recommended that relevant policies directed at consolidation of population education through the introduction of the school's curriculum be implemented in order to achieve self reliance in future.

INTRODUCTION

The need for rural development has been a matter of serious concern to many policy makers, change agents, Research Scientists and Administrators in the third world as this is related to the low standard of living due to imbalance of resources with human population.

At present, Nigeria has the highest birth rate and low food production growth rate thus, despite all the noble agricultural programmes like Green Revolution, Operation Feed The Nation, Agricultural Development projects to mention but a few, the people are still under nourished while the spate of food importation is high and continuous because there are many mouths to feed compared to agricultural output (Solanike, 1992).

The population of Nigeria has been put at 57 million people in 1963, 94 million people in 1984, 120 million person in 1996 and presently about 140 million person. (National Population Commission 2006). Also National Population Commission (1991) revealed that in 2006, the average number of children born to each woman during her reproductive period is between seven and eight which invariably implies a crude birth rate of 45% to 48% per 1000 population, Consequently, the phenomenal increase in the number of people has its devastating effect and distressing implication. Among these are high risk of material and infant illness, diseases, premature death, mass hunger, denial of fundamental human rights, and food shortage which evidently characterized population explosion (Arowolo, 1988). Also

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Implication for Development in Ngor Okpala LGA Imo State
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population growth and distribution are closely linked to issue of poverty, to pattern of production and consumption, to environmental quality and natural resource use, to economic social and gendering inequality. These have a lot of problems in relation to socio-economic condition of people including poor standard of living, unemployment, high inflation, urbanization, deterioration of social amenities and poor education.

Due to the mis-handling of and family approach in family planning programme, the rural dwellers have not been properly mobilized and educated about the effect of large family size on their welfare. Therefore, they still remain free and continue reproducing without considering their socio-economic status.

In over looking this situation, due to essentially lapses on the part of government to practicalise family planning effectively, the effect being expressed on the rural people's faces is enough to wonder if they actually need large family sizes or will want to adopt family planning as to solve their present yearning for food and hardship – Okafor, (1991), stated that a reduction in the growth rate of population through family planning will eradicate poverty to a minimal level by increasing the per capital income of the society.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Ngor-Okpala, Imo State, Nigeria. It is bounded by Aboh Mbaise Local Government area in the south, in the East by Isiala Ngwa Local Government Area and in the West by Owerri North Local Government Area. The demographic data of the area shows that it has a population of 159,932 persons (National population Commission, 2006). The main occupation is farming. The study area is in the rain forest zone. The L.G.A. is made up of 16 autonomous communities, of which five (5) communities were randomly selected. Three villages also were randomly selected and from each community, four (4) households were selected randomly which gave a total of 60 households.

Data used for analysis were obtained by using a set of structured questionnaire administered to both male and female household heads. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics to analyse the socio-economic characteristics. Effects of large family size on farmers' wellbeing was determined by requesting respondents to rate the strength of the effects perceived along a 5 point likert-type scale of "strongly agree" "agree", undecided", "unagree", and "strongly unagree" values 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 were then assigned to the response options. 3.00 which is the mean of the response values was then used as the cut-off point. Thus recorded effects with mean 3.0 were agreed as perceived effects while those with mean below 3.0 were not agreed as perceived effects. Regression analysis was used to determine relationship between the households socio-economic characteristics and the perceived effects of large family size.

Linear, semi-log and double log forms of regression were used in the analysis but a lead equation was used to make conclusion. The model used for this relationship is implicitly specified by;

Y = F(X_1 X_2 X_3 X_4 X_5 X_6 X_7 e)
Where Y = Effects of large family size
        X_1 = Gender (dummy variable, 1 for male and 0 for females)
        X_2 = marital status (dummy variables, 0 for single and 1 for married)
        X_3 = Age (years)
        X_4 = Occupation
        X_5 = Education
        X_7 = Farm income
        e =   Error   term

Table 1:   Socio-economic characteristics of respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	25	41.7
Female	35	58.3
Marital Status	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Single	10	16.7
Married	50	83.3
Age	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
20-35	6	10
36-51	27	45
52-56	27	45
No of years spent in education (yrs)	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
No in formal education	25	41.7
1-6	21	35
7-12	13	21.7
> 13	01	1.7
Family size	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
1-5	24	40
6-10	33	55
11-15	03	5
Income Level (N)/month	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
5000-15000	30	50
16000-26000	17	28.3
27000	13	21.7
Major Occupation	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Farming	36	60
Trading	8	13.3
Civil Service	11	18.3
Others	5	8.3

Table 2: **Ratings of large family sizes based on the effects of rural farmers' well being.**

Effects	Mean Scores	Remarks
Increase in household expenditure	4.13	Agree
Retardation of available household facilities	3.85	Agree
Reduced access to education	4.4	Agree
Poor health	3.12	Agree
Poor membership of social organization	3.57	"
Loss of interest in government activities	3.4	"
Poor Nutrition	3.47	Agree
Poor capital base for investment	4.4	Agree
Grand mean	3.79	

Strongly agree = 5, Agree = 4, Undecided = 3, Disagree = 4, Strongly disagree = 1, Mid point = 3.

Table 3: **Functional Forms**

Variables	Linear	Semi log	Double log
Constant	229.414	173.052	139.084
	0.494	0.413	0.723
Gender	-31.308	-8.949	-0.161
	(-1.048)	-(1.143)	(-1.076)
Marital Status	27.147	1.987	0.039
	(1.043)	(1.102)	(3.698)**
Age	49.391	8.305	0.075
	(1.212)	(1.039)	(3.579)**
Family Size	17.013	5.461	0.067
	(2.870)**	(4.990)**	(2.480)**
Education	16.022	8.502	0.084
	(1.059)	(1.195)	(4.132)**
Income	11.449	1.302	0.062
	(3.179)**	(2.599)**	(2.033)**
R-square	0.4135	0.4133	0.7218
F-ratio	7.27	5.37	20.62

Figures in parenthesis are the t-ratio values
**Significant at 1%

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 showed that 41.7% of the respondents were males while 58.3% were females. The dominance by women could be explained by the increasing number of females headed households as males migrate to urban areas to engage themselves in one business venture or the other. (Imo, 2007).

Table 1 further revealed that 83.3% were married while 16.7% were single. Also 10% of the respondents were between the ages 20-35years representing the model class and this is followed by age class 36-50 and 52-66 representing 45% and 45% respectively.

The table also indicates that 41.7%, 35%, 21.7%, 1.7 had no formal education, spent 1-6 years, 7-12 years and 13 years and above in school respectively. This shows that majority of the respondents had no formal education and there is need for education in agriculture since the level of education of a farmer not only increases his productivity but also enhances his ability to understand and evaluate new production techniques (Eze 2009). Also from the findings in table 1, 45%, 55% and 5% of the respondents have family size (no of immediate family members) of 1-5 persons, 6-10 persons and 11-15 persons respectively. The large family size could be attributed to poor knowledge of family planning procedure, and the cultural desire for large member as a form of social security. This could give rise to enough hands in the labour force and more potential sources of receiving agricultural information. Also with large family, there is population growth which forces farmers to shorten fallow periods and increase investment on land (Obasi, 2007). In other words, it could also give rise to over consumption to the extent that the investible farm capital could be spent on food and the like. The monthly income generated as indicated by the respondents showed that 21.7% earned N27,000 and above and this is followed by (28.3%) of respondents earning between N16000 and N26,000. Majority of the respondents earned between N5000.00 and N15,000.00.

The table also revealed clearly the major occupation of the respondents in the study area. 60% were involved in farming, 13.3% were involved in trading, 18.3% engaged in civil service and 8.3% are engaged in other petty jobs like clearing and driving

Table 2 shows the distribution of farmers by the effects of large family size on their wellbeing. The eight items listed for rating were above 3.0 cut-off point for the acceptance of the items.

These effects which recorded very high mean scores include increase in household expenditure, reduced access to education and poor capital base for investment (4.13, 4.4 and 4.4 mean scores respectively). Large family size entailed more socio-economic requirements for up-keep. These included food security needs, high infrastural requirements, more health and education services among others. These often convert investible farm capital to consumptive capital. The overall analysis is that farmers in the study area were not certain of the strength of the effects listed on their well being. This accounts for the grand mean of 3.79.

Relationship between socio-economic characteristics of respondents and the perceived effects of large family size was shown on table 3. It shows that the Double-log function gave a comparatively better fit with more statistical significant coefficients and had higher magnitudes of R^2 and F-value, it has been chosen as the lead equation. This means that marital status, age, household size, education and farm income contribute significantly and positively to farmers perceived effect of large family size on their well being at 0:01 level. The positively significant relationship implies that increasing the status of the farmers by the single getting married also increased the magnitude of perception of the effect. Also older farmers have wealth of experience and could refer to the past to deal with the present.

Although older farmers could be conservative (Nnadi and Amaechi, 2007) they have knowledge that could be referred to. Furthermore, increasing the family size could give rise to over consumption to the extent that the investible farm capital could be spent on food and other households expenditure. Also increasing the number of educated farmers increased the level of their perception of the effects of large family size. This is because educated farmer is knowleageable and can easily analyse situation to take resounding decision. In the same way, increasing the income of the respondents will increase the level of their perception of the effects through encouraging investment which consequently increased respondents' responsibilities and level of rationality in decision making.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION

The results of this study showed that majority of the farmers in the study area are women with low level of education. The mean age of the farmers is 44years; they have average of 7 members in a family. The study revealed that farmers in the area agreed that increase in household expenditure, reduced access to education and poor capital base for investment the confirmed effects of large family size on their wellbeing. The factors that significantly and positively affects the relationship between the socio-economic characteristics perceived effects of family size on farmers' well being were marital status, age, household size, education and farm income at 0.01 level using double log functional form as lead equation in the multiple analysis.

Based on the results of the study, it could be recommended that extensive enlightment campaign should be embarked upon using multiple media to create awareness and sensitize rural dwellers on the advantage of embarking on family planning with adequate funding by government to assist in procuring materials for enlightment campaign. Relevant policies directed at consolidation of population education through the introduction in the schools' curriculum will be fundamental in providing the necessary information and education on the value of family sizes that will help to achieve self reliance in future.

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