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# Place of Residence, Fertility Behaviour and Relevance of Malthusian Population Theory of Growth and Development in Nigeria

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## Abstract

In many developing countries, population explosion and high fertility rates have been a serious concern to individuals, societies and governments. Nigeria is one of the countries in sub-Sahara Africa (SSA) which has been experiencing high fertility over the last five decades withplace of residence been an important factor influencing fertility level in most SSA countries including Nigeria. Policies need to be formulated in ensuring balanced development in countries prone to urbanisation. Countriesthat have population policies and sustained family planning programmes have the potential to achieve socio-economic progress and in turn general improvement in well-being of the populace. This study examined place of residence and fertility behaviour in Nigeria in conjunction with the relevance of the Malthusian theory of population growth and development in Nigeria through extensive review of literatures. It was deduced from literatures that there is relationship between place of residence and fertility behaviour in Nigeria in terms of children ever born (CEB). The Malthusian population theory of growth and development is also relevant to development issues witnessed in Nigeria. It was concluded that policies need to be formulated and effectively implemented towards ensuring even development in Nigeria. The Malthusian theory of population growth and development need to be properly studied in guiding the government and other policy makers on effective population and developmental policies and programmes in Nigeria

*Keywords*: place, residence, fertility, behaviour, Nigeria

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Fertility level in sub-Sahara African countries remains high (Obiyan *et al.*, 2019; Michael *et al.,* 2025). In many developing countries, population explosion and high fertility rates pose serious concern to individuals, societies and governments. Nigeria is one of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) which has been experiencing high fertility rates over the last five decades

(NPC & ICF International, 2019). There has been much debate about the relationship between population growth and socio-economic development, with main consensus supporting the idea that slower population growth rates promote economic development and lead to poverty reduction (Michael, 2024; Bucci *et al.*, 2018).

Place of residence has the capacity of influencing fertility level. Policies need to be formulated in ensuring balanced development in countries prone to urbanisation. Published evidence suggests that countries which have population policies and sustained family planning programmes have the potential to achieve socio-economic progress and in turn general improvement in well-being of the populace (Bucci *et al.,*2018; Bucci & Prettner, 2020). Demographic dividend can only be achieved with population reduction and socio-economic policies such as increase in per capita income, schooling and employment opportunities (Njike, 2021). This study will examine the long-term effect of achieving some of the sustainable development goals (SDGs), especially Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10 and 11, namely poverty reduction, zero hunger, good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, reduced inequality, and sustainable cities and communities respectively.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is divided into two. The first part examined place of residence and fertility behaviour in Nigeria. The second part examined the relevance of the Malthusian population theory in Nigeria. The discussion is handled in subsequent paragraphs.

### 2.1 Place of Residence and Fertility Behaviour in Nigeria

Kemi (2021), in a study aimed at exploring fertility preference and other factors associated with women within the reproductive age range of 40-49 years in Nigeria; considered the influence of proximate factors on fertility preference in Nigeria. The factors considered include wealth, place of residence, contraceptive use, education and other factors that may be associated with fertility preference in Nigeria. The study made use of the 2018 NDHS data set of 1,357 women that fall within the age bracket of 40-49 years. The study revealed that about 25 percent of women within ages 40-49 years who desire to have more children in addition to the ones they already have was higher in the rural areas than to the urban areas. About 50 percent of those who desired more children had no formal education and were Muslims.

Simple regression indicated that older women who do not use contraceptive devices have high odd ratio regarding desire for another child, women in urban areas have low odds ratio, women in the North-West and North-East

zones of the country recorded more than 2.5 chance in desiring another child relative to those in the South-West zone of the country. The study concluded that desire for pregnancy towards the end of a woman's reproductive years need to be controlled through community-based sensitization programmes and investing in women's education.

Sani & Mohammad (2014) posited that fertility is one of the main factors affecting population growth in every country or society. Variations based on fertility performance have the tendency of creating differentials in fertility behaviour among women of reproductive or childbearing age. Their study revealed that both place of residence and education play significant role on residential variation in fertility behaviour as well as variation on the same place of residence. They recommended proper and adequate policy formulation on fertility as well as proper implementation, more involvement of private sector in campaign for measures on fertility control drawing from the premise that fertility control will go a long way in reducing rate of population growth in the country.

In a study conducted by Michael *et al.* (2025) aimed at examining the contextual factors as well as prevalence of high risk fertility behaviour among women that fall within reproductive age range 15-49 years in Nigeria, female respondents reported as head of their household had about 12 percent reduction in odds of high risk fertility behaviour when compared with respondents from households that had male gender as head of the family. They also discovered that geographical location or region tend to be associated with high risk fertility behaviour among women in Nigeria. They submitted that high prevalence in high-risk fertility behaviour in Nigeria can be attributed to poor policies and programmes and, as such, there is need to enact and enforce adequate programmes and policies that will be tailored towards addressing this issue in Nigeria. There is need for improvement in healthcare, education, access to and utilisation of family planning services as well as improvement on socio-economic status of women. All of these will ensure better fertility outcomes in Nigeria.

Ololade *et al.* (2018) submitted that fertility level in Nigeria still remained high and that it has been stagnating around six (6) children per woman in the country. Relevant statistics establish that the existence of community level factors have been sustaining high level of fertility in the country. Most studies that have been previously done on fertility focused on women fertility and very few have examined male fertility behaviour in Nigeria that is focused mainly on individual factors, neglecting the influence of community and contextual determinants. The study conducted by Ololade et al. was aimed at examining the influence of individual, household and community level factors

on male fertility behaviour in Nigeria. Their study employed the male data set from the 2013 NDHS and found out that community level variables such as region, community family size, diversity in ethnicity, community level of education and social norms had significant influence on male fertility behaviour in the country. Their study established that community level and contextual factors played important role towards influencing male fertility behaviour in the country and these factors need to be taken into consideration while working towards reducing fertility level in Nigeria.

Jecinta *et al.* (2020) posited that rate of increase in total number of children ever born in Nigeria with a proportionate growth in the economy is very inimical to human development. Their study applied a regression model on children ever born (being a count data) and generalised Poisson Regression to text age of respondents at time of first birth, urban-rural status, and religion as factors possible to influence children ever-born in Nigeria and their result revealed: urban-rural status (P<.0001), religion (P<.0001) and age of respondent at the time of first birth (P<.0001). This result showed that place of residence, religion and age at time of first birth (age of entry into reproduction, or marriage) are significantly associated with total number of children ever born in Nigeria; hence, possibly influencing factors of fertility levels and trends in Nigeria. In connecting this result with regional variation in Nigeria, this will buttress some of the reasons behind the high fertility levels in Northern Nigeria: the predominance of early marriage; influence of religion regarding modern contraceptive use, polygamous family and the fact that most of the citizens are still dwelling in their simple rural setting.

## 2.2 Relevance of Malthusian Theory of Population Growth and Development in Nigeria

Thomas Malthus (1766-1834) asserted that population appears to be increasing in a geometric progression while food supply only increases in arithmetic progression and that if population growth rate is not controlled, the growth rate would be checked naturally, either positively or negatively. He highlighted the positive checks to include diseases, war, and famine. He highlighted the negative checks to include intentional prevention of births through delayed marriage, and choice. Some of its present-day positive checks include AIDs, Ebola, COVID 19 and its mutations. It also includes the low life expectancy in Africa and other developing countries. According to Malthus, due to the arithmetic growth rate of agriculture and geometric growth rate of population, natural growth of population will eventually outpace agricultural output which will thereby result to famine, hunger, diseases and other catastrophes until the population is restored or reduced to a level that will be sustained by the environment.

He was pessimistic about the relationship between population growth rate, environment and development, believing that standard of living can only be improved if there is strict limitation on human reproduction. However, Malthus could never imagine the advent of medicine, global access to good water and machinery involved in food production thereby leading to mass production. He could also not envisage the advent of improved technology, science and improved medical innovations which have helped in disease prevention, widespread birth control and global awareness.

### 2.2.1 Malthusian Theory of Population Growth and Economic Implications

The economic implications of Malthusian theory are that high level of population will reduce income per capita which is common in developing countries, most especially countries that rely to a large extent on agriculture as well as countries that are heavily dependent on energy and mineral exports such as Nigeria. Economists have argued that the Malthusian trap has been broken since the 19th century due to industrial revolution that has ushered in technology and massive production of goods and services, thereby improving the living standards of people despite the rapid population growth. This can be evident in developed countries where the mode of production is manufacturing and service driven. Agricultural production is mechanised; so, only about 4 percent of the population produce what the entire country needs in terms of food supply and export.

However, others were of the opinion that the Malthusian trap is still in operation due to excessive pollution and food shortages most especially in developing countries. They were also of the opinion that the incidence of food shortages and excessive pollution in developing countries can be attributed to over population; so that the growth rate of the population is now exceeding the environmental carrying capacity in terms of natural resources. In Nigeria, studies have revealed that the rate of population growth has influenced economic growth in Nigeria. This can be in terms of the huge working population that are channelled to the service sector, remittal from skilled Nigerians working abroad, and so forth; so that the economic effect can be positive or negative in terms of unemployment, inequality or poverty.

### 2.2.2 Neo-Malthusianism and Environmental Implications

Neo-Malthusians are advocates for planning of the human population such as family planning in our various homes in order to ensure sustainability of our environmental resources in relation to the current and future human population and other future species. Neo Malthusians differ a little from Malthusian theories due to their support for birth control; that is, family

planning. The Malthusians were in support of abstinence instead of birth control suggested by the Neo-Malthusians; so that the modern view of the Neo-Malthusians was more concerned with environmental catastrophes and environmental degradation that can lead to famine rather than poverty of the Malthusians. Environmentalists made use of the Malthusian theory in stressing that the earth's carrying capacity in terms of natural resources cannot sustain the present population growth rate and unless the present rate of population checked, the environmental resources will run out; hence, the Neo-Malthusians thought of birth control. Neo-Malthusians were of the fear that large population size can lead to ecological and humanitarian disaster and as such, the need to combat overpopulation such be treated with urgency with coercive policies in order to mitigate the negative consequences of overpopulation.

Neo-Malthusianism was based on the premise that the power of the human population to reproduce will always be greater than the power of the earth to sustain the growing population, that the passion between men and women is a basic necessity and will tend to continue; hence need to be checked, and that food is a basic necessity for human existence. They were of the opinion that overconsumption resulting from overpopulation has the tendency of increasing the depletion of environmental natural resources; that is, environmental degradation which may eventually lead to collapse of the ecological system and other environmental hazards, thereby by positing that freedom to breed will eventually bring a ruin to all. Based these premises, in order to attain the sustainable development goals in Nigeria and other developing countries, there is no gainsaying that population control measures need to be put in place though family planning programmes and other birth control measures.

## 3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study employed extensive review of scholarly articles as methodology. Meaning and definition of concepts relating to place of residence, Malthusian theory, Neo-Malthusianism, environmental implications and fertility behaviour in Nigeria were accessed from the internet and other electronic search devices. Deductions were made from the literatures and discussions made so far. The author's personal conclusion formed the last chapter.

## 4.0 POLICY RESPONSE TO FERTILITY IN NIGERIA

The Nigerian government, with the aid of the national population commission (NPC), updated its national population policy in 2021 with a view to accommodating emerging issues on population matters since 2004. The main goal or objective of this policy on population was to achieve a development

index, termed demographic dividend in order to achieve sustainable development in Nigeria. The country is the most populated country in Africa with about twenty (20) percent of the African continent. In this new national policy, fertility management and family planning were adapted measures viewed as crucial strategies in achieving the various goals set by the policy. This is because fertility decline is very essential in order to achieve the so-called demographic dividend in Nigeria.

In pursuance of this demographic dividend, the federal government with the aid of federal ministry of health (FMH) in Nigeria drafted a robust commitment to family planning (FP 2030) with a vision to making Nigeria a country where everybody will be capable of making informed choices on fertility and have affordable as well as equitable access to quality family planning services and amenities and participate as equals on issues that relate to societal development. They were of the view that if the country does not invest in family planning then, the country may miss the opportunity for accelerated economic growth.

Intersectionality between family planning and the 2021 national population policy (NPP); The 2021 national population policy identified family planning as a very important national agenda. The 2021 national population policy recognized family planning as a very crucial strategy needed by the country in order to realise the various population policy goals on sustainable development and demographic dividend. This national population policy eliminated the fear of some officials in pursuance of allocating country's resources on family planning. This policy also expanded collaborations with other stakeholders, and about One (1) percent of the country's budget on health went to family planning at all levels of government; referred to as the FP 2030 commitment.

The responsibility for implementation of this national policy was viewed to be everyone's concern even though the federal government also took considerations for the poor domestic funding that was apparent in the year. This is because the year this policy was launched no fund was allocated in catering for programmes on family planning in the national budget. There were also difficulties in translating policy to action at all levels of government. As such, there was need to intensify awareness of the policy at subnational levels of the country. There was need to intensify family programmes on planning for adolescents, need for urgent strategies in preventing untimely release of funds that were budgeted for family planning, and ensuring accountability at all levels of government (both at national and sub-national levels).

This policy viewed family planning as contributing to the achievement of the national population policy goals on sustainable development through decline in the fertility rate and level; leading to few dependents (low dependency ratio) and increasing savings for investment in productive areas, reducing morbidity and mortality rates of women; thereby making women that are of the reproductive age to remain stronger, having more time and energy in improving their reproductive lives thereby enhancing productivity. It was viewed that families save money for developmental purposes when they were wealthier families, healthier families that raise up children that are more educated. In conclusion, government at all levels need to extend collaborations to include civil societies, and to devise systems that will be capable of tracking data on family planning across both private and public sectors of the country. They should also improve on advocacy with civil society organisations (CSOs) in fostering health insurance policies, schemes in coverage and provision of family planning services, ensuring that basic health funds for provision of coverage in family planning are integral part of the primary health care systems. Moreover, government should support actors in the private sector such as community pharmacists that offer free family planning services in the country.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

There is relationship between place of residence and fertility behaviour in Nigeria in terms of children ever born (CEB). The Malthusian population theory of growth and development is also relevant to development issues witnessed in Nigeria. Policies and programmes need to be formulated and effectively implemented towards ensuring even development in Nigeria. This will go a long way in improving the standard of living of an average Nigerian. The Malthusian theory of population growth and development need to be properly studied to guide the government and other policy makers on effective population and developmental policies and programmes in Nigeria.

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