



**Patriarchal Norms and Reproductive Autonomy: The Influence of Son Preference on
Family Planning Among Women in Nigerian Police Barracks**

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Abstract

Microalgae have the highest efficiency in capture and exploit sunlight in the process of photosynthesis. The use of microalgae is very good in replacing raw materials for motorized vehicles and is useful for mitigating global warming problems. Because of this potential, the growth rate of microalgae must be considered properly for population stability. Factors such as

light and nutrient provision are important components that must be considered in the growth rate of microalgae. This study aims to determine the light and nutrient factors that affect the growth rate of microalgae. This study uses a literature review method with a narrative approach, secondary data obtained from articles, journals, or scientific papers accessed through an online database. The results of this study, light factor and nutrients have an important role in the growth rate of microalgae

Keywords: Microalgae, Light, Nutrient

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Introduction

Across sub-Saharan Africa countries, especially Nigeria, socio-cultural belief and values significantly shaped reproductive behavior and family planning decisions. An ongoing cultural norm in this region is the preference for a male child. This deeply rooted patriarchal structures prioritizes male lineage, inheritance, economic security, and social status. In a regular Nigerian society, male children are often referred to as heirs and keepers of the family name, while female children are seen migrating members of the family. This male-child preference created substantial pressure on women to continue to bear children till sons are born, these often times at the risks to health and reproductive rights/ autonomy, thus generating additional stress for the mother (Ikogho & Onoharigbo, 2025; Olufunmilayo et al., 2017; Ikogho & Akpokiniovo, 2025).

This situation is not peculiar to Nigeria. In Nepal and Indian for instance, preference for male children continues to shape the reproductive behavior of most women. Women in these region often reported increased fertility desires with reduced contraceptive use as they tried to meet societal expectations for male offspring. Studies have demonstrated strong preference for sons, which significantly impacted family planning decisions. In rural communities, 61.23% of families reported a clear preference for male children, citing key motivators to be economic support while breast feeding in old age (Vardhan & Rao, 2020; Ogbe & Ikogho, 2025). In the same vein, 53% of Nepal women expressed a preference for sons, which correlated strongly with expectations of old-age security (Dawadi et al., 2024).



Son preference is consistently associated with lower contraceptive uptake, as women often delay or avoid using contraception in hopes of achieving their ideal family composition (Dawadi et al., 2024). Moreover, the acceptance of permanent contraceptive methods tends to increase only after the desired number of sons has been achieved. This trend is found among women with lower health literacy levels, suggesting that health education may be a major determinant in reducing gender related bias in reproductive choices (Vardhan & Rao, 2020). These findings underscored the importance of designing inclusive family planning programs that consider the preferences and involvement of both partners (Dhande et al., 2016; Ikogho, 2022).

In spite of male child preference, recent researches suggest that more educational opportunities are promoting gender equality which can gradually reshape these deeply entrenched norms, promoting more equitable reproductive decision-making.

In spite of sustained national and international efforts to promote family planning in Nigeria for maternal health, socio-economic advancement, population control, contraceptive uptake remains suboptimal. The 2018 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) opined that only 17% of married women patronize modern contraceptive methods, with some disparities. Socio-cultural determinants on the other hand like religious beliefs, spousal approval, and the desire for male children have consistently been linked to low uptake (Sykora, 2022). Among specific sub-populations, these challenges are promoted by occupational and environmental factors. In the Nigerian police barracks, families live in hierarchical, and communal settings, while personal choices are subjected to peer surveillance, limited privacy and institutional norms. Such an



environments can promote and reinforce traditional norms, including male-child preference, thereby affecting reproductive health. Women in these barracks may experience low autonomy in contraceptive usage, while their male partners as well as extended family make the birth of male children a priority. Additionally, the quasi-military lifestyle sometimes limits access to reproductive health services, expanding existing barriers (Doepke & Tertilt, 2018; Ikogho & Temisere-Bethel, 2025).

Zone 5 of the Nigerian Police Force presents a unique context with which to explore these dynamics. The zone is made up by varied ethnic diversity, education, fertility norms, and patriarchal values. In several communities, the number of male children a woman bears is closely linked to her perceived worth and social status. This cultural heterogeneity makes Zone 5 a compelling case for examining how male-child preference intersects with contraceptive decision-making in police barracks.

Recent studies challenged the view that male-child preference is the primary determinant of contraceptive behavior. Akhter (2014) suggested that while male preference is relevant, it is often influenced by economic factors, education, and awareness of family planning benefits. Similarly, Cain (1994) argued that many sub-Saharan women are not opposed to contraception but face systemic barriers such as provider bias and lack of spousal communication. These findings indicated that male-child preference is one factor among many shaping contraceptive choices.



Another perspective emphasizes the role of changing gender norms and female education. As women gain education and economic power, traditional preferences for male children may decrease, leading to greater acceptance of family planning (Moghadam et al., 2017). However, these shifts may be less visible in structured environments like police barracks, where traditional family roles persist. This study therefore examined how son preference influences reproductive choices among women living in police barracks in Zone 5.

Statement of the Problem

Despite decades of advocacy and intervention programs promoting family planning in Nigeria, the utilization of contraceptive methods remains low, especially among married women. One of the major socio-cultural barriers to effective family planning is the deep-rooted preference for male children. In many Nigerian households, particularly within patriarchal communities, male children are often viewed as the primary carriers of the family name, future breadwinners, and custodians of inheritance. This gender bias places immense pressure on women to continue childbearing until a male child is born or until a desired number of sons is achieved—regardless of health risks or financial constraints.

This issue is even more nuanced in institutional settings such as Nigerian police barracks, where families are influenced by uniformed service culture, regimented living conditions, and communal interactions. Women living in police barracks may face unique social expectations, peer pressures, and constraints that shape their reproductive decisions. Despite the presence of health units and



awareness programs, it remains unclear how strongly male-child preference influences family planning practices among married women in these communities.

Currently, there is limited empirical evidence on the specific ways male-child preference affects reproductive choices in such semi-institutional environments, particularly in Zone 5 (Edo, Delta, and Bayelsa States). Understanding these dynamics is crucial for designing targeted interventions that respect cultural sensitivities while promoting reproductive rights and health equity.

Objective:

To examine the influence of male-child preference on family planning practices among married women living in Nigerian police barracks in Zone 5 (Edo, Delta, and Bayelsa States).

Research Questions

1. How aware are these women of various family planning methods, and to what extent are they utilized?
2. What cultural, institutional, or social factors within the barracks reinforce or challenge male-child preference and its effect on reproductive choices?

Hypothesis

1. There is no significant relationship between male-child preference and family planning practices of married women in zone 5 barracks of the Nigerian Police.



Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. Firstly, it provides valuable insight into how gender-based cultural expectations, particularly male-child preference, influence family planning practices among a relatively understudied population married women residing in police barracks. These communities often reflect both urban and communal living, shaped by institutional norms and shared lifestyles, which can amplify traditional values or create unique barriers to family planning.

Secondly, the findings will be instrumental for policymakers, health educators, and reproductive health service providers in tailoring interventions that consider both cultural sensitivity and institutional dynamics. The research can inform the development of gender-equitable reproductive health programs that address the root causes of male-child preference while promoting informed family planning choices.

Lastly, the study contributes to academic discourse on gender, fertility behavior, and public health in Nigeria, offering data that may guide further research and policy in similar contexts across the country and other patriarchal societies.

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study is delimited to married women residing in police barracks located within Zone 5 of the Nigerian Police Force, which includes barracks in Edo, Delta, and Bayelsa States. The research



focuses specifically on the influence of male-child preference on family planning decisions and behaviors. Only women who are legally married and currently living in these barracks with their spouses are considered eligible participants. The study excludes unmarried women, single mothers, and those living outside police-controlled residential areas.

The scope is further limited to assessing awareness, usage, and attitudes toward family planning, and how these are shaped or influenced by the desire for male offspring. It does not examine broader reproductive health issues, infertility challenges, or male perspectives, though these may be acknowledged as influencing factors.

Theoretical Framework



The study is anchored on two major theories:

Gender Preference Theory

This theory explains how cultural, economic, and societal values assign more importance to male children, especially in patriarchal societies. In many Nigerian contexts, male children are seen as carriers of family names, inheritors of property, and social security in old age. This framework helps understand how such perceptions influence reproductive behaviors and decisions related to family planning (Regmi et al., 2023).

1. Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991)

This theory posits that individual behavior is determined by intentions, which in turn are



influenced by attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Applied to this study, it helps examine how a woman's intention to use (or not use) family planning methods may be affected by her attitude toward male-child preference, the perceived expectations of her husband or community, and her control over reproductive decisions. These theories provide a dual lens: one culturally grounded (Gender Preference) and one psychologically driven (Theory of Planned Behavior), to explore the intersection of belief systems, societal expectations, and reproductive choices.

Methodology



The study will adopted a **descriptive survey research design**. This approach is suitable for collecting data from a large population to determine the extent to which male-child preference affects family planning decisions. The population includes all married women of reproductive age (15–49 years) living in police barracks across Zone 5 (Edo, Delta, and Bayelsa States). A **multi-stage sampling technique** was used:

1. Purposive selection of major police barracks in each state capital within Zone 5.
2. Stratified sampling to group women by age range or number of children.
3. Simple random sampling to select participants from each stratum.



The sample size was determined using the Taro Yamane formula. A structured questionnaire was the instrument for data collection. The instrument was validated by experts in health education and in psychology. A pilot test was conducted for reliability using Cronbach's Alpha. **Descriptive statistics** (frequency, percentage, mean) will summarize data. **Chi-square tests** and **Pearson's correlation** will test relationships between male-child preference and family planning use. **Regression analysis** may be applied to assess predictive relationships.

Result

The result of the study is presented in table 1.

Hypothesis: *There is no significant relationship between male-child preference and family planning practices of married women in zone 5 barracks of the Nigerian Police.*

Table 1: Summary of Regression analysis for Male-child preference and family planning practices (Parameter Estimates)

Variable	B	SE	r	r ²	r ² (adjusted)
(Constant)	42.82	2.39	.17	.028	.026
Male-child preference	-.65	.17			

ANOVA Summary Table for male-child preference

And Family Planning Practices



Model	Sum of	df	Mean	F	Sig
	Squares		Square		
1	670.812	1	670.812	15.289*	000a
Regression	23473.817	535	43.876		
Residual	24144.629	536			
Total					

*Sig. at $P < .05$

Note:

B = Regression Coefficient

SE = Standard Error of B.

Results in table 1 reveal that the regression coefficient found for male-child preference was $-.65$, significant at $P < .05$ and coefficient of determination, r^2 of 0.028 and r^2 of 0.026 (adjusted). This value indicates that male-child preference accounted for 3% of the total variance in family planning practices of married women in zone 5 Police barracks. Further analysis by Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) as displayed in Table 1 showed that the regression produced an F – the value of 15.289 which was found to be significant at $P < .05$ level.

Therefore, the only hypothesis was rejected at $P < .05$. Thus a conclusion was reached that male-child preference will significantly influence family planning practices of married women in zone 5, Police barracks. The inverse correlation between male-child preference and family planning practices indicated that increase or improvement in one of the variables led to a decrease in the



other variable. Thus as the value placed on male-child decreases, the use of family planning will increase.

Discussion of findings

The present study examined the influence of male-child preference on family planning practices among married women living in police barracks across Zone 5 of the Nigerian Police Force, encompassing Edo, Delta, and Bayelsa States. Anchored on the Gender Preference Theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), the findings confirmed that socio-cultural preferences for sons significantly affect contraceptive decision-making in semi-institutionalized environments like police barracks.

The regression analysis revealed a statistically significant inverse relationship between male-child preference and family planning practices ($\beta = -0.65$, $p < .05$), with male-child preference accounting for approximately 3% of the variance in contraceptive behavior among the participants. Although the coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.028$) indicates a modest effect size, the statistically significant F-value (15.289, $p < .05$) confirms the predictive value of male-child preference on reproductive decision-making. This suggests that the more entrenched the preference for male children, the lower the likelihood of adopting contraceptive methods.

These findings are consistent with prior research conducted in both African and Asian contexts, which indicate that male-child preference often leads to delayed or reduced contraceptive use as women seek to fulfill societal expectations of bearing sons (Dawadi et al., 2024; Vardhan & Rao,



2020). In particular, the cultural perception of male children as heirs and sources of economic security in old age reinforces continued childbearing until the desired number of sons is attained (Ikogho & Onoharigho, 2025).

Moreover, the communal and hierarchical structure of police barracks may reinforce traditional norms due to peer surveillance, limited autonomy, and institutional expectations. These findings echo Doepke and Tertilt's (2018) assertion that environments with rigid social structures often constrain women's reproductive autonomy. Thus, within the barracks, family planning may be less about individual choice and more about conformity to collective and gendered expectations, particularly those prioritizing male progeny.

Contrary to claims in recent literature that increasing female education and awareness can erode son preference (Moghadam et al., 2017), this study found that even in urban or semi-urbanized institutional settings, the influence of male-child preference persists. This finding suggests that structural and cultural factors may override education, particularly when institutional living conditions promote conservative family values.

However, this study also aligns with critiques that challenge the singular causality of male-child preference in determining contraceptive use. For instance, Akhter (2014) and Cain (1994) suggest that economic constraints, provider bias, and lack of spousal communication are also critical factors. This may explain the modest variance observed ($r^2 = 0.028$), highlighting that while male-



child preference is a significant predictor, it interacts with a constellation of other variables, including institutional barriers and health service accessibility.

The findings reinforce the need for reproductive health interventions tailored to institutional communities such as police barracks, where socio-cultural and environmental factors intersect to shape health behavior. Effective interventions must go beyond generic family planning messages and integrate culturally sensitive strategies that address gender norms, promote male involvement, and increase women's autonomy.

Recommendations

1. Family planning programs in police barracks should actively engage men and challenge male-child preference through culturally sensitive campaigns that emphasizes the equal value of all children.
2. **The ministry of health should** strengthen reproductive health services within barracks by ensuring trained personnel, adequate contraceptive supplies, and privacy, to support women's autonomy in reproductive decisions.
3. Nigeria Government should collaborate with the Police Authority to promote fertility at replacement level (i.e. two children to replace their parents) or even below, through “two is enough” and “a child is a child, boy or girl” campaign.
4. State policies should provide women with the right to hold properties, as this may be a primary way to redress the high value placed on male-child



Conclusion

The study found a significant inverse relationship between male-child preference and family planning practices among married women in Zone 5 police barracks. As preference for sons increases, contraceptive use decreases. This highlights how deep-rooted gender norms continue to shape reproductive behavior, especially in institutional settings.

Despite ongoing family planning efforts, traditional beliefs and restricted autonomy still limit contraceptive uptake. Addressing these challenges requires culturally sensitive interventions, male involvement, and supportive policies to promote informed and equitable reproductive choices in police communities.



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