



Childlessness and Family Dynamics among Couples: Implications for Social Work Practice in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State

Martin Chigozi Igwe^{1*}

¹Department of Social Work, University of Port Harcourt

Abstract: This study investigated childlessness and family dynamics among couples: Implications for social works practice in Port Harcourt Metropolis. Two objectives, research questions and hypotheses guided the study. A descriptive research design was adopted for the study. The population consisted of 134,326 married couples. A multistage approach was used to select 400 married couples determined using Taro Yamane’s formula. Data were collected using a questionnaire titled “Childlessness and Family Dynamics Questionnaire (CFDQ)”, rated on a four-point Likert scale. The instrument was validated by experts in Social Work, Measurement and Evaluation, and Counseling Psychology, while its reliability coefficient of 0.86 was established using Cronbach’s Alpha. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, and hypotheses were tested using Analysis of Variance at the 0.05 level of significance. Results revealed that there exist noteworthy variation in marital stability of married couples based on years of childlessness, and there is noteworthy variation in family and in-law relationships of married couples based on years of childlessness. One implication for social work practice is that social workers should provide individual and couple counselling to address emotional trauma and build coping resilience among childless couples. It was recommended, among others, that professional social workers should design and implement targeted counselling programs for childless couples, focusing on emotional support, conflict resolution, and strengthening marital bonds to mitigate the negative effects of childlessness on marital stability.

Keywords: Childlessness, Family Dynamics, Implication, Social Work, Marital Stability.

Copyright © 2025 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.

Research Paper

***Corresponding Author:**

Martin Chigozi Igwe
Department of Social Work,
University of Port Harcourt

How to cite this paper:

Martin Chigozi Igwe (2025).
Childlessness and Family
Dynamics among Couples:
Implications for Social Work
Practice in Port Harcourt
Metropolis, Rivers State. *Middle
East Res J. Humanities Soc. Sci.*
5(6): 210-217.

Article History:

| Submit: 15.11.2025 |
| Accepted: 18.12.2025 |
| Published: 22.12.2025 |

INTRODUCTION

Marriage in many African societies, including Nigeria, is deeply rooted in socio-cultural expectations that emphasize procreation as a central component of marital success. Within this context, fertility is often regarded as a defining feature of family continuity, social identity, and marital fulfillment. Consequently, childlessness is perceived not merely as a private reproductive challenge but as a social condition with far-reaching implications for couples. Globally, the World Health Organization estimates that about 17.5% of adults (approximately 1 in 6 people) experience infertility at some point in their lifetime (World Health Organization, {WHO}, 2023), indicating that childlessness is a significant public health concern.

Data from the National Population Commission of Nigeria show that approximately 4–5% of presently married women aged 15–49 experience primary

infertility, while higher proportions experience secondary infertility (Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey, 2018). Despite these realities, fertility and marriage remain closely linked, with societal norms reinforcing the expectation that marriage should result in childbearing (Alawode, 2021). When this expectation is unmet, couples may experience diminished social recognition, emotional strain, and instability within the family structure.

The impact of childlessness on marital stability has been widely documented in Nigerian studies, with evidence showing that infertility can disrupt emotional bonding, reduce affection, and increase marital conflict. Research indicates that childlessness contributes to mistrust, depression, and, in some cases, extramarital affairs, thereby weakening the marital relationship (Balarabe, 2025). Similarly, earlier clinical and sociological findings in Nigeria reveal that infertility is associated with marital dissatisfaction and instability,

particularly in contexts where childbearing is highly valued (Orji *et al.*, 2002). These patterns suggest that the absence of children can erode the emotional and psychological foundation of marriage, making it a critical factor in understanding family dynamics among couples.

Beyond the marital relationship, childlessness significantly influences interactions with extended family members and in-laws, who play a vital role in African family systems. In Nigeria, cultural beliefs often attribute childlessness disproportionately to women, reinforcing stigma and social pressure within family networks (Nwankwo & Akumefula, 2022). Studies further show that childless individuals may experience negative perceptions, reduced social acceptance, and a sense of marginalization within their communities (Ibisomi & Mudege, 2014). Such pressures frequently manifest in the form of intrusive questioning, comparisons, and interference from relatives, thereby straining family relationships and undermining the support system that is essential for marital stability.

In addition to relational challenges, childlessness has broader psychosocial implications, including emotional distress and the adoption of coping strategies among affected couples. Evidence from Nigerian contexts indicates that childlessness can lead to anxiety, social withdrawal, and reduced quality of life, as couples struggle to navigate societal expectations and stigma (Kwaghtser, 2023). Cultural interpretations of infertility, including spiritual or supernatural explanations in some communities, further complicate the experiences of affected individuals (Ofole, 2014). Despite these widespread implications, there remains limited empirical research specifically focused on Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State. This gap underscores the need for localized studies to better understand how childlessness shapes family dynamics and to inform context-specific social work interventions.

This study is anchored in Family Systems Theory, propounded by Murray Bowen. The theory posits that the family operates as an interconnected system in which changes in one component affect the entire structure. Central to the theory is the concept of interdependence, emphasizing that individual experiences; such as childlessness, cannot be understood in isolation but must be examined within the broader family network. In the context of this study, childlessness represents a disruption to expected family roles and functions, influencing marital interactions as well as relationships with extended family members. The theory further highlights how external pressures, particularly from in-laws and societal expectations, can shape internal family dynamics. By applying this framework, the study provides a theoretical basis for understanding the impact of childlessness on marital stability and family relationships, as well as for developing effective

social work interventions aimed at promoting family cohesion and well-being.

Despite the strong socio-cultural value placed on procreation in Nigeria, many married couples in Port Harcourt Metropolis continue to experience childlessness, which poses significant challenges to family dynamics. In this context, childlessness is often accompanied by marital strain, emotional distress, and social pressure from extended family members. Couples frequently encounter issues such as persistent misunderstandings, reduced intimacy, and increased conflict within the marriage. Additionally, interference from in-laws, negative comments, and societal expectations to bear children further complicate family relationships. In some cases, spouses may feel unsupported or blamed, thereby weakening the emotional bond that sustains marital stability. These challenges create tension not only within the marital unit but also across the broader family system, limiting the ability of couples to maintain harmonious relationships.

The persistence of these problems has serious implications for the well-being of couples, as it can lead to marital dissatisfaction, psychological distress, and weakened family cohesion. The lack of adequate support systems and the prevalence of stigmatizing attitudes toward childlessness further exacerbate these difficulties, making it harder for affected couples to cope effectively. Although social work practice is expected to address such psychosocial and family-related issues, there is limited empirical evidence on the specific ways childlessness affects marital stability and family and in-law relationships in Port Harcourt Metropolis. This gap in localized knowledge constrains the development of targeted interventions and policies. Therefore, this study seeks to bridge this gap by examining the impact of childlessness on family dynamics among couples in the area.

Objectives of the Study

The study investigated childlessness and family dynamics among couples: Implications for social works practice in Port Harcourt Metropolis. The specific objectives include, to:

1. Determine the impact of childlessness on the marital stability of married couples in Port Harcourt Metropolis.
2. Assess the impact of childlessness on family and in-law relationships among married couples in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

Hypotheses

1. There is no noteworthy variation in the impact of childlessness on the marital stability of married couples in Port Harcourt Metropolis based on years of childlessness.
2. There is no noteworthy variation in the impact of childlessness on family and in-law relationships among married couples in Port

Harcourt Metropolis based on years of childlessness.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Childlessness:

Childlessness is commonly defined as the condition in which an individual or couple does not have children, whether by choice, circumstance, or limitation. The phenomenon is multifaceted, encompassing medical, psychological, cultural, and social dimensions. Scholars often distinguish between primary childlessness, where a couple has never conceived, and secondary childlessness, where conception or birth has occurred previously but not subsequently (Ombelet, 2020).

Childlessness can also be viewed as an aspect of reproductive health and rights, as it intersects with individual desires for parenthood and social expectations concerning fertility (Shreffler & Johnson, 2019). No matter the perspective espoused, childless draws the attention of the wider society especially in a patriarchal society where inheritance accrues to the direct off springs of an individual and especially the male descendants. Consequently, childlessness will have a socio-cultural and family dynamics that impact on the couples that are tangled by the situation.

Family dynamics describes the distinctive, progressing patterns of interactions, relationships, and roles amongst family members, shaped by their communication styles, cultural leaning, and individual personalities. These interactions, roles and relationships prescribes how members connect, communicate, adapt and resolve issues, especially in an involuntary childless situation. This invariably could significantly influencing individual adaptability, growth, progress, existential wellbeing and even mental health. A couple's experience may include societal pressure, marital strain, stigma and isolation etc., all of which may impact relationship and redefine purpose. In the Nigerian context where communal living is cherished and predominate relationship, marriage is not just a dual affiliation between the husband and the wife, it embraces the immediate and extended family, kith and kin and the community at large. Cultural expectations, gender roles and societal norms may influence the dynamics in unfertile marriages and bred stigmatization extended family interference, mental health challenges, psycho-social impacts, and a loss of self-esteem emanating from social ridicule.

Marital Instability:

Marital instability describes an enduring conflict, disharmony, or perceived threat to a marital relationship that often precedes separation or divorce. It involves affective and cognitive state like thinking about divorce, allusion to separation and actually taking action in the appropriate quarters to end a marriage.

The impact of such an outcome can be overwhelming for the couple and may result to significant Psychological Trauma, family disorganization, and negative outcome for the children.

Family and in-Law Relationship:

Family relationship denotes the time-honored networks, connections, and acquaintances between individuals related by blood, marriage/affinity and adoption and constitute a household which influence interactions, determine commitment to providing care and dynamics. In-law relationships are a definite type of family tie created exclusively through marriage. The term means one's spouse's family members. These become your legal and social relatives upon marriage; and includes your spouse's parents, siblings, and their spouses.

Relationships at the family and in-law levels impact childless couples and the dynamics of the relationships they share. Unmet expectations of parents, intrusive questioning by family members and in-laws, may ignite sour relationship leading to marginalization, frustration, resentments denial of rights and the likes. Navigating family and in-law dynamic is there crucial for childless couples. There is need to establish clear boundaries, focus on partnership and combat misinformation, stigma and the isolation that may ensue.

Uche and Nwankwo, (2023) undertook a cross-sectional study surveyed 240 married women aged 25–45 in Obio-Akpor and Port Harcourt LGAs using confirmed depression, anxiety, and marital satisfaction scales. Findings showed 68% had moderate to severe psychological problems due to societal pressure and in-law meddling. Marital satisfaction was meaningfully lower among women whose husbands were the only children or from patrilineal families. Coping mechanisms involved religiosity-a resurgence in religious activities, adoption consideration, and entrepreneurial spirit. The study brought to limelight how childlessness reduces women's decision-making power and increases susceptibility to polygyny threats within family dynamics.

Eze, Tamuno, & Okoro, (2022) , adopting mixed methods with 150 questionnaires and 30 in-depth interviews of couples married ≥ 5 years in Diobu, GRA, and Rumuola areas of Port Harcourt, this study found 74% faced pressure from mothers-in-law to consent to a second wife for their sons or seek spiritual solutions. Affected couples that are highly educated and are double-income earners were unrelenting and sustained greater marital unity by setting boundaries. While male stigma was present, it was less socially stringent than female blame. Extended families acted as double forces — providing financial support while intensifying reproductive decision conflicts.

Amadi, and George (2024) examined Voluntary childlessness and household structure among Port Harcourt’s middle class. This qualitative study of 25 self-identified voluntarily childless couples discovered career development, economic insecurity, and flexible lifestyle as primary motivations. Affected families reported more open role-sharing than parenting peers in similar income groups. However, participants encountered social misconceptions, often being presumed barren rather than childfree by choice. Absence of children strengthened some spousal bonds but weakened extended family ties due to perceptions of “incomplete families.”

Childlessness, inheritance practices, and family conflict in Ikwerre and Okrika communities. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 19(4), 332–350.

Through ethnographic work and 120 surveys in Port Harcourt’s traditional and urban residences, Ibiba, and Wokoma, (2021) associated childlessness to disrupted inheritance expectations. 62% of childless men reported anxiety over property retention, with brothers/nephews as default heirs. Women without offspring more often invested in personal possessions. Estate disputes with siblings were three times higher among childless respondents. The findings demonstrate that childlessness redesigns wealth transfer and allocation, and increases lateral family conflict while weakening lineal continuity.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive research design, chosen because it focuses on describing events as they naturally occurred. This design allows for systematic collection of data from a large sample of respondents while capturing their experiences, perceptions, and coping strategies related to childlessness. The study’s population consisted of 134,326 married couples. It comprised all married couples experiencing childlessness and those that have children.

The population includes couples registered at fertility clinics, those accessing reproductive health services (Source: Rivers State Ministry of Health, 2025). A sample size of 400 married couples was determined using Taro Yamane’s formula used to determine sample size. To ensure representativeness, a multi-stage sampling technique was adopted. First, the study area was stratified into its major local government areas (LGAs) – Obio/Akpor and Port Harcourt LGAs. Second, specific communities, fertility clinics, and religious organizations were purposively selected. Finally, purposive and snowball sampling techniques were employed to recruit eligible couples who met the inclusion criteria: married for at least two years, experiencing involuntary childlessness, and willing to participate.

Data collection was carried out using the Childlessness and Family Dynamics Questionnaire (CFDQ), a 14-item instrument measured on a 4-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (SA) – 4, to Strongly Disagree (SD) – 1, with a criterion mean of 2.5. To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by three experts: one in Social Work, one in Measurement and Evaluation, and one in Counseling Psychology. The reliability of the instrument was established through a test-retest procedure on 20 couples, with reliability coefficient of CFDQ = 0.86, confirmed by the Cronbach Alpha statistic. Questionnaires were distributed and collected from respondents at fertility clinics, and religious organizations, with the assistance of trained research aides who facilitated the data collection process. Mean scores and standard deviations were used to address the research questions, while Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 significance level, via the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 26.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: What is the impact of childlessness on the marital stability of married couples in Port Harcourt Metropolis?

Table 1: Descriptive analysis of the impact of childlessness on the marital stability of married couples in Port Harcourt Metropolis

| S/N | Items | Responses (n = 400) | | |
|-----|--|---------------------|------|----------|
| | | \bar{x} | SD | Remark |
| 1. | Childlessness has created frequent misunderstandings in my marriage | 2.89 | 0.85 | Agree |
| 2. | My relationship with my spouse has weakened due to the absence of children | 2.81 | 0.79 | Agree |
| 3. | Lack of children has increased the chances of separation or divorce in my marriage | 2.87 | 0.90 | Agree |
| 4. | The intimacy between my spouse and I has reduced because of childlessness | 2.91 | 0.87 | Agree |
| 5. | My marriage has remained strong despite not having children | 2.10 | 0.86 | Disagree |
| 6. | Childlessness makes me feel insecure about the future of my marriage | 2.91 | 0.91 | Agree |
| 7. | The absence of children has led to increased marital conflict in my home | 2.90 | 0.69 | Agree |
| | Grand Mean | 2.77 | | |

Criterion $\bar{x} = 2.5$, \bar{x} : 1.0-2.49 = Disagree, 2.5- 4.00 = Agree

Table 1 indicates that childlessness has a significant negative impact on marital stability among married couples in Port Harcourt Metropolis. All negatively framed items recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.5; misunderstandings ($\bar{x} = 2.89$), weakened relationships (2.81), increased risk of separation (2.87), reduced intimacy (2.91), future insecurity (2.91), and heightened marital conflict (2.90); showing general agreement among respondents that childlessness contributes to emotional and relational strain in marriage. Conversely, the positive item stating

that marriage remains strong despite childlessness recorded a mean of 2.10, indicating disagreement and reinforcing the perception that childlessness undermines marital resilience. The grand mean of 2.77 further confirms an overall agreement that childlessness adversely affects marital stability.

Research Question 2: What is the impact of childlessness on family and in-law relationships among married couples in Port Harcourt Metropolis?

Table 2: Descriptive analysis of the impact of childlessness on family and in-law relationships among married couples in Port Harcourt Metropolis n = 120

| S/N | Items | Responses (n = 400) | | |
|-----|---|---------------------|------|----------|
| | | \bar{x} | SD | Remark |
| 8. | My in-laws have made negative comments about my childlessness | 2.97 | 1.02 | Agree |
| 9. | I experience pressure from extended family to have children | 2.96 | 0.90 | Agree |
| 10. | Childlessness has strained my relationship with my in-laws | 2.94 | 1.12 | Agree |
| 11. | My spouse defends me when relatives complain about my childlessness. | 2.11 | 1.09 | Disagree |
| 12. | My family often compares me to others who have children | 2.94 | 1.05 | Agree |
| 13. | The absence of children has led to interference from in-laws in my marriage | 2.91 | 1.10 | Agree |
| 14. | I feel accepted by my extended family despite my childlessness | 2.08 | 1.10 | Disagree |
| | Grand Mean | 2.70 | | |

Criterion $\bar{x} = 2.5$, \bar{x} : 1.0-2.49 = Disagree, 2.5- 4.00 = Agree

Table 2 shows that childlessness has a considerable negative impact on family and in-law relationships among married couples in Port Harcourt Metropolis. Most items recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.5, including negative comments from in-laws ($\bar{x} = 2.97$), pressure from extended family (2.96), strained in-law relationships (2.94), family comparison (2.94), and increased interference from in-laws (2.91). These findings indicate that childlessness exposes couples to external pressure, criticism, and relational tension within the extended family system. However, items relating to spousal defense (2.11) and feeling

accepted by extended family (2.08) fell below the criterion mean, indicating disagreement. This suggests that many respondents do not feel adequately supported by their spouses and often experience a lack of acceptance from their families. The grand mean of 2.70 confirms overall agreement that childlessness negatively affects family and in-law relationships.

Hypothesis 1: There is no noteworthy variation in the impact of childlessness on the marital stability of married couples in Port Harcourt Metropolis based on years of childlessness.

Table 3: ANOVA summary on the difference in the impact of childlessness on the marital stability of married couples in Port Harcourt Metropolis based on years of childlessness

| ANOVA | | | | | |
|----------------|-----------------|------------|-------------|------|------|
| Sources | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
| Between Groups | 363.94 | 2 | 181.97 | 1.41 | 0.25 |
| Within Groups | 51367.50 | 397 | 129.39 | | |
| Total | 51731.44 | 399 | | | |

Table 4 shows that there is no noteworthy variation in marital stability of married couples in Port Harcourt Metropolis based on years of childlessness ($F_2, 397 = 1.41, P = 0.25 > 0.05$), hence null hypothesis one is retained at the 0.05 level of significance.

Hypothesis 2: There is no noteworthy variation in the impact of childlessness on family and in-law relationships among married couples in Port Harcourt Metropolis based on years of childlessness.

Table 4: ANOVA summary on the difference in the impact of childlessness on family and in-law relationships among married couples in Port Harcourt Metropolis based on years of childlessness

| ANOVA | | | | | |
|----------------|----------------|-----|-------------|------|------|
| Sources | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
| Between Groups | 60.97 | 2 | 30.48 | 5.23 | 0.00 |
| Within Groups | 51670.47 | 397 | 130.15 | | |

| | | | | | |
|--------------|-----------------|------------|--|--|--|
| Total | 51731.44 | 399 | | | |
|--------------|-----------------|------------|--|--|--|

Table 4 showed that there is noteworthy variation in family and in-law relationships of married couples in Port Harcourt Metropolis based on years of childlessness ($F_2, 397 = 5.23, P = 0.00 < 0.05$), hence null hypothesis two is rejected at the 0.05 level of significance.

DISCUSSION

The study investigated the impact of childlessness on family dynamics among couples: implications for social works practice in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State. The findings reveals that childlessness significantly undermines marital stability, indicating agreement on issues like frequent misunderstandings, weakened relationships, reduced intimacy, and increased conflict. Notably, the disagreement on marriages remaining strong underscores the pervasive strain. The corresponding hypothesis further confirms no noteworthy variations in marital stability based on years of childlessness suggesting that prolonged childlessness exacerbates relational stress. These findings resonate with Bhatti and Sami (2020), who noted that infertility in South Asian contexts often leads to marital discord due to societal expectations of parenthood. Similarly, Omosun and Kofoworola (2021) found that childlessness in Nigeria heightens risks of separation, particularly in urban settings like Port Harcourt, where cultural pressures amplify tensions.

The result of research question two indicated that childlessness strains family and in-law relationships, with agreement on negative comments, pressure, and interference from in-laws. Disagreement on spousal defense and family acceptance highlights relational challenges. The corresponding hypothesis showed noteworthy variation based on years of childlessness. These findings echo Rouchou (2019), who noted that in African contexts, in-laws often attribute childlessness to women, fostering conflict. Okonofua *et al.*, (2020) further observed that in Nigeria, extended family interference is a common response to infertility, aligning with the reported strain.

Implications of the Findings for Social Work Practice

Childlessness in the Port Harcourt Local Government Area is highly associated with weighty implications for social work practice. This is because of the deeply ingrained cultural, social, religious, and economic factors in Rivers State that view procreation as the primary purpose of marriage. Social workers operating in this region should be committed to address the high levels of negative social impact, including stigmatization, psychological distress, and family instability that childless contend with.

The Implications include:

1. Healing Counseling and Psychological Support

Addressing Psychosocial Trauma: Social workers need to provide counseling to manage anxiety, depression, lowered self-esteem, emotional trauma and feelings of guilt or blame.

Marital Counseling: There is need for the provision of marital counseling for victim couples. With high rates of matrimonial instability, including the fear of divorce and the social pressure on men to take second wives in such circumstances, counselors should work with couples to reinforce their bond, improve communication and cooperation, and promote mutual support.

Targeting Gendered Distress: Typically, women frequently bear the brunt of social stigma and abuse emanating from infertility in local communities, social workers should focus on empowering women victims and mitigating the psychological effects of abuse and stigma infertility may attract.

2. Family Intervention and Advocacy

In-law and Family Mediation: Social workers must mediate between couples and extended family members, as in-laws often aggravate the situation, pressuring husbands for children and contributing to the breakdown of the marriage.

Promoting Adoption and Alternative Pathways: While some couples are open to adoption, others show resistance. Social workers must provide advocacy to improve awareness and foster a culture of acceptance for adoption and IVF as legitimate alternatives.

Legal Aid and Rights Protection: Legal advocacy/aids need to be provided to protect childless women. This is necessary to protect her from losing inheritance rights and property, which is a regular practice in many local cultures when a woman is childlessness.

3. Community Education and Social Change

Sensitization and Myth Dispelling: There is a urgent need for the social worker to engage community education in order to break the misconceptions, prejudice, superstitions, and stigmas associated to infertility. The people need to understand that infertility is, frequently a medical concern with no fault of the victim or a question of the failure of character of the individual.

Accent on Male Fertility: Study have shown that men contribute up to 40% of cases of infertility but they are frequently reluctant to accept their involvement in issues of childlessness. Social workers should encourage corporation among couple in seeking combined medical examinations. This will reduce the cultural, gendered stigma fixated solely on women.

Establishing alternative Support Networks: Social workers need to create support groups for childless couples in Port Harcourt local Government Area as network of support is usually not available for this category. Providing such facility can reduce social isolation and create a safe haven for sharing experiences and coping strategies.

4. Direct Services and Referral Networks:

Linking with Medical Services: Social workers should link childless couples with health facilities for fertility evaluation and treatment, as many in Port Harcourt lack access or information on available solutions.

Encouraging Coping Strategies Through counselling: Social workers should help couples develop coping strategies which are far-fetched by people in this condition. Granting the couple direct service through counselling will enable the social worker to advise the couple on coping strategies like focusing on self-growth and career, building resilience, adoption services, engaging in voluntary community service to mitigate the negative mental health impacts associated with stigmatization.

Overall, social work with childless couples in Port Harcourt Local Government Area entails a blend of empathetic therapy, community advocacy to change societal perceptions, referral network and direct intervention to support couples fronted by such severe social, medical and emotional challenges.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that childlessness exerts a significant negative influence on family dynamics among married couples in Port Harcourt Metropolis, particularly in undermining marital stability and straining family and in-law relationships. The findings reveal that childlessness is associated with increased misunderstandings, weakened intimacy, marital conflict, and external pressures from extended family members, all of which threaten the cohesion of marriage. Additionally, the persistence of these challenges regardless of years of childlessness suggests that the condition remains a continuous source of emotional and relational stress. The study therefore highlights childlessness not merely as a private concern but as a social issue shaped by cultural expectations and family structures, with serious implications for the well-being of affected couples.

Recommendations

1. Professional social workers should design and implement targeted counselling programs for childless couples, focusing on emotional support, conflict resolution, and strengthening marital bonds to mitigate the negative effects of childlessness on marital stability.
2. Social workers should engage in community-based interventions and advocacy aimed at educating families and in-laws on the psychosocial impact of childlessness, promoting supportive attitudes, reducing stigma, and discouraging harmful interference in marriages.
3. The Government and its policy making agencies should consider implementing and incorporating childlessness as component part of basic medical services to be provided to the people and should be

integrated into Primary Health Care Services and bear the burden of medical expenses associated with it.

REFERENCES

- Alawode, O. A. (2021). Analysis of non-marital fertility in Nigeria and implications for intervention and future research. *Social Sciences*, 10(7), 256. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci10070256>
- Amadi, R. I., & George, F. P. (2024). Voluntary childlessness and household structure among Port Harcourt's middle class. *African Journal of Reproductive Health*, 28(3), 201–215.
- Balarabe, S. H. (2025). The effects of childlessness on marital cohesion in organizational communities. *International Research Journal of Sociology, Psychology and Anthropology*, 13(3), 44–48. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17061688>
- Bhatti, L., & Sami, N. (2020). Infertility and marital dynamics in South Asia. *Journal of Family Studies*, 26(3), 345–360.
- Bueno Fernandez LA, Schoo C, Aslam SP, et al. Family Dynamics. [Updated 2025 Dec 13]. In: StatPearls [Internet]. Treasure Island (FL): StatPearls Publishing; 2026 Jan-. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK560487/>
- Eze, M. K., Tamuno, S., & Okoro, L. (2022). Extended family involvement and marital stability among childless couples in urban Port Harcourt. *Nigerian Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, 20(1), 45–63.
- Ibiba, D. A., & Wokoma, J. (2021). Childlessness, inheritance practices, and family conflict in Ikwerre and Okrika communities. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 19(4), 332–350.
- Ibisomi, L., & Mudege, N. N. (2014). Childlessness in Nigeria: Perceptions and acceptability. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 16(1), 61–75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2013.839828>
- Kwaghtser, A. P. (2023). Childlessness and its coping strategies among couples in Lafia Local Government Area, Nasarawa State, Nigeria. *Ianna Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*.
- National Population Commission (NPC) [Nigeria], & ICF. (2019). *Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey 2018*. Abuja, Nigeria, and Rockville, MD: NPC and ICF.
- Nwankwo, I. U., & Akumefula, E. K. (2022). Being childless: Exploring the factors affecting involuntary infertility in South-East Nigeria. *International Journal of Health and Social Inquiry*.
- Ofole, N. M. (2014). Psychosocial and cultural analysis of childlessness and its implications on women emancipation in South Western Nigeria. *African Journal for the Psychological Studies of Social Issues*.
- Okonofua, F. (2018). Infertility in sub-Saharan Africa: Contemporary issues and future directions.

- African Journal of Reproductive Health*, 22(3), 7–14. <https://doi.org/10.29063/ajrh2018/v22i3.1>
- Ombelet, W., & Goossens, J. (2020). Access to infertility care and assisted reproduction in developing countries. *Reproductive Biomedicine & Society Online*, 11, 70–77. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rbms.2020.01.006>
 - Omosun, A., & Kofoworola, O. (2021). Childlessness and marital instability in Nigeria. *African Journal of Sociology*, 15(2), 89-102.
 - Orji, E. O., Kuti, O., & Fasubaa, O. B. (2002). Impact of infertility on marital life in Nigeria. *International Journal of Gynecology & Obstetrics*, 79(1), 61–62. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0020-7292\(02\)00180-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0020-7292(02)00180-7)
 - Rouchou, B. (2019). Infertility and family dynamics in Africa. *African Studies Review*, 62(4), 112-130.
 - Shreffler, K. M., & Johnson, D. R. (2019). Fertility intentions, career considerations, and childlessness among U.S. women. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 81(2), 494–511. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12554>
 - Uche, C. O., & Nwankwo, B. E. (2023). Psychological impact of involuntary childlessness on married women in Port Harcourt metropolis. *Journal of Family Psychology in Africa*, 15(2), 112–128.
 - World Health Organization. (2023). *Infertility prevalence estimates, 1990–2021*. Geneva: WHO.