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# UTILIZATION OF BIRTH CONTROL MEASURES BY ILLITERATE MOTHERS OF OBUKPA TOWN IN NSUKKA L.G.A.,ENUGU STATE

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## Abstract

This study investigated the utilization of birth control measures by illiterate mothers in Obukpa town in Nsukka L.G.A. Enugu State. Specifically,the study determined: the birth control measure(s)with the highest level of acceptability by the illiterate mothers,socio-cultural factors that influence the utilization of birth control measures by the illiterate mothers,and the different measures to be taken to enhance the utilization of birth control by the illiterate mothers. The study adopted survey research design. The area of the study is Obukpa community in Nsukka Local Government Area.A sample of 100 respondents was used for the study. Questionnaire was used for the data collection.Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation.Findings include among others, that the illiterate mothers do not accept the use of modern birth control measures due to some myths and misconceptions they have against them. Based on the findings. it was recommended among others that Adult education program should be enforced to upgrade illiterate mother's low status and help fix their problem of ignorance. Keywords:Utilization,Birth Control,literate,Mothers,Folkloric. Contraception.

## Introduction

Birth control or family planning as commonly called can be defined as a program intended to regulate the number and the spacing of children in a family through the practice of contraception or other methods of birth control. Beleke, Fantahun,Gutena,Getchew,Lambiyo and Yitayal,(2003) stated that birth control is a process that usually involves a discussion between a woman, a man and a trained family service provider focusing on the family health and the desire of the couple to either limit or space their family. Ajani, (2013) defines birth control as the idea of spacing of children given birth to by individual family within reasonable time period which helps the mother to give adequate care and effective weaning to a child before giving birth to another. The

author further stated that birth control and family planning are often used interchangeably.Ajani (2013) again stressed that in whichever case,the essence of birth control or family planning is to give birth to number of children which the individual family can take care of adequately.Also, Hanson, Burke and Anne, (2010) defines birth control as contraception or fertility control which are methods or devices used to prevent pregnancy. WHO (2013) defines modern birth control measures as products or medical procedures that interfere with reproduction from procedures from acts of sexual intercourse.

Birth control measures refer to the various ways or methods that can be adopted to achieve birth control. Creange,Gillespie, Karklins and Tsui (2011)stated that there are different methods used for family planning or birth control. They are: long

acting or permanent methods for example intrauterine device, implants and sterilization and short term methods for instance includes pills, condoms. spermicidal, injectable and other modern and traditional methods. Long or permanent measures are usually used to stop child bearing: whereas short-term measures are better suited for women who want to delay childbearing in order to have adequate spacing. For easy understanding, Alagarajan. (2008) classified birth control methods under three groups. They are modern methods, traditional and folkloric methods. There are birth control pill. transdermal patch/ortho-Evra, contraceptive ring/vagina ring, injectable, intrauterine device, diaphragm, cervical cap among others. WHO. (2009) defines traditional or natural methods as the methods that require a man and a woman not having any sexual intercourse during the time an egg is available to be fertilized by sperm. They include lactation Amenorrhea, Basal body temperature method. calendar rhythm method and many more. Alagarajan and Kulkarni, (2008b) describes folkloric methods as the use of locally described or spiritual method believed popularly by most of the illiterate class to reduce fertility and it includes the use of herbs, leaves or amulets.

Birth control is credited primarily for its role in bringing down the birth rates globally and particularly for its role in developing countries. From 1950-2000, the global fertility has fallen by about half from five children per woman, from 1984-2004 from 5-3 (United Nation, 2005). Couples are empowered to regulate their fertility. The public health relevance of family birth control is enormous in absence of it: the level of childbearing will be high resulting in a greater demand for obstetrics and infants child health service, In such situation, maternal morbidity and mortality will be high. Birth control plays pivotal role

in population control, poverty reduction, increased education attainment, strong position of girls and women at home and in the society, prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and environmental control (World Bank, 2004; Griffin, 2006). It is a prerequisite for achieving the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals and for realization of human right of reproductive choice (Allen, 2007).

Despite the impressive gains, the use of birth control measures is still low and the need for contraceptives becomes high in some of the world's poorest and most populous countries (Smith, 2009). Studies have shown that the use of birth control methods or family planning facilities among women is strongly affected by a woman's level of literacy (Jabeen, Gull, Wazil and Jarvis, 2011). Illiterate mothers are married women who lacked the ability to read and write; lack the knowledge of a particular subject and also are ignorant of the fundamental of a particular art or area of knowledge (Jenny, Christopher, and Travis, 2012). They comprise a particular vulnerable section of the community; they lack empowerment, are unable to voice their choice with respect to issues and decisions concerning contraceptive use and also lack access to health service. They are not primary decision makers on key household matters including childbearing because they have low decision-making power in the household (Smith, 2009b). United Population Fund, (2012) noted that they are usually the victims of child voice which makes them powerless in the family as they cannot voice their opinion in the family matters.

Furthermore, Lind (1996) stated that illiterate mothers are also the most victims of lies and deceptions from some family members. They have little opportunity to become acquainted with and make use of the individual rights to which they are entitled to

by law or to participate actively in the attainment of collective rights that are essential to human dignity. The utilization of birth control methods is affected by many factors; women have different perception on birth control methods which are related to their level of enlightenment. Babalola and John, (2012) stated that the illiterate mothers thought that contraceptives might cause excessive bleeding, infertility or cancer. They also perceive that Intra Uterine Device (IUD) could shift during sexual intercourse with serious implication for birth outcomes (Alaii, Nada, & Njeru, 2012). There is an ample research evidence identifying the various factors that contribute to the poor prevalence of modern contraceptive use in Nigeria with the most common factor being the myths about the side effects of modern contraceptives (Otoide, Orosanye and Okonofua, 2001). There is also a disproportionate fear of fertility regulating methods by most illiterate women (African Institute for Development Policy, 2010). They tend to value male children and large family size that they forget to consider the resources to train them (Iffih & Ezch, 2004). Prospective women users even cannot access health centre in most places in Nigeria geographically (Emens, 2008). Socio-economic factors also pose a great challenge to the use of birth control methods (World Bank, 1996). The low status of the illiterate mothers within the society affects their access to health care (Prevention of Maternal Mortality Network, 1992). Male authority over such women also poses a great challenge to the use of birth control methods because of the fear that the use of birth control might promote infidelity amongst women. Illiterate mothers are the victims of the superstitious belief surrounding birth control. They also fear that birth control causes abnormal increase in size of the users. A visit by the researcher to one of the famous Health Care Centers in

Ogbagu area in Obukpa with the aim to determine the extent of utilization of birth control facilities reported that there are no family planning services there because of the religious inclination of the Matron. These pose a great challenge to the use of birth control facilities.

Studies have shown that the utilization of birth control methods among women is strongly affected by a woman's level of literacy (Jabeen, Gul, Wazil and Janis, 2011). Education of women is one of the key factors to fertility reduction. Women with higher level of education tend to space their pregnancies and seek health care and support (UNESCO, 2011). Salen and Bobak (2005) stated that education is linked to use of birth control measures: the more educated women are, the more likely they are to use birth control measures. Basu and Froster (1998) assert that illiterate mothers attitude towards birth control can be corrected if their husbands or their families of their husbands are literates. It is therefore necessary to seek ways of helping the illiterate mothers to improve on the utilization of birth control measures. A meaningful step in this direction is to determine their present utilization of the different birth control methods as a basis for determining the ways of helping them.

#### Purpose of the Study

The major purpose of the study was to determine the utilization of birth control measures by the illiterate mothers in Obukpa town in Nsukka L.G.A. Enugu State. Specifically, the study determined:

1. the birth control method(s) that is mostly acceptable by the illiterate mothers.
2. the socio-cultural factors influencing the utilization of birth control methods by the illiterate mothers.
3. ways of improving the utilization of birth control by the illiterate mothers

## Research Questions

The study answered the following questions:

1. What is/are the birth control method(s) that is/are mostly acceptable the illiterate mothers?
2. What are the socio-cultural beliefs influencing the utilization of birth control methods by illiterate mothers?
3. What are the ways of improving the utilization of the birth control methods by the illiterate mothers?

## Methodology

**Area of the study:** The study was carried out in Obukpa town in Nsukka I.G.A. Enugu State. The town has four (4) communities namely; Ogbagu Obukpa, Obige Obukpa, Owerre Obukpa and Ajuona Obukpa. Obukpa town was chosen as the area of the study because the members are found to be highly rooted in traditions, customs and religion which are founding so many ways to have affected their belief system and lifestyles.

**Population of the Study:** The population for the study includes all the illiterate mothers in the four (4) communities of Obukpa. According to the statistics of Obukpa Women Association in 2013, the population of the illiterate mothers is 1630. The population of the illiterate mothers in Owerre Obukpa was 423, that of Obige Obukpa was 400, that of Ogbagu was 400 while that of Ajuona Obukpa was 407 (Obukpa Women Association, 2018). The reason for using the illiterate mothers as respondents is because, illiterate mothers do not accept the adoption of modern methods as they erroneously feel that these modern methods are injurious to the health.

**Sample of the Study:** A stratified random sampling technique was used to select the sample for this study. Twenty five (25) illiterate mothers were randomly selected from each of the four (4) communities that make up Obukpa town thereby totaling hundred (100) illiterate mothers. In all, total sample of the study was hundred (100) illiterate mothers. These women were met at their various homes and some on their farms

**Instrument for data collection:** A structured questionnaire which was developed based on literature and research objectives was used to collect data for the study. The instrument was face validated by three (3) Home Economics lectures from the Faculty of Vocational and Technical Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. To ensure the reliability of the instrument, 20 copies of the instrument were administered to twenty (20) women living in Ibagwani town in Nsukka West L.G.A. Cronbach Alpha Reliability Coefficient Index was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. The reliability coefficient was 0.76 and this considered high and the instrument reliable.

**Data collection and Analysis Technique:** Hundred (100) copies of the questionnaire were distributed to respondents with the help of two research assistants. The research assistant's was briefed on the objectives of the study and how to administer and collect the questionnaire from the respondents. The instrument was administered to each respondent through personal contact and the percentage rate of return was 100% and it was used for analysis using mean and Standard Deviation.

Table 1: Mean Scores of Responses on the Birth Control Method(s) Mostly Accepted by the Illiterate Mothers in Obukpa Area

S/NO	Item Statement	X	SD	Decision
1	Contraceptive pills	1.81	0.54	Reject
2	Transdermal patch	1.80	0.61	Reject
3	Injectable	1.82	0.50	Reject
4	Progestin-only pills	1.82	0.50	Reject
5	Intra uterine device	1.65	0.55	Reject
6	Vagina ring	1.35	0.52	Rejct
7	Femalc condom	1.28	0.49	Reject
8	Diaphragm	1.20	0.44	Reject
9	Cervical cap	1.18	0.43	Reject
10	Vagina sponge	1.18	0.43	Reject
11	Vagina spermicides	1.17	0.41	Reject
12	Female sterilization	1.23	0.47	Reject
13	Basal body temperaure	1.35	0.52	Reject
14	Calendar rhythm method	1.43	0.60	Reject
15	Withdrawal	1.42	0.53	Reject
16	Ovulation indicator testing kits	1.85	0.71	Reject
17	Lactational amenorrhca method	2.10	0.88	Reject
18	The billing mcthod	2.36	1.00	Reject
19	Folkloric methods c.g.concoctions.herbs.amulets	3.68	0.72	Acccpt
20	Abstinence	3.50	1.00	Accept
	Grand Mean		1.76	

No.of respondents-100.Grand mean-1.76

Table 1 shows that out of the 20 birth control methods or family planning faciliies listed out by the researcher, only the folkloric method of birth control with the mean score of 3.68 is mostly adopted by the illiterate mothers in Obukpa town. This is

followed by the method of abstinence with the mean score of 3.50. This implies that the modern method and most of the natural methods of birth control are not easily accepted for utilization by the illiterate mothers.

Table 2: Mean Scores of Responses on the Socio-cultural Beliefs Influencing the Utilization of Birth Control by the Illiterate Mothers in Obukpa Area

S/NO	Item Statements	X	SD	Decision
1	Children are gifts from God and nobody should interfere in the	3.73	0.55	Accept

procreation process				
2	The greater the number of children the greater the honor and a family's chances of prosperity	3.80	0.44	Accept
3	Many male children are needed to perpetuate the family lineage	3.70	0.56	Accept
4	Modern birth control methods cause serious side effects.	3.52	0.68	Accept
5	Husbands do not accept the use of contraceptives.	3.25	0.84	Accept
6	There are no family planning services in my community health care center.	3.07	0.86	Accept
7	My husband is the only son and therefore we must give birth to so many children.	3.20	0.88	Accept

8	The use of contraceptives is a taboo against the culture of the land	3.52	0.75	Accept
9	The use of birth control measures encourages the wives to practice adultery.	3.82	0.47	Accept
10	The kind of religion practice does not accept the use of contraceptives.	3.87	0.47	Accept
	Grand Mcan	3.20		

No.of respondents=100: Grand mean score 3.20.

Table 2 shows that all the 10 socio-cultural beliefs influence the utilization of birth control methods by the illiterate mothers in Obukpa area. All the items in

Table 2 have grand means score of 3.20.

This indicated poor utilization of birth control facilities by the illiterate mothers in Obukpa arca.

Table 3: Mean scores of Responses on the ways of Improving the Utilization of Birth Control by the Illiterate Mothers

S/No	Item Statements	X	SD	Decision
57	Health workers should help by disseminating contraceptive information to rural arcas.	3.88	0.37	Accept
58	Integration of birth control service into basic health services.	3.97	0.18	Accept
59	Offering birth control services at a lower and affordable cost.	3.95	0.22	Accept
60	Educating the husbands on the relevance of birth control.	3.95	0.23	Accept
61	Religion and Christian denomination should strive to influence their families on contraceptive usage positively	3.98	0.13	Accept
62	Equipping women with salable skills to upgrade their low status.	3.98	0.13	Accept
63	Government should attach incentives with the use of birth control methods.	4.00	0.00	Accept
	Grand Mcan	3.96		

No. of respondents 100.Grand mean 3.96.

Table 3 shows the different ways of improving the utilization of birth control methods by

the illiterate mothers. The table has a grand mean score of 3.96. This indicated that all the seven items listed are really acceptable ways of improving the utilization of birth control by the illiterate mothers with item 63, as the most

acceptable way of improving birth control of all the listed items.

#### Discussion

The findings in Table I shows that illiterate women living in Obukpa area in Nsukka I..G.A adopt the utilization of folkloric method and 'abstinence'method of birth control but do not use the others birth control measures, Folkloric method is provided as the most acceptable method

followed by the natural method of abstinence. Modern methods(such as contraceptive pills, transdermal patch. injeable, progesterone-only pills, intra uterine device,female condom,diaphragm, cervical cap,vagina sponge, vagina spermicidal, female sterilization) and natural/traditional methods(such as basal body temperature, calendar rhythm method, withdrawal, ovulation indicator testing kits, lactational amenorrhea method, mucus inspection method)are rejected. This is in line with what Babalola and John (2012) said that most women thought that modern contraceptives might cause excessive bleeding,infertility or cancer. They have shown their fear,myths and unbelief through that statement. Alagarajan and Kulkan

(2018) also stated that folkloric method of birth controls are age old methods handed down to people from their ancestors. They assert that they do not have any side effects as modern contraceptive neither are they rigorous and complicated to use as some natural birth control measures. They are also acceptable by them as they opined that these birth controls are cheap measures.

Table 2 reveals that there are ten(10) socio-cultural beliefs influencing the utilization of birth control by the illiterate mothers. These are as follows: the belief that children are gifts from God and nobody should interrupt the procreation process, the belief that the greater the number of children the greater the honor and family chances of prosperity, the belief that many male children are needed to perpetuate the family lineage, the belief that modern birth control measures cause serious side effects, husband do not usually accept the use of contraceptive, there is no family planning service in some community health centers, husband is the only son and therefore there is a need of multiple birth, the use of birth control is a taboo against the culture of the land, contraceptive use encourages married women into adultery and the kind of religion in practice discourages the use of contraceptives. This is in tandem with the research carried out by Hanson, Burke and Anne (2010) that some cultures or religious belief discourages members access to birth control because they consider it to be morally, religiously or politically undesirable.

Table 3 shows the seven (7) different acceptable ways of improving the utilization of birth control by the illiterate mothers. These include the following: health workers should help by disseminating contraceptive information to rural areas, integration of birth control service into basic health service, offering birth control services at a lower and affordable cost, educating the

husbands on the relevance use of contraceptive, religions and Christian denomination should strive to influence their families on contraceptive usage positively, equipping the women with saleable skills to upgrade their low status and government should be attaching incentives with every use of birth control. UNESCO (2011c) stated that most of the factors militating birth control utilization by the illiterate mothers are anchored on ignorance. This is in line with the findings of the study. The seven(7) various ways in the table 3 above will be better measures to be taken to proffer solutions to the militating factors hindering the use of birth control.

#### Conclusion

This study has investigated the preset utilization of birth control methods by the illiterate mothers in Obukpa area. It determined the various birth control measures that are acceptable by the illiterate mothers and the socio-cultural belief of the people influencing the utilization of birth control.

Based on the findings, folkloric method which is of unproven efficacy (Alagarajan, 2008) followed by 'abstinence' are the major birth control methods that are mostly acceptable by the illiterate mothers. This reveals the low and inefficient use of birth control by the target group. In addition, their attitude toward the birth control is utterly negative. This is revealed by the socio-cultural beliefs influencing their utilization. Therefore, there is need for measures towards enhancing the utilization of birth control by the illiterate mothers in Obukpa areas in Nsukka L.G.A. Enugu State. In order to improve the health of these mothers, the children and the family wellbeing

#### Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher made the following recommendation for proper utilization of

birth control by the illiterate mothers in Obukpa area in Nsukka L.G.A. Enugu State

1. Adult education should be encouraged where women will be taught birth control measures as well as reproductive health in order to imbibe modern methods.

2. Enlightenment campaign should be carried out through radios and TV programme in order to equip them with right information about birth control.

3. The utilization of modern method of birth control should be improved upon to reduce side effect to the barest minimum for general acceptability

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