**FACTORS INFLUENCING FAMILY PLANNING CHOICES AMONG COUPLES ATTENDING FAMILY PLANNING CLINIC IN UCTH CALABAR**

**CHAPTER ONE**

**INTRODUCTION**

**1.1 Background of the Study**

Family planning is a critical component of reproductive health, and it has become a central issue in global health discussions due to its significant impact on population control, maternal health, and the overall well-being of families. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), family planning allows individuals and couples to anticipate and attain their desired number of children and the spacing of their births (WHO, 2020). The accessibility and proper use of family planning methods have been shown to reduce maternal mortality by preventing unintended pregnancies and reducing the need for unsafe abortions (Cleland et al., 2022). In developing countries like Nigeria, family planning plays a particularly important role in addressing the high rates of maternal mortality and morbidity, as well as helping to manage population growth (Okonofua, 2020). In Nigeria, the use of family planning services remains low despite efforts to increase access. Data from the Nigerian Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) in 2018 indicated that the contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR) among married women was only 12%, which is below the global average (National Population Commission, 2018). This low uptake of contraceptive methods reflects several interrelated factors, including cultural, religious, and educational barriers, as well as issues surrounding gender dynamics and access to healthcare facilities (Oye-Adeniran et al., 2019). These barriers are more pronounced in rural areas and among populations with lower socio-economic status, where access to healthcare is limited and traditional beliefs are more prevalent (Adedini et al., 2021). The University of Calabar Teaching Hospital (UCTH) in Calabar serves as a referral center for family planning services in Cross River State. The hospital provides a wide range of contraceptive services to couples, but despite these services, the level of utilization remains relatively low compared to national targets. Several studies have highlighted that factors such as education, religion, cultural norms, economic status, and misconceptions about family planning play significant roles in shaping couples' choices in family planning methods (Ikeako et al., 2021; Adebowale & Palamuleni, 2020). For instance, while some couples prefer traditional methods of contraception due to their perceived safety and alignment with cultural values, others may avoid family planning altogether due to fear of side effects or the belief that contraception could lead to infertility (Ebeigbe & Igberase, 2019).

Sociocultural factors such as gender roles and religious doctrines also significantly influence family planning decisions in Nigeria. Research has shown that male partners often have the final say in decisions about contraception, which can limit women's autonomy in making choices about their reproductive health (Akinyemi et al., 2022). Furthermore, certain religious beliefs, particularly in conservative Christian and Muslim communities, discourage the use of modern contraceptives, viewing them as a violation of natural law or divine will (Eze & Okonkwo, 2021). These dynamics further complicate the effective implementation of family planning programs and policies in Nigeria. Family planning has been widely recognized as a vital tool for improving public health and achieving gender equality. The benefits of family planning extend beyond health, influencing economic development and social stability. According to Ahmed et al. (2021), women who have access to family planning are more likely to pursue educational and employment opportunities, which can improve their socio-economic status and contribute to national development. Moreover, reducing unplanned pregnancies through family planning can alleviate pressure on healthcare systems and reduce poverty rates by enabling families to allocate resources more effectively (Cleland et al., 2022). Despite these clear benefits, challenges persist in achieving universal access to family planning, particularly in Nigeria, where cultural, religious, and institutional barriers hinder progress (UNFPA, 2021).

In Calabar, where the UCTH family planning clinic operates, the need for effective family planning interventions is critical. As a major urban center in southern Nigeria, Calabar has a diverse population with varying levels of awareness and attitudes toward contraception. Studies have shown that couples in urban areas may have better access to family planning services, but they still face challenges related to misinformation, gender power imbalances, and the high cost of contraceptive services (Onwuzuruigbo, 2020). These factors contribute to low contraceptive use and a high rate of unintended pregnancies, which further strains healthcare resources and impacts the quality of life for families.

Given these complexities, it is essential to investigate the specific factors influencing family planning choices among couples attending the UCTH family planning clinic. Understanding these factors will provide insight into how to improve the uptake of contraceptive methods and address the barriers that couples face in making informed reproductive choices. This study, therefore, seeks to explore the various determinants of family planning decisions in this population, with the aim of contributing to more effective family planning interventions in Nigeria.

**1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Despite the availability of family planning services at UCTH, the uptake of these services remains low, contributing to high rates of unintended pregnancies and maternal health complications in the region. Various studies have pointed to sociocultural, religious, and economic factors as significant determinants of family planning choices, yet these factors have not been adequately explored in the context of UCTH Calabar (Akinyemi et al., 2022; Ikeako et al., 2021). Furthermore, gender dynamics, particularly the influence of male partners in decision-making, have been identified as barriers to women's autonomy in reproductive health decisions (Eze & Okonkwo, 2021). The lack of comprehensive data on the factors influencing family planning choices among couples in Calabar makes it difficult to design targeted interventions that address these issues.

In addition to the sociocultural barriers, there is evidence that misconceptions about the side effects of contraceptive methods contribute to the reluctance of couples to use family planning services (Oye-Adeniran et al., 2019). Many couples also lack access to accurate information about the benefits and safety of modern contraceptive methods, which leads to a reliance on traditional practices that may not be as effective in preventing unintended pregnancies (Adedini et al., 2021). These gaps in knowledge, coupled with cultural resistance to modern contraceptives, pose significant challenges to improving family planning uptake in the region.

This study aims to fill the knowledge gap by investigating the factors that influence family planning choices among couples attending the UCTH family planning clinic. By understanding the specific determinants of these choices, healthcare providers and policy-makers can develop more effective strategies to promote family planning and improve reproductive health outcomes in Calabar.

**1.3 Objectives of the Study**

1. To identify the sociocultural factors influencing family planning choices among couples attending the UCTH family planning clinic.
2. To examine the role of gender dynamics in family planning decision-making among couples in UCTH.
3. To assess the impact of economic and educational factors on the choice of family planning methods among couples.

**1.4 Research Questions**

1. What sociocultural factors influence family planning choices among couples attending the UCTH family planning clinic?
2. How do gender dynamics affect family planning decision-making among couples in UCTH?
3. What is the impact of economic and educational factors on the choice of family planning methods among couples?

**1.5 Research Hypotheses**

**H01:** There is no significant relationship between sociocultural factors and family planning choices among couples attending the UCTH family planning clinic.

**H02:** Gender dynamics do not significantly influence family planning decision-making among couples in UCTH.

**H03:** Economic and educational factors have no significant impact on the choice of family planning methods among couples.

**1.6 Significance of the Study**

This study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on family planning in Nigeria, specifically focusing on the factors that influence couples' choices at UCTH Calabar. The findings will be valuable for healthcare providers, policy-makers, and public health advocates, enabling them to design targeted interventions that address the specific barriers to family planning in this population. By understanding the sociocultural, economic, and gender-related factors that shape family planning decisions, the study will help improve reproductive health outcomes and contribute to the national goal of reducing maternal mortality. Additionally, the study's findings could inform future policies aimed at increasing access to family planning services and empowering women to make informed decisions about their reproductive health.

**1.7 Scope of the Study**

This study will focus on couples attending the family planning clinic at UCTH Calabar. It will investigate the factors that influence their family planning choices, including sociocultural, economic, educational, and gender-related determinants. The study will also examine the role of healthcare providers and the availability of contraceptive methods in shaping these choices. However, the findings may not be generalizable to other regions in Nigeria due to the unique cultural and demographic characteristics of the study population.

**1.8 Definition of Terms**

**Family Planning:** The practice of controlling the number and spacing of children through the use of contraceptive methods.

**Contraceptive Methods:** Medical or natural techniques used to prevent pregnancy.

**Sociocultural Factors:** Social and cultural influences that affect individuals' behaviours and decisions, including family planning choices.

**Gender Dynamics:** The roles and power relations between men and women, particularly in decision-making processes.

**Reproductive Health:** A state of physical, mental, and social well-being in all matters related to the reproductive system.