

Fertility Level in Urban Nigerian Societies : Recent  
Observations From Eket Urban of Akwa Ibom State of  
South Eastern Nigeria

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The Eket urban fertility survey was conducted between November and December, 1990. During the survey, information was collected from a scientifically designed and representative sample size of 614 respondents. They were all women of child bearing age. The data collected were analysed using perecentages and arithmetical means .

The primary objectives of the survey was to obtain reliable information on the current levels of fertility in Eket urban . A brief demographic characteristics of the respondents were presented. This was done with the view to providing background information relevant to the study. The data presented show a high fertility rate for Eket urban. The data on cumulative fertility show that the mean number of children everborn (CEB) to all the women is 5.61. Completed fertility, as shown by the number of children everborn to the women, who have reached the end of their reproductive lives, is 7.14 as at the time of the survey. The total fertility rate for the last twelve months preceeding the study is 7.27. About 45 percent of the women reported themselves as pregnant as at the time of the study. It was observed that like the age specific fertility rates, the proportion of women peregnant is highest for women in the peak years of childbearing, i.e. in the 20-24, 25-29, 30-34, and 35-59 age groups. The implications of the findings are also examined, and suggestions if implemented would help bring down fertility level in the Eket urban in particular and Nigeria in general have been recommended.

## INTRODUCTION

During the past twenty years, demographic researches have been focused on fertility in Nigeria. The interests of the researchers arise from the fact that fertility has been viewed as the most disturbing component of population change and by the feeling that fertility is the most unpredictable of population change and by the feeling that fertility is the most unpredictable of the population components. But despite these interests, substantial and reliable data on fertility are not readily available in Nigeria. This paucity of fertility data shows the need for the luxuriant sprouting of demographic surveys which have increasingly been used in the study of vital population events in recent time most especially fertility in Developing countries including Nigeria. With death rates declining and international migration fairly regulated, fertility has become the most important variable of the components.

In Nigeria, both rural and urban death rates have started to decline, but fertility levels remain high. The high fertility levels and rates have brought a lot of problems to both urban and rural dwellers. Based on the above observations, it becomes therefore, imperative that fertility in Nigerian Societies should be thoroughly researched into in order to understand its level, pattern and implication for human society (Ottong, J. G., 1983: 1-3). This study is one of those studies carried out by the author chiefly to examine fertility levels and patterns, fertility determinants and family planning in Ibibio communities of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

The researcher in conducting this survey adopted the usual approach which is the investigation of the frequency of childbearing among women who fall within the child-bearing age bracket. The report presented in this paper is concerned with live births to the women interviewed. It is pertinent to say at this point that retrospective data on fertility of women are rarely free from errors (NPB, Lagos, 1984: 74). These errors may include total omission of births, because of memory lapses, omission of dead children, or those who have left home, births to older women that may have occurred for many years before the study and age shifting by the women. Thus the findings presented in this paper should have a tolerable level of generalization bearing the above limitations in mind.

### Objectives of The Study

- The following are the specific objectives of the paper :
1. To present the current fertility situation in Eket Urban. This would be discussed along the following dimensions : Cumulative fertility and fertility level in the area .
  2. The implications of the observed level of fertility in the area for population and socio-economic planning in Nigeria.

### Methodology

The study was conducted in Eket urban of Eket Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. A sample size of 614 women were used randomly drawn. In selecting the respondents, the researcher combined simple random sampling technique with multi-stage cluster sampling. For ease of sample selection, streets

and roads were taken as clusters. And to avoid bias and ensure that each element had equal chance of being selected, random sampling technique was employed . Interview technique and Questionnaire were used in collecting information for the study . The face-to-face interview technique was used in collecting information from those who were unable to read or write . The Questionnaire was issued to and completed by literate ones in the community .

The research instruments contained questions on respondents' background characteristics, their fertility history, their parents' and grand parents' fertility history . Before the real fieldwork, a pretest of the survey instruments was conducted . this was to give the researcher the opportunity to know the people's attitude towards the survey and their general sensitivity to some of the questions asked . In analysing the data, analytical tools used included the computation of arithmetical sums and frequency of the responses .

#### Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

This study was conducted in Eket, a small urban centre in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The study sample of 614 women of child-bearing age was randomly drawn from within the urban area . In order to collect the necessary information for this study, the women were asked questions on their background characteristics and fertility history.

Unlike some other urban areas in Akwa Ibom State, Eket, because of the presence of Mobil producing Nigeria (an oil company) is highly heterogeneous. The study was restricted to Eket women, other women were excluded from the study sample because of cultural differences that may effect their fertility behaviour.

### Education :

The people of Eket urban had been under the influence of Western type of Education for more than a century . This is as a result of their early contact with European traders and Missionaries. The population is semi literate. Out of the 614 women interviewed, only about 25 \% were unable to read and write and about 15.8 \% had Education beyond secondary level .

### Occupation :

Although farming is one of the main occupations of the Eket people and other Ethnic groups found in the forest zone of South Eastern Nigeria, only 3 \% of the women said they were farmers . This is what we should expect in an urban area with industries . 36.4 \% are traders while 60.6 \% of the respondents are those who are employed outside their homes most especially in governments and private establishments

### Religion :

In terms of religion, Catholics and Protestants are the two dominant denominations in the area, From the survey, we found that about 20 \% of the people are Catholics, while about 80 \% of the respondents are Protestants . Majority of these people are members of the newly established spiritual churches such as Assemblies of God Church, Mount Zion, Christ Mount Zion, Mount Zion Full Gospel, Sanctified Mount Zion, Apostolic Faith and a lot of others .

## Marital Status :

Out of the 614 women interviewed about 95.2 \% were, and about 4.8 \% reported never married . These people were not excluded because they were within the child-bearing age range and all of them had up to four children each . It should be noted that in Eket urban, premarital sexual union between a man and a woman is frowned upon but children from such union suffer no disabilities.

The above information presented is intended to provide the background materials relevant to the research and against which data on fertility in Eket urban can be interpreted .

## Cumulative Fertility

The number of children everborn is often used as a summary measure of the cumulative fertility of a population (NPB, 1984 : 74). The distribution of women according to mean number of children everborn by current age is shown in table 1.

Tablt 1

The distribution of women according to mean number of children everborn by Current age for Eket urban.

Current Age	No. of Women	Children	Mean No.
		Total No. OF CEB	OF CEB
15-19	65	147	2.26
20 - 24	92	414	4.50
25 - 29	132	770	5.83
30 - 34	96	590	6.15
35 - 39	110	699	6.35
40 - 44	62	415	6.69
45 - 49	57	407	7.14
Total	614	3,442	5.61

The data on cumulative fertility in Table I show that the mean number of children ever born (CEB) to all the women is 5.61. As one would expect the mean number of children ever born for the different age groups increases for a greater length of time than the younger women. Since women aged 45-49 (last cohort of women interviewed) have virtually reached the end of their reproductive life, the mean value of 7.14 can be regarded as a measure of completed fertility of the population.

From Table I it is observed that the Mean children ever born in Eket urban is 5.61. In fact, it should be mentioned here that, information concerning family size in any population would only be meaningful and useful if they are highly correlated with the information about actually completed family size. Moreover, a comparison of the actually completed family size and average family size for a population would indicate the level of reliability of the information on family size for that population. For the purpose of comparison data were collected on the fertility history of the 614 respondents, their mothers and their grandmothers. These data are presented in Table 2. For comparative purpose 60 women aged 50 years and above were used and are presented in Table 2.

Table 2  
Average Family size for 3 Generations of Mothers in  
Eket Urban

Generation of Mothers	Average Family Size	
	N = 614	N = 60
1. Respondents (present generation of mothers)	5.61	7.40
2. Their mothers	7.25	7.61
3. Their Grandmothers	7.14	7.38

It should be stated here that the 60 women in column 3 Table 2 were not part of the 614 women interviewed they were excluded at the stage of data processing and analysis because their ages were used for the purpose of analytical observation . It must be admitted that data on retrospective fertility especially those for previous generations of mothers are normally not easy to collect because of memory lapses . Cognizance of this fact, the data collected were seriously cross-checked and where the women expressed the slightest doubt, they were given enough time to check for accurate information and the research assistants would have to either confirm the information or substitute the corrected information . Based on this rigorous procedure, there is a very high probability that the data in Table 2 are reliable and valid . Table 2 shows a consistency in the average completed family size of about 7. The low figure of 5.61 for the study sample is affected by the relative youthfulness of the population since the women are yet to complete the cycle of child-bearing. This fact shows that the completed family size in Eket urban is around 7 live births . However, given the spread of family planning information in the area, the positive attitude of women towards white collar jobs and business, rapid wind of urbanization blowing across the area and increased rate of female education in Eket urban there is the likelihood of the completed family size falling slightly below those of previous generations of mothers in the society .

# CURRENT FERTILITY

Table 3 : Age Specific Fertility Rates for Women of Child-Bearing Age in Eket Urban Interviewed

Age Group	No. of Women	Reported Current Births	Age Specific Fertility Rate (ASFR)
15 - 19	65	10	154 *
20 - 24	92	28	304 *
25 - 29	132	33	250
30 - 34	96	27	281
35 - 39	110	22	200
40 - 44	62	12	194
45 - 49	57	4	70
Total	614	136	1.453

Total Fertility Rate = ASFR x 5 = 7.27

The age specific fertility rates for the women are shown in Table 3. There is a high correlation between the information in Table I and in Table 3. The reported mean live births of 7.14 for women completing the child-bearing cycle (ie. women in the 45-49 years age group) is consistent with a total fertility rate of 7.27. The rates, as expected are considerably lower for the older women who are approaching the end of their child-bearing. These women are found in age groupes 40 - 44 and 45 - 49. Their age specific rates are 194 and 70 respectively. The data presented in the table also show that the most fertile eriod for women is the 20-34 years age bracket. Given the semi literate character of the population and the empirical observations made during the field interviews, the above information should be seen as reliable and valid. Thecomputed total fertility rates in Table 3 is 7.26. This means that an average woan in Eket urban is likely to have

about 7 live births by the time she completes the child-bearing cycle. This is considered relatively high for an urban population . However, given the small size of Eket and the low levels of knowledge and use of contraceptives in the area, the figure of 7.0 seems valid . The observed rate is consistent with Ekanem's findings of 7.20 total fertility rate for some urban centres in the former Eastern Nigeria (Ekanem, I.I., 1974) and (Ottong, J.G., 1983) findings of 7.12 total fertility rate for Ikot Ekpene urban of Cross River State .

These areas just like Eket, lie in one of the highest fertility zones of the Southern part of Nigeria, where there is a very high value for children and seriously dominated by christians, hence low usage of modern methods of contraception .

Table 4  
Percentage of all Women Reporting  
Current Pregnancy By Age

Current Age	Women Reporting Pregnancy	
	No. of Women	Percent
15 - 19	20	7.2
20 - 24	56	20.1
25 - 29	66	23.7
30 - 34	70	25.1
35 - 39	63	22.6
40 - 44	4	1.4
45 - 49	0	0.0
Total	279	100.0

For the second measure of Current Fertility, Table 4 shows that about Too much percentage of all the women of child-bearing age interviewed reported pregnant at the time of the survey . It should be noted that pregnancy rates are highly susceptible to under-reporting because pregnancies of less than or around three months' duration are commonly omitted by the women either because they are not very sure that they are pregnant or are unwilling to report it (NPB, Lagos, 1984 : 76). Again just like the age specific fertility rates, the proportion of women pregnant is highest for women in the peak years of child-bearing, i.e. in the 20-24, 25-29, 30-34 and age groups.

The two measures of current fertility presented here can be compared to see if they reflect a consistent age pattern . The two relative distributions correspond very closely, thus suggesting that the age pattern of fertility derived from births in the twelve months preceeding the survey is correct.

#### DISCUSSION FINDINGS

#### DISCUSSION :

The observations outlined in the above sections for socio-economic development in Nigeria in general and Eket in particular. The picture of the population situation in Eket urban in particular and Nigeria in general is that of a rapidly expanding population because of the phenomenon of high fertility . It has been observed that a large increase in the size of the population is mostly a function of past and present levels of fertility and mortality in any country . All available evidence indicates that the level of reproduction has been persistently high for the last three or four decades and still remains so at present (Federal Ministry of Health, Lagos, 1988 : 3) . The United Nations Population Division indicates that the

Nigerian Population is growing by more than three percent per year, the population could reach 163 million persons by the year 2,000 and 281 million persons by the year 2015 (UNFP, 1980) .

The life time of Fertility, the average number of children born to each woman by the end of her reproductive life is close to 7 according to (World Bank, 1981), (UNFP, 1980) and (NPB, Lagos, 1983). Equally important is the fact that Nigerian Fertility surveys have not revealed any evidence that fertility has declined historically in Nigeria. Estimates indicate that the birth rate has been high over the past 30 years. The fertility rate of between 6 and 7 children implies a crude birth rate of 46 per 1000 population (Federal Ministry of Health and NPB, 1985 : 4) . All these facts presented above show that the population of Nigeria is growing at a high rate and this implies rapidly expanding total population. This rapid growth of the population is a serious strain on the economy as increasingly larger "scarce" resources are being allocated to the provision of basic social services such as education, health facilities and housing, instead of investments on capital development (Ottong, J. G., 1983 : 11-12).

Sustained high fertility levels observed in Nigeria, coupled with declining mortality rates has resulted in the country having a youthful population . Given the young age structure of the Nigerian population, the number of young women continually entering their reproductive years exceeds the number of older women moving out of that age span . This phenomenon has consequences for the future size of the country's population. This is because children who are potential parents of the future, are already so numerous, an irresistible momentum for growth is already built into the age structure of the population (Federal Ministry of Health, Lagos, 1988) : 6). This indicates that Nigeria has a very young population . Population projections indicate that in 1985 over 47

percent of the population was under the age of 15. Consequently, Nigeria has a high child dependency ratio. For every 100 adults, there are about 94 children to be supported and educated, or close to one child for each adult (Federal Ministry of Health Lagos and NPB, Lagos 1985 : 6). Nigeria's relatively young population places high demand on education, housing, health care, food supply and employment at rapidly increasing rates (Chojnacka, 1980). Also, youthful population is a serious burden to progress. This is because large part of the productivity of the adults is consumed so that little is left for investment in improving agriculture, building modern infrastructure, generating jobs for employment and advancing economic and social development, and self-reliance. It should be pointed out here that the problems of inadequate accommodation and poor housing, congestion, unemployment, filthy and poor environmental sanitation in Nigerian towns and cities are in many ways consequences of the pressure of population on urban resources and facilities. At the family level, the greatest effect of high fertility is on the health of mothers and children. High fertility itself tends to be related to high rates of sickness and death among women and young children. Rapid population growth in Nigeria also affects the ability of the country to develop adequate and comprehensive health service.

In Nigeria where agricultural production has not kept pace with rapid population growth, further population would aggravate the dangers of insufficient domestic food supply and dependence on imported food items.

## CONCLUSION

The paucity of fertility information in Nigeria has given rise to the proliferation of Small Scale fertility studies by scholars, organizations and institutions. Despite this effort, there is still insufficient information on the interrelationship between fertility and socio-economic variables. This notwithstanding a reasonable level of knowledge has been gained in the areas of fertility trend and pattern in Nigerian societies . This is one of those studies that examine and present : current fertility picture of some Nigerian Communities . The data presented here show a high fertility for Eket urban in particular and for Nigeria in general . Completed fertility, as shown by the number of children everborn to women, who have reached the end of their reproductive lives is about 7 children as at the time of the survey . The total fertility rate for the last twelve months preceeding the study is 7.27 for the women . These show that the average family size is relatively large and indicates little or no knowledge about the practice of contraception, rather large family is preferred by Nigerians for economic, social and political reasons supported by institutionalized beliefs and practices in the society .

This study sheds more light on the fertility situation in Nigeria, and exposes us to rewarding experiences about fertility situation in Nigeria and the available evidence is indicative of the need for a population policy in Nigeria . It is hoped that the findings of this study will be useful to the government, social agencies and organizations as well as departments which are interested in population policy formulation, implementation and evaluation . And also to those interested in the socio-economic development of the society. Based on these findings,

Nigeria should as a matter of urgency formulate an articulate population policy and programmes within the framework of integrated socio-economic planning, if the development process in the country is to be properly harnessed and in order to avoid those disastrous consequences associated with high fertility. The findings and discussion show that the population of Nigeria growing at a very high rate. In order to check this astronomical growth rate and in order to avoid its disastrous and inevitable consequences such as bleak socio-economic outlook, industrial stagnation, the vicious circle of unemployment and general depression in Eket urban in particular and Nigeria in general, population programmes which should be part of a broader development effort should be vigorously pursued . The following issues should form parts of the programmed :

Government should as a matter of urgency develop strong population policies . The government should make it compulsory for population education to be taught in our primary, adult, secondary and other institutions . This education should emphasise the consequences of population changes and the need for family planning . Although family planning is voluntary, it should be based on full knowledge, which the mass media are supposed to provide . The mass media should spread information and also the sense of rightness about the practice of family planning . In order to make the impact of birth control felt among the people of Eket (in particular and Nigeria in general) whose fertility rate is very high, the government should make bold moves to institutionalize maternal health care in rural as well as urban areas as a means of offering family planning education and services . Those services should be more accessible and available and at affordable prices.

The government should as a matter of urgency establish a socio-political system that will create opportunities and structures for the totality of the people and ensure the abolition of poverty and ignorance which are the factors that can stimulate a high birth rate . This political system should be that which commits itself to improving the life style of the citizenry . Such a commitment will include the provision of schools in all communities (urban and rural) , employment for both able and disabled persons, redistribution of income, wealth and social benefits, social security, pension schemes, urban and rural industries . This will ensure that the population problem is not segmented from the overall problem of development planning . We should recall that this is consistent with the view held by economists that for success in population issues, the population and development problems must be handled simultaneously .

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