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Socio-Cultural Determinants of Quality of Life among Families in Lagos State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study is based on culture-related factors that contribute to living in Nigeria. Nigeria is a nation characterized by extensive socio-economic inequalities and culture-rooted conventions. The study is based on such theoretical concepts as so-called Social Action Theory in relation to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in analyzing various critical issues such as how family size functions, rituals of marriage, preferences based on gender, and socio-economic status which play a role in living. This research employs a qualitative research approach to explore gender preferences, marriage practices and family size in relation to quality of life among families. Three research objectives and four research questions guided the study. The findings made point towards traditional practices such as a large number of children, an early marriage, and gender biases being factors which enhance poverty levels and make medical care, education, and shelter more limited and harder to achieve. This study concludes it is of paramount importance to incorporate culturally oriented strategies in such areas as policy-making, education, and community engagement in addressing such concerns in an appropriate manner. It recommends that through supporting family planning, supporting equality of gender, and supporting empowerment, Nigeria can make actual progress in improving living for its citizens and in the direction of fulfilling such Sustainable Development Goals which are traditionally known as SDGs.

Keywords: Socio-cultural, quality of life, large family sizes, early marriages, and Nigeria

Introduction

The term quality of life encompasses not only material richness, but access too, for such critical facilities as medical care, education, and sheltering (Hall & Richter 2018). According to Hawthorne, Herrman & Murphy (2022) the concept refers to the extent to which individuals can enjoy the valued possibilities in their lives. It is the perception of individuals' position in life, within the context of the culture and value system in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns (WHO Quality of life group, 2022). Quality of life a multi-dimensional (World Health Organization, 2022), complex understanding of living circumstances, physical, mental, and social wellbeing. —affects developing countries like Nigeria. In Nigeria, a so-called "Giant of Africa" owing to its material richness of endowment and growth potential, its citizens enjoy a standard of living well short of international levels. Nigeria, despite being Africa's largest economy, is rated low on human development, in its position of 163rd place among a total of 191 on the Human Development Index, (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2021) and its citizens live in adverse living circumstances. This United Nations Development Programme submission, suggests an urgent imperative for this situation to be addressed.

Among determinants of quality of life, there is a vital role for socio-cultural determinants, which shape family size, marital practices, and reproductive patterns. Such practices perpetuate poverty, gender inequality, and limited access to medical care and education, in particular in rural areas. This study considers Nigeria's socio-cultural determinants of quality of life, using a case study of Lagos State, in a quest for actionable solutions for change. Lagos State is cosmopolitan in nature, being home to many ethnic groups, spread across Nigeria's geo-political zones.

The challenge of improving standard of living in Nigeria is compounded by culturally embedded practices, which shape community norms and behaviour. This is a major problem to development and advancement. The determinants of culture play a vital role in controlling opportunities and asset access. For instance, large family size, which is traditionally perceived as a symbol of security and affluence, strains household income and inhibits individual opportunity for advancement (Agbor, 2016). In a similar process, patriarchal culture and gender preference inhibit women's access to education and medical care, perpetuating inequality (Turner & Götmark 2023; Chinoyo, 2016). Marriage practices in Nigeria further play a vital role in determining Nigeria's standard of living. Child and polygamic unions are widespread in a great number of Nigeria's rural areas, wherein culture traditionally prescribes ways of living. Such practices result in a high fertility ratio and constrained economic empowerment for women (Nwakeze, 2007). The intermix of these factors perpetuates poverty and stifles national advancement. The solution of these determinants of culture necessitates a critical understanding of its sources and implications.

The study here explores ways in which culture contributes to Nigeria's standard of living, determinants of which involve size of family, marital expectations, and gender roles. Through a critical analysis of these determinants based on theories such as Social Action Theory and Maslow's Needs Theory, this study provides a detailed understanding of barriers of living standard based on culture. Such an understanding can help guide policy and stakeholders on culturally attuned interventions. Similarly, understanding socio-cultural determinants is essential for assessing disparities in quality of life across different socio-economic groups. In this study, socio-cultural determinants refer to the social and cultural characteristics of a family with regards to the variables under consideration.

This report is highlighting the urgency of integrating culture in policy for development. Living standard improvements must go beyond economies for a change in culture, which drives outcomes and behavior in a community. With policy change, education, and public action, Nigeria can begin dismantling barriers of embedded culture, ushering in a more just, productive community. With these solutions, this report is making a contribution toward broader efforts toward sustainable development and social equality in Nigeria.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the influence of cultural practices, including family size, gender preferences, and marriage norms, on the quality of life in Nigeria.
2. To analyze the socio-economic implications of these cultural determinants and their impact on access to education, healthcare, and housing.
3. To propose culturally sensitive strategies for improving living standards in Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. How does family size impact the quality of life in Nigerian households?
2. What is the relationship between gender preferences and resource allocation within families?
3. How do marriage practices, such as early and polygamous marriages, influence societal well-being?
4. What interventions can effectively address cultural barriers to improved quality of life in Nigeria?

Literature Review

Socio-cultural factors, which entail tradition, culture, and custom, play a major role in determining individual and collective behaviour. For instance, a culture-and economics-based

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preference for large numbers of offspring strains household resources and blocks access to medical care and education (Ahinkorah, et al. 2021; Alfred et al. 2017)

Quality of life in Nigeria is highly dependent on access to such fundamentals as medical care, education, and shelter. The International Labour Organization reports that quality of life is a result of satisfaction of these fundamentals, which in Nigeria persist in being in short supply due to socio-cultural and budgetary restraints (Hall & Richter 2018). While there is a place for determinants of an economic kind, there is an equally vital place for determinants of a culture kind in determining individual and collective well-being.

Theoretical framework

Theoretical frameworks account for diverse patterns of culture. Social Action Theory of Weber suggests human actions being guided by culture and values of a society. The stability of large family size and discrimination based on gender in Nigeria can be accounted for as a result of embedded culture values (Haralambos & Holborn, 2004). Interventions have to counter these norms in a culturally appropriate manner, however, in a direction of progress. The interdependency of culture practices and well-being is further clarified by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Survival is given priority in Nigeria, overshadowing other requirements for growth such as education and medical care. This prioritization results in a poverty trap, as these lower requirements for survival have precedence over growth and actualization requirements for a family (Maslow, 1943). Interventions have to fulfill these lower requirements in laying a platform for improvements in a broader scale. The needs theory, especially Maslow's hierarchy of human needs provides insight into how different levels of need influence human behavior and their decision making, making it particularly useful for exploring various aspects of quality of life (Mcleod & Guy-Evans, 2024)

Family size

Large family size, a culture of traditional Nigeria, is a contributor to lower living levels due to strain on financial and social resources. Smaller families, it is shown, achieve enhanced levels of education and well-being (National Demographic and Health Survey [NDHS], 2013; 2023). However, there is a culture of large family size being a symbol of prestige, which is fostered in traditional Nigeria, particularly in rural areas, counteracting efforts toward using family planning (Adewole et al., 2020). This urban-rural divide aggravates inequalities and undermines efforts toward national progress. The determiners of culture entail practices, custom, and belief driving behaviors in a set of societies. Family size is in Nigeria, among the strongest determiners of culture. The traditional culture celebrates large size of family as a symbol of security and affluence. However, evidence indicates large size of family contributes to stretched household resources, which result in a lower provision of hospital care and school care for children (Agbor, 2016). Such practices result in cycles of poverty and a lower standard of living.

Marriage practices

Marriage practices such as polygamy and early marriage increase poverty and often perpetuates gender violence, in addition to narrowing opportunities for women and girl children. For instance, polygamous households typically face economic struggles due to shared resources, and early marriages suppress education levels and career opportunities for women, entrapping women in poverty cycles (Rutaremwu, 2014; Nwakeze, 2007). Marriage practices, such as polygamic and early marriages, are widespread in rural Nigeria. Such traditional practices result in a high fertility, and lower levels of empowerment in the economy (Nwakeze, 2007).

In the end, both practices typically suppress opportunities, strain household resources, sustain poverty cycles, thus lowering total living standard.

Gender preferences

Cultural preference for sons drives fertility, as couples continue to give birth in a quest for a desired number of sons (Agbor, 2016). The culture not just leads to an increase in size of the family, but it discriminates against girl children, who receive little in opportunities and facilities. The role of preferences in gender is critical too. In Nigeria, male children come first compared to females, which leads to unwanted fertility as couples struggle to give birth to a male child. The culture not just aggravates poverty, it is a barrier for women in accessing education and opportunities for empowerment, which sustain inequalities based on gender (Turner, N., & Götmark, 2023; Chicoyo, 2016). The solution is in challenging patriarchal culture.

Research underlines a connection between culture and socio-economic determinants. The traditional practices not only perpetuate poverty, they also create it. For example, in cultures in which large family size and early marriage exist, there is minimal opportunity for advancement in an economic sense, which perpetuates a reinforcing pattern of deprivation. This pattern can be interrupted by education and economic programs aimed directly. A second point of primary interest is empowering women through determinants of culture. The patriarchal culture traditionally keeps a woman in a domestic role and a role of childbearing, keeping her away from education and work. Empirical evidence shows that empowering women in education and income opportunities can lead to smaller size of a family and an improved standard of living (Turner, & Götmark, 2023, Chicoyo, 2016). Third, addressing determinants of culture calls for engaging community leaders and stakeholders. Changing traditional practices is not a matter of a night, for culture is a well-

established entity. Initiatives rooted in a community, which make people aware and provide alternative ways of doing, are needed. Involving community leaders in such programs, planners of policy can facilitate uptake and sustainableness of change.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative research approach, supported with secondary data to investigate cultural determinants of quality of life in Nigeria. Sources of data are government reports, peer-reviewed journal articles, population surveys, and academic literature. The selection of qualitative research allows for an in-depth investigation of cultural practices and their influence on the well-being of society. The research is situated in five distinct areas of Lagos State, a region that typifies Nigeria's multicultural socio-cultural landscape. Lagos was chosen due to its status as a region with a combination of rural and urban landscapes, thus facilitating examination of cultural factors across different contexts. As reported by Aliu (2024), the socio-demographics characteristics in Lagos show significant disparities which impacts residents' quality of life. Adult male (22-60years) and female (18-49 years) of reproductive age were surveyed. The study adopted a multistage sampling procedure in selecting respondents to constitute the sample required for the study, in the end responses were gathered from fifty families with children across the locations under study, using an interview guide. This research explores significant determinants of culture such as family size, marriage behavior, and gender preference as operationalized in existing literature.

Data were coded by themes to identify patterns and associations between quality of life indicators and cultural practices. Quality of life indicators consist of access to education, health care, and a good living environment. Social Action Theory and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs were utilized to explain findings and provide a guided perspective for understanding the dynamics of cultural norms affecting quality of life outcomes.

Findings and Discussion

Family size as a predictor of quality of life

The study verifies that family size is associated with reduced measures of quality of life, including reduced access to healthcare and education. There remain prevalent cultural beliefs that place a premium on large families as indicators of prosperity and social status, for which family planning efforts must be addressed. Family size was found to be a significant predictor of quality of life. Nigerian traditional norms have a tendency to romanticize large families as indicators of prosperity and social security (Oyefara, 2011). However, this cultural ideal imposes a lot of pressure on family resources. The bigger families with more children are in conflict with providing appropriate education, medical services, and nutrition, consequently, their standard of living is compromised (Nandagiri, 2021; Ibisomi, & Mudege, 2014). This is consistent with one of the responses:

‘family size plays an important role in guaranteeing quality of life, if the size of the family is much or perhaps overwhelming on the family income, it becomes difficult for you to get quality of service in terms of education, food, shelter and clothing which are the basic ingredients that make life worth living’

Such families are more likely to reside in substandard housing due to financial constraints (Witten et al, 2020; Marmot, 2020)

The economic burden of large families is further aggravated by limited government subsidization of social services. It results in the dependence on family resources, typically leaving less room for child development and education. Evidence indicates that smaller families, typically with two or three children, have more resources available for improved health and education (Nwakeze, 2007). In this effort, family planning activities have to be culturally responsive and ensure that the benefits of moderate family size are enhanced.

Furthermore, large family sizes have intergenerational impacts. The children in these families end up being transmitted poverty because of the scarce education and economic chances

offered to them by parents (Maslow, 1943). As a result, policies to suppress fertility must incorporate campaigns with efforts to dismantle the traditional notions of family size.

Gender preferences and quality of life

Cultural son preference continues to occur in Nigeria and impacts fertility behaviors and quality of life. Male-preference norms push families to have more children, thereby increasing the cost burden and reducing the care per child (Turner & Götmark, 2023; Chicoyo, 2016). The practice also perpetuates gender inequality by allocating resources that are supposed to go to male children at the expense of female empowerment and education. One of the responses substantiates the above:

I can give you an example that I have seen with my eye that is causing problem in a home. There is a friend of mine she has only girls, her husband just moved outside. He left her alone in the house and packed to another because she did not have a boy. And likewise, I can use my sister as an example, she has all girls, she did not have a boy at all, yet another couple, they have all boys, this woman has seven boys she did not have a girl. So do you know she has to go and marry another man, then she eventually got a boy'

Research shows that people with a higher ratio of male children are more likely to invest less in women's education and health (Agbor, 2016). In rural Nigeria, for example, female literacy levels are considerably lower than for men, reflecting the impact of this gender disparity. To address this requires unique educational initiatives that promote gender parity and highlight women's contributions to society.

Sons' preference is also linked to patterns of inheritance and cultural norms. Sons in patrilineal systems are viewed as heirs of property and family name, which holds families back from adopting modern practices such as family planning (Nwakeze, 2007). To break these practices, community interventions must join hands with traditional leadership in redefining gender and fertility attitudes.

Marriage practices and their impact on quality of life

Marriage customs, particularly early and polygamous marriages, are powerful cultural predictors of quality of life. Early marriages deprive women of access to education and economic empowerment, thereby entrenching poverty (Nwakeze, 2007). Girls in the majority of rural societies are married off during their teenage years, reducing their likelihood of making educational or professional accomplishments.

Polygamous unions, which are prevalent in certain regions of the nation, exacerbate domestic resource shortages. Polygamous households often end up in economic hardship due to the larger number of dependents (Agbor, 2016). This reduces the overall well-being of all members of the family, including quality housing, health care, and education.

To counteract the impact of such marriage practices, cultural and legal reforms are necessary. Governments must move against minimum age marriage acts and invest in girls' education to empower them. Public campaigns may also create awareness about the socio-economic benefits of monogamous marriages and delayed marriages. This is in consonance with some responses obtained:

'I think in today's world even if I am in the village as a person now, I don't think I would have been influenced to be polygamous'

Another respondent alluded to the socio-cultural influences such as culture, religion and impact of education stating:

'I told you we have cultural and religious innovations, those muslims that are not well informed would still give birth as they like but within the enlightened they listen and issue of polygamy is fast fading off unlike before'

Conclusion

Cultural determinants such as family size, marriage norms, and gender preferences have significant impacts on the quality of life in Nigeria. These cultural norms, although rooted in tradition, have a tendency to reproduce poverty and inequality. The solutions must address these issues holistically by engaging education, policy reform, and community action. The findings of this study highlight the pivotal role that cultural practices play in determining access to education, health, and economic prospects. For instance, large family sizes and gender biases have a ripple effect on quality of life by reducing the prospects for economic and social mobility. A nation that is not 'engendered stands endangered'. This is especially true when women's contributions, are not captured in the development process.

In a bid to register substantial improvement in quality of life, Nigeria must implement practices that shatter inhibiting cultural practices. Community-based education programs have the capacity to alter attitudes, while certain policies have the capacity to provide the economic and legal framework necessary for the change. Women's education investment, health care access, and poverty alleviation programs are as important.

Ultimately, the interplay of socio-economic dynamics and determinants of culture call for efforts of all interested stakeholders. In its quest to expose the underlaying driver of cultural elements inhibiting progress, Nigeria may open a forum to ensure it makes a great climate for citizens to thrive. Not only an economic dream is sustainable development, but a paradigm in culture is bringing equity, opportunities, and wellbeing to everybody.

Recommendations

1. Attempts at promoting gender equity through education on son's preference and support for adoption of family planning, can work to modify cultural norms.

2. This study recommends that implementation of government policies aimed at discouraging early marriage, and promoting female education are essential.
3. It is necessary to initiate and implement poverty reduction programs and those that expand healthcare and education access. This will have an indirect impact on cultural practices overtime.
4. Engaging community leaders to promote cultural reforms can enhance the adoption of new norms.

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