

Impacts of Infertility on Divorce among Reproductive Age Spouses in Ibadan city, Oyo State, Nigeria

¹Oloyede A.O., ¹Alawode O.W., ²Adelakun M.A., and ²Babalola O.F.

¹Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, PMB 4000 Ogbomoso, Oyo state

²Emmanuel Alayande University of Education Oyo, Oyo State

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ABSTRACT: *Infertility is the inability of a woman to achieve a clinical pregnancy following 12 months of unprotected sexual intercourse. It has become a major concern in the world most especially Africa for married couple with them facing a lot of consequences of infertility either emotionally, psychologically or socially majorly women. The research examined the impacts of infertility on divorce among reproductive age spouses in Ibadan Metropolis. The null hypothesis stated as there is no significant relationship between infertility and divorce among couples in the study area. The study employed multi-stage sampling technique. A closed ended questionnaires were used to acquire data. Data were analysed using descriptive (frequency counts) and inferential (chi-square X^2) statistical methods. The study revealed that more than half of divorce cases heard in year 2020 in the study area have been remarried, It was revealed that X^2 calculated = 17.729 was more than X^2 tabulated = 15.507 therefore, null hypothesis rejected and agreed that infertility has to do with divorce. The study concluded that the impact of infertility on divorce rate in Nigeria is high and can be reduced through improvement in relationship and cooperation of the couple in the overcoming challenges together. Implementation of clinical practices in the field of reproductive health and family support service is of help to the challenged couples.*

KEYWORDS: infertility, divorce, remarry, reproductive age

INTRODUCTION

Infertility is the inability of a woman to achieve a clinical pregnancy following 12 months of unprotected sexual intercourse. In Nigeria, infertility is a notable concern, representing 24-59% of gynecological consultations (Bello *et al.*, 2021). Women frequently encounter emotions such as loss, grief, rage, sadness, humiliation, self-blame, and a sense of diminished femininity. The stigma is influenced by socio-cultural attitudes that consider reproduction as the woman's main duty.

Women who are infertile are at a higher risk of experiencing economic hardship, psychological pain, and social humiliation, which may result in marital discord and divorce (Bello *et al.*, 2021). Infertility can be caused by male, female, or both factors. While female infertility might be caused by ovarian malfunction, tubal obstruction, or aberrant uterine structure, male infertility can be caused by testicular dysfunction, hormone imbalances, or genetic diseases. The number of cases of infertility has increased with growing financial capability and availability of various birth plans. Of the women aged 15 to 49 who sought infertility therapies in 2019, 12.7% did so in order to obtain medical assistance (Zhang *et al.*, 2021). Menstrual problems, obesity, hypertrichosis, and seborrhoeic alopecia are among the symptoms of infertility that can lower a patient's self-esteem and quality of life. Hysteroscopic surgery, medication-induced ovulation therapy, IUI, IVF-ET, and third-party assisted ART are among the available treatment options (Zhu, Shi, Wang, Cui, Wang, Tang, Qian, Wei, Wang, Zhou and Xu, 2022).

Okonofuaa, Harris, Odebiyi, Kaned and Snow (1997) underlined the consequences of infertility in among some African women who face severe societal repercussions, including bereavement, frustration, social humiliation, rejection, and economic hardship. Infertility is a reason for divorce in some communities in Cameroon, which results in women losing their land and getting less presents. Women have been considered as outcasts and buried with insane people in some communities in Ekiti state, South West Nigeria. Bakhtiyar, Beiranv and, Ardalán, Changae, Almasian, Badrizadeh, Bastami and Ebrahimzadeh (2019) emphasized the psychological problems associated with Infertility like anxiety, depression, tension, and a lower standard of living. Frustration and rage are common emotions experienced by infertile women, which can negatively impact relationships. Compared to fertile people, they have a higher risk of mental diseases, marital discontent, and a lower quality of life.

A couple is often deemed clinically infertile if there is no pregnancy following at least twelve months of consistent unprotected sexual intercourse. It is viewed as a significant life crisis that has the capacity to jeopardise the stability of persons and relationships (Oluwole, Fakayode, Olufela, Akinsola, and Ojo, 2021). Akande, Dipeolu, and Ajuwon (2019) highlighted the difficulties caused by infertility in couples, particularly in the South West region of Nigeria. In many communities, bearing children is seen as a social obligation and parenthood is culturally necessary. Childlessness is socially unacceptable and stigmatised because children are highly valued. As a result, infertile couples may face rejection from their in-laws, leading them to explore alternative treatment options. Couples have a strong and common desire to have children, but for a significant portion of them, this goal is not readily achieved. Fertility challenges can be caused by genetic defects, infections, environmental factors, delayed childbearing, behaviour, and specific disorders. In Ojedokun's (2019) study, it was emphasised that Africans saw children as a symbol of power and pride, and as a form of security for their parents in their later years. The study emphasizes that the primary significance of having children is to ensure family continuity.

Infertility impacts the reproductive systems of both men and women, causing challenges in conceiving or carrying a pregnancy to full term. Primary infertility is the inability of a male partner to father a child, often caused by poor sperm production. Additional factors comprise heat, infections, sperm antibodies, torsion, medicines, radiation damage, and ovarian malfunction. Infertility affects both the physical and emotional well-being of both the infertile individual and their partner. It impacts 10-15% of couples in their reproductive years worldwide, resulting in sexual dysfunction, social isolation, and emotional stress (Ojedokun, 2019). Fehintola, Fehintola, Ogunlaja, Awotunde, Ogunlaja, and Onwudiegwu (2017) emphasised the significant influence of cultural attitudes in understanding infertility. Infertility in high fertility regions such as Africa can have significant emotional impacts on couples, particularly women, leading to harassment and marital instability. Primary infertility occurs when a woman is unable to conceive a child or carry a pregnancy to term, while secondary infertility refers to women who have previously given birth at least once.

Statement of Problem

Many infertile couples have psychological distress due to societal and familial pressures, leading to increased stress and marital problems. Infertility stigma often leads to family discord, separation, and divorce. There is limited information on how infertility impacts the divorce rate among spouses in Ibadan city in recent years. Hence, the present study seeks to examine the impacts of infertility on divorce among reproductive age spouse in Ibadan city. It would investigate the impact of infertility on the quality of marital relationships and the probability of divorce in couples without children.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Infertility is a major family and reproductive health issue in Africa, where the greatest burden on people living in developing nations is childlessness. Unintentional childlessness is viewed differently in different civilizations; in many non-Western cultures, it is considered a social abnormality and improper in marriage. For infertile couples, not having children is stressful and challenges their moral and social identities. Cultural norms, personal experiences, and social history all have a significant influence on children's values. Studies carried out in emerging nations indicate that children's values are sociocultural and economic, with a preference for traditional values. (Iwelumor, Jamaludin, George, Babatunde, Olonade, 2020). Procreation is a natural human want. "Quality of life impairment" is the general phrase for the detrimental emotional experiences that infertility can cause throughout life. (Bakhtiyar, Beiranvand, Ardalan, Changae, Almasian, Badrizadeh, Bastami and Ebrahimzadeh, 2019).

In Kwara South, Nigeria, Iwelumor, Jamaludin, George, Babatunde, and Olonade (2020) examined the beliefs of infertile couples regarding the value of having children. They discovered that these beliefs are strongly embedded in societal norms and are closely linked to patriarchy, religion, and the need for a strong marriage and family. Since having children was viewed as the fulfillment of

a heavenly mandate, many believed that children were divine. Women considered children as sources of fulfillment and a balanced lifestyle, whereas most men saw them as life itself. Boys are typically thought to bestow honor and dignity on men and preserve the integrity of the family tree. There is a belief that being a mother gives women a permanent position in marriage. These insights about the value of children in Nigerian culture may be incorporated into programs and services intended to assist childless couples in reducing the effects of infertility. We also support innovative cultural programs that enhance the worth of girl children (Iwelumor, Jamaludin, George, Babatunde, Olonade, 2020). Gayathri, Indu, Parvathi, and Sudha (2023) claim that because women are frequently held responsible for childlessness, particularly in rural India, the prevalence of depression is rising among infertile women. In order to alleviate pressure on infertile couples, efforts should be made to educate the public about infertility.

Having a child or children is a high priority for many couples. Infertile individuals frequently experience feelings of failure, and when they are shunned for societal, cultural, or private reasons, it can trigger a crisis in which women are mistreated. Particularly in developing countries, infertility is turning from being a personal problem to an unpleasant societal stigma that has a devastating impact on needs, expectations, and social relationships (Caliskan, Balkan, Mecdi Kaydırak, 2023).

Psychosocial Impacts of Infertility among Couples

Having a child or children is a high priority for many couples. Infertile individuals frequently experience feelings of failure, and when they are shunned for societal, cultural, or private reasons, it can trigger a crisis in which women are mistreated. Particularly in developing countries, infertility is turning from being a personal problem to an unpleasant societal stigma that has a devastating impact on needs, expectations, and social relationships (Caliskan, Balkan, Mecdi Kaydırak, 2023).

Xie, Ren, Niu, Zheng, Yu, and Li (2023) claim that the stigma associated with infertility can cause a considerable deal of mental and psychological distress to female patients, which can have a detrimental effect on their quality of life. Thus, targeted and effective psychological interventions should be developed to improve patients' quality of life and reduce the stigma attached to them. Women are usually blamed in traditional cultural societies for not having children (Tiu et al., 2018). Many people believe that women who are infertile are inferior or alien (Zhang et al., 2021). Many infertile women face discrimination of many kinds throughout their life as a result of illogical social assumptions and prejudices. Other people's perspectives (Kaya and Oskay, 2020). They also face social repercussions such as domestic abuse, divorce, or negative opinions from others (Kaya and Oskay, 2020).

Infertility causes many couples to go through a crisis that affects many aspects of life. When the couple first finds out they are unable to conceive, they are initially overcome with emotional shock,

sorrow, and disappointment. It is difficult to accept the situation and the diagnosis since it typically causes feelings of annoyance, regret, and self-criticism in addition to a drop in self-esteem. Our research centers on evaluating the degree of self-esteem and acceptance of infertility in patients (Nagórska, Zych, Obrzut, and Darmochwał-Kolarz, 2023).

According to Olowokere, Olowookere, and Komolafe (2022), infertile women experience psychological and social challenges. It is thought that women's coping strategies and the presence of a support network help them cope with the infertility process better. When caring for infertile women or couples, nurses and other medical professionals must show that they have a complete understanding of the specific psychosocial concerns related to infertility. This is made clear by the study's conclusions and the participant's personal narratives..

The primary problem with infertility in developing countries like as Nigeria is that it can go from a serious, private hardship to a terrible, public shame that has complex, far-reaching effects. Beyond the individual and family, infertility affects society at large and the international community (Naab, Lawali, Donkor, 2019 and Öztürk, Bloom, and Li, 2021). Compared to women in western countries, infertile women often experience social rejection, shame, and ridicule (Atijosan, Adeyeye, Ogungbayi, 2019). They consequently struggle with a range of societal challenges and are typically perceived as social outcasts. As a result of the rejection, some of them withdraw inside of themselves, get depressed, and some may even think of killing themselves. According to reports, women experiencing infertility frequently experience these and other psychological problems (Galhardo, Moura-Ramos, and Cunha, 2016).

Mental Impacts of Infertility among Couples

According to the research conducted by Caliskan, Balkan, and Mecdi Kaydırak (2023), infertile individuals' primary concern was having children. Along with the general increase in infertility-related stress and all of its subscales, infertile individuals experience an increase in emotional divorce. However, interpersonal issues were the least common among the infertile group. It was more effective, though, at predicting the emotional divorce of infertile people. The results imply that infertile people's emotional divorce should be lessened by paying more attention to relationship concerns. When the level of stress related to infertility and all of its subscales increases, individuals who are infertile are more likely to have an emotional divorce. Couples experiencing infertility may withdraw from social interactions, particularly with friends who are expecting or have young children. They cannot, however, completely avoid the conflicts that result from infertility (Caliskan, Balkan, Mecdi Kaydırak, 2023).

Receiving an infertility diagnosis can be quite upsetting for a couple. This diagnosis may lead to serious mental diseases such as depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. Couples undergoing infertility therapy should so receive support and counseling. It has been demonstrated that psychological therapies for infertile couples significantly increase the likelihood of getting

pregnant while also lowering depressive and anxious symptoms. Consequently, most individuals can benefit from the appropriate therapy to attain a resolution, even though infertility may have significant psychological effects: Whether a person decides to adopt children, raise their own children, or decide not to have children.

In addition to the psychological effects of infertility, social pressure and the stigma associated with childlessness can exacerbate couples' physical and mental health (Simionescu, Doroftei, Maftai, Obreja, Anton, Grab, Ilea C. anAs suggested by Singh, Rajpal, Majumdar, Mandal, and Sahu, 2023). To optimize the response to treatment, it is crucial to address these problems prior to starting infertility treatment. An inability to conceive can seriously harm a woman's mental well-being. Infertile women's quality of life and mental health are also adversely affected (Hasan, Sharif, Jahan, and Begum, 2023). There is a compelling argument to be made that infertility is a multifaceted stressor that has long-lasting effects on mental health, including anxiety, stress, and depression. Particularly in countries where men predominate, like India, the social stigma attached to infertility causes women to experience a host of detrimental consequences, such as physical abuse, isolation from social groups, marital difficulty, sexual dysfunction, divorce, remarriage, and more. According to Singh, Rajpal, Majumdar, Mandal, and Sahu (2023), a woman who is infertile may suffer from serious psychological and social repercussions, such as mental stress, anxiety, depression, self-blame, self-isolation, worthlessness, and loss of interest in life.

METHODOLOGY

Study Area

Ibadan, a Nigerian city, was founded in 1829 by a band of warriors under the leadership of Lagelu. It was established as a British Protectorate in 1893 and continues to serve as the capital of Oyo state. The city houses eleven (11) local governments, comprising five urban and six semi-urban administrations. The local governments in Nigeria are the third tier of government and include the Executive Arm. The study aims to examine the impact of infertility on divorce among divorced couples residing in the study area.

Sampling techniques and Procedures

The study employed a multi-stage random sampling technique. Stage 1: six (6) local government areas namely: Egbeda, Oluyole, Ona ara, Ibadan northeast, Ibadan Southeast, and Ibadan North were selected representing 50% of existing local government areas in Ibadan. Stage2: all six (6) customary courts within the local government area were selected. Stage 3: 50% of divorced cases heard for year 2020 were selected totaling 450 divorcee and/or remarried. A total of four hundred and fifty questionnaire were administered to divorced or remarried spouses residing in the study area to extract data. The questionnaire comprises of two (2) sections one for demographic

information (gender, religion, education, age, occupation, and marital status) and another for impacts of infertility on divorce. The instrument's reliability was assessed utilising the test-retest reliability coefficient of stability. A preliminary study was carried out with 10 divorced couples from two (2) local government areas namely Akinyele local government and Ibadan Southwest local government areas different from the selected local government areas for main research in Oyo State, Nigeria, demonstrating dependability coefficients of 0.85 and 0.86, respectively.

Data Collection and Analysis

Four hundred fifty (450) questionnaires were distributed representing 50% of the total divorced cases heard in the customary courts in the year 2020. 281 were properly filled and returned representing 62.4%. The data acquired were analysed using descriptive statistical methods such as frequency count and percentage, as well as inferential statistical techniques like chi-square using SPSS version 20.0. When the calculated chi-square value exceeds the tabulated value, the null hypothesis is rejected, indicating a substantial link between the dependent and independent variables.

FINDINGS

The significant relationship between infertility and divorce was analysed using chi-square. 281 responses were analysed from the research instrument which elicited responses on set ranged relationship between couples as a result of infertility, lamentation over inability to have biological offspring, disagreement over number of offspring expected of, child gender preference, and stigma occasioned by lack of marital fruitfulness (by child consumption).

As shown in the table 1 the larger percentage of the respondents totaling 59.44% remarried while the least percentages were single after divorced at 40.56%. It can be concluded that remarried occupied the larger percentage of the respondents of this research work. According to (Cherlin and Furstanberg 2010). Many divorced people remarry in Nigeria, as well as other parts of the world, and about half of those who do are already parents. The result is the creation of “blended families”, also called “stepfamilies”. For instance, in 1992, over 11 percent of all American children were living with one biological parent and one stepparent. Estimates are that a fourth of American children will live with a stepparent before reaching the age of sixteen. By the year 2000, it has been estimated that, stepparent is expected to outnumber traditional nuclear families. This could be traced back to the age of the respondents where there was indication that divorced occurred most among the age of 31 to 40 years old which is still young to stay lonely, they have feelings, needs affectionate, they still need one's to cares for them and many other needy that can only be provided by an opposite sex, for these reasons they remarried.

Table1: Marital Status of the Respondent

| | | Marital Status of the Respondent | | Total |
|--|----|----------------------------------|------------|------------|
| | | Divorce | Remarry | |
| Childlessness as a Factor Affect Marital Instability | SA | 19(6.76) | 82(29.18) | 101(35.94) |
| | A | 26(9.25) | 25(8.90) | 51(18.15) |
| | D | 38(13.52) | 6(2.14) | 44(15.66) |
| | SD | 31(11.03) | 54(19.22) | 85(30.25) |
| Total | | 114 (40.56) | 167(59.44) | 281 |

Table 2 revealed that more than 60% of the respondents believed that infertility had nothing to do with the terms that led to their divorce. This is contrary to reports from White and Lynn (1990); Strong et al., (2011); Fehintola *et al.*, (2017); Iwelumor *et al.*, (2020). It was shown that the larger percentages of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that having no biological children brings sadness into their family and lifestyle. Table 2 revealed that most of the respondents accepted that infertility caused a great deal of damage to their communication medium and contributed to the divorce. Lastly, more than half of the respondents admitted that the number of children born in the family or their gender has nothing to do with divorce. This is similar to Fehintola *et al.*, (2017) who reported that after six months of marriage, pressure begins to build, and after the first three years of infertility, it becomes extremely intense and family dynamics become uneasy.

TABLE 2: Variables of infertility as a Determinant factor for Divorce

| Infertility on divorce | | child as a factor for divorce | | | | | Total | % |
|--|--------------|-------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|
| My spouse and I were not in good term because of the infertility | SA | 26 | 12 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 48 | 17.1 |
| | A | 14 | 26 | 10 | 2 | 0 | 52 | 18.5 |
| | D | 24 | 16 | 24 | 10 | 2 | 76 | 27.0 |
| | SD | 24 | 25 | 20 | 16 | 20 | 105 | 37.4 |
| | Total | 88 | 79 | 64 | 28 | 22 | 281 | 100 |
| There was sadness in having no biological children. | SA | 26 | 14 | 18 | 12 | 0 | 70 | 24.9 |
| | A | 14 | 20 | 24 | 20 | 0 | 78 | 27.8 |
| | D | 3 | 2 | 24 | 24 | 12 | 65 | 23.1 |
| | SD | 8 | 0 | 18 | 28 | 10 | 64 | 22.8 |
| | U | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 1.4 |
| Total | 53 | 36 | 86 | 84 | 22 | 281 | 100 | |
| My spouse and I didn't agree on the number of children to bear | SA | 28 | 18 | 16 | 10 | 0 | 72 | 25.6 |
| | A | 10 | 18 | 26 | 20 | 2 | 76 | 27.2 |
| | D | 26 | 12 | 20 | 4 | 0 | 62 | 22.0 |
| | SD | 24 | 22 | 12 | 12 | 1 | 71 | 25.2 |
| | Total | 88 | 70 | 74 | 46 | 3 | 281 | 100 |
| The infertility have caused a lot of damages to | SA | 11 | 12 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 23 | 8.18 |
| | A | 120 | 20 | 10 | 4 | 0 | 154 | 54.8 |
| | D | 22 | 2 | 30 | 2 | 0 | 56 | 19.9 |

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|--|--------------|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|------------|------------|
| communication between us | SD | 32 | 4 | 8 | 4 | 0 | 48 | 17.1 |
| | Total | 185 | 38 | 48 | 10 | 0 | 281 | 100 |
| | SA | 24 | 26 | 14 | 0 | 0 | 64 | 22.7 |
| My spouse always worried about lack of male/female child | A | 26 | 28 | 4 | 0 | 2 | 60 | 21.3 |
| | D | 21 | 12 | 30 | 16 | 0 | 79 | 28.2 |
| | SD | 24 | 22 | 18 | 12 | 2 | 78 | 27.8 |
| | Total | 95 | 20 | 66 | 28 | 4 | 281 | 100 |

From table 3 the chi-square statistic (X^2) calculated as 17.729. Tabulated critical chi-square (X^2): value at a 0.05 confidence level value is 15.507. The chi-square test has 3 degrees of freedom. With a calculated chi-square statistic of 17.729, which surpasses the threshold chi-square value of 15.507 at a significance level of 0.05 with 3 degrees of freedom, null hypothesis there by rejected. It shows a statistically significant relationship between the infertility and divorce among selected couples in Ibadan metropolis. Put simply, there is evidence indicating that the frequencies seen in the data set considerably deviate from the frequencies that would be expected if they were independent. We can infer that there is a relationship between the variables at the designated confidence level. Hence, the result of the research analyses in the placement areas found that, just like must preceding research works done extant literatures, lack of children in a marriage was found to be a significant factor in determining divorce. The findings align with Adegoke (2010), Isuigo-Abanihe (1998), Takyi (2001), and Reniers (2003) in stating that having children shortly after marriage is preferred and that the arrival of a kid post-marriage indicates a level of marital contentment that supports marriage longevity. This study aligns with Tilson and Larsen's (2000) research, which found that nearly all women (95%) in Ethiopia who did not produce a child during their first marriage ended up divorcing within 20 years of getting married.

Table 3: Chi-Square Analyses of Significant Effect of Infertility on Divorce

| Chi-Square Tests | | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------|----|-----------------------|
| | Value | Df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
| Pearson Chi-Square | 17.729 ^a | 3 | .897 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 17.628 | 3 | .897 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | .041 | 1 | .839 |
| N of Valid Cases | 281 | | |

$X^2= 17.729$, Tab $X^2=15.507$ Df= 3 Conf. Level = 0.05 = Rejected And Significant

CONCLUSION

Infertility has a major impact on marital stability among selected couples in Ibadan Metropolis, as shown by a statistically significant association between infertility and divorce. Infertile couples may have more anxiety, physiological pressure, and relationship difficulties, which can result in marital strife and potentially divorce. The significant association between infertility and divorce is considerable, but it is important to acknowledge the complex nature of this connection. A variety of variables, including customs of the community, social status, availability of healthcare, and individual coping strategies, interact with infertility to impact marital success uniquely for each couple.

The research emphasizes the significance of offering thorough support and intervention services for couples facing infertility in Ibadan Metropolis. Accessing reproductive treatments, counselling services, and community support networks can reduce the impact of infertility on marital relationships and improve couples' ability to overcome problems together. The results have consequences for the formulation of policies and the implementation of clinical practices in the field of reproductive health and family support services. This evidence can be utilised by policymakers, healthcare professionals, and community organisations to establish specific interventions and programmes that focus on enhancing marital resilience and well-being in couples impacted by infertility

Furthermore Studies

Though this study offers insightful information about the connection between divorce and infertility in Ibadan Metropolis, more still need to be explored to fully comprehend the underlying dynamics of infertility and divorce rate among couples. Further insights into this intricate phenomenon may come from cross-cultural comparisons, qualitative research, and longitudinal studies.

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