



## **THE OVERPOPULATION PROBLEM IN NIGERIA: A SOCIAL WORK PERSPECTIVE ON INTERVENTION**

**EJUKWA OSAM PHD**

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK, UNIVERSITY OF CALABAR, CALABAR - NIGERIA

[ejuks@hotmail.com](mailto:ejuks@hotmail.com)

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### **Abstract**

The study was centred on the problem of overpopulation in Nigeria and a Social Work perspective on intervention. The background problem revealed the adverse effects of overpopulation in Nigeria. These are fierce competition for scarce resources, overcrowding of physical and social spaces, decayed urban infrastructure, intra and inter communal wars due to insufficient land. There is also very high unemployment with its consequences of violent crimes. The methodology was qualitative comprising documentary method. The theoretical perspective was the Malthusian theory of population growth.

Findings: Overseas social workers were engaged in curbing overpopulation by counselling different clients to curb the procreation of high number of children in respective families, such clients were advised to educate their female children, strictly adhere to family planning and child spacing procedures and the continuous sensitisation to use contraceptives.

Conclusion: Through counselling sessions, social workers can influence clients to have fewer children.

Recommendations: Government agencies should partner with allied health workers including social workers and NGOs to sensitise the public on family planning procedures and the dangers of having large families. The federal government should initiate an effective population control policy and a robust mechanism should be applied to enforce the law by prosecuting and convicting violators that exceed the number of children that are allowed by the government.

**Keywords:** Overpopulation, Counselling, Family-Planning, Procreation, Social Workers Coitus

### **1. Introduction**

One of the major problems in Nigeria at the moment is the fast pace of population growth. This has placed the security of Nigerians in great jeopardy by contributing to the country's enormous, daunting social problems. In March 2018, the National Population Commission of Nigeria (NPC) estimated the country's population to be 198 million. In 2020 the population was revised upwards to 206 million making it the seventh most populous country in the world. At the moment the current population of the country is 218 million people (Worldometers, 2022). The NPC also projected that in thirty years, Nigeria will have 300 million people, thereby overtaking the United States as

the third most populous country in the world after China and India (National Population Commission, 2018). The seriousness of the exponential population growth has led to reactions like this one:

*Between 2006 and 2018, a period of about 12 years, we added 58 million people into our population, that's scary, so all of us must be on point and on target to make sure that we are doing what we are supposed to do otherwise we are going to be in serious trouble (Oji, 2019).*

The overpopulation problem in Nigeria did not suddenly occur; it was a gradual increase in figures which are graphically presented in the

chart below. From 1955 five years before Nigeria attained her political independence, the population was 41 million people. Four years later in the year of political independence in 1960, the population became 45 million people. In 1965 the country was grappling with the

challenges of development of the three Nigerian regions, the population increased to 50 million people. Nigerian population has continued to increase in an exponential form to this day when it has exceeded 200 million people. The chart below gives a breakdown of the details.

TABLE 1: The Population of Nigeria (1955-2019)

Year	Population	Yearly % Change	Yearly Change	Migrants (net)	Median Age	Fertility Rate	Density (P/Km <sup>2</sup> )	Urban Pop %	Urban Population	Country's Share World Pop	World Population	Nigeria Global Rank
2020	206,139,589	2.58 %	5,175,990	-60,000	18.1	5.42	226	52.0 %	107,112,526	2.64 %	7,794,798,739	7
2019	200,963,599	2.60 %	5,088,916	-60,000	17.9	5.67	221	51.2 %	102,805,995	2.61 %	7,713,468,100	7
2018	195,874,683	2.62 %	5,001,439	-60,000	17.9	5.67	215	50.3 %	98,610,801	2.57 %	7,631,091,040	7
2017	190,873,244	2.64 %	4,913,003	-60,000	17.9	5.67	210	49.5 %	94,525,016	2.53 %	7,547,858,925	7
2016	185,960,241	2.66 %	4,822,793	-60,000	17.9	5.67	204	48.7 %	90,546,177	2.49 %	7,464,022,049	7
2015	181,137,448	2.71 %	4,526,850	-60,000	17.9	5.74	199	47.8 %	86,673,094	2.45 %	7,379,797,139	7
2010	158,503,197	2.68 %	3,927,636	-60,000	17.9	5.91	174	43.5 %	68,949,828	2.28 %	6,956,823,603	7
2005	138,865,016	2.58 %	3,316,233	-34,000	18.0	6.05	152	39.1 %	54,288,918	2.12 %	6,541,907,027	9
2000	122,283,850	2.53 %	2,867,103	-19,005	17.9	6.17	134	34.9 %	42,627,440	1.99 %	6,143,493,823	10
1995	107,948,335	2.54 %	2,547,177	-19,154	17.7	6.37	119	32.2 %	34,785,545	1.88 %	5,744,212,979	10
1990	95,212,450	2.64 %	2,329,933	-18,281	17.4	6.60	105	29.7 %	28,276,132	1.79 %	5,327,231,061	10
1985	83,562,785	2.62 %	2,027,830	-135,413	17.5	6.76	92	25.7 %	21,434,266	1.72 %	4,870,921,740	10
1980	73,423,633	2.99 %	2,009,867	164,143	18.0	6.76	81	22.0 %	16,139,321	1.65 %	4,458,003,514	11
1975	63,374,298	2.51 %	1,478,431	-7,705	18.3	6.61	70	19.8 %	12,535,584	1.55 %	4,079,480,606	11
1970	55,982,144	2.23 %	1,170,845	-8,669	18.7	6.35	61	17.8 %	9,942,297	1.51 %	3,700,437,046	11
1965	50,127,921	2.12 %	997,893	204	19.0	6.35	55	16.6 %	8,296,771	1.50 %	3,339,583,597	13
1960	45,138,458	1.90 %	810,472	541	19.1	6.35	50	15.4 %	6,955,737	1.49 %	3,034,949,748	13
1955	41,086,100	1.65 %	645,270	674	19.1	6.35	45	12.1 %	4,952,844	1.48 %	2,773,019,936	13

Source: Worldometers ([www.worldometers.info](http://www.worldometers.info))

According to the estimation by Worldometers, elaboration of the current population of Nigeria is 218,297,752 as of Sunday, November 20, 2022. In 2020 the population was estimated at 206,139,589 people at mid-year according to UN data. Based on that estimate, Nigeria's population is equivalent to 2.64% of the total world population. The country ranks number 7 in the list of countries (and dependencies) by population. The population density is 226 per sq. Km (586 people per sq. miles). The total land area is 910,770 sq. Km (351,650 per sq. miles) 52.0 % of the population is urban (107,112,526 people in 2020). The median age is 18.1 years.

In view of the hardships Nigerians experienced during the global economic recession of 1983, the subsequent Structural Adjustment Programme that was initiated by the former military government in 1986, and the global economic recession of 2008 and locally in 2015, one might have hoped that Nigerians would consider family planning so as to curb the growing population rate, but family planning has not been their priority as the population has been soaring at an exponential rate for decades. Although Tartiyus, Dauda and Peter (2015) acknowledged the adverse effects of population growth, they contradicted their positions by suggesting a positive relationship between population growth and economic growth. They even encouraged Nigerians to maintain the current level of population growth, considering it strength and an economic benefit. Several studies cited by Onwuka (2006) also suggested high population benefits for advanced industrial countries due to available manpower.

Some scholars have argued that an increasing population is a boost to economic growth due to the level of manpower available. In other words, an increase in population did not adversely impact the Nigerian economy (Nwosu, et al, 2014; Ogunleye, et al, 2018). Kolawole (n.d.) focused on the economic impact of population growth, arguing that high population can aid the market due to the greater number of buyers in the

country. Since Nigeria has a youthful population, the market will derive benefits from selling children's wares especially toys. Theodore (2006) discussed the role of population growth in the depletion of the physical environment, the ecosystem and natural resources. He argues that overpopulation is linked to the fast decline of non-renewable resources, as well as to the consumption and depletion of crude oil, coal and other minerals. It impacts land degradation and waste disposal, water and air pollution, and desertification. Amadi (n.d.) focused on the social consequences of population growth by studying the unemployment rate among graduates from over one hundred universities, many of whom end up roaming the streets every year in search of elusive jobs.

Enang and Eni (2014) analysed the growing population and how it impacts national development. They confirmed what numerous others have asserted, stating that population growth becomes a huge problem when it outpaces economic growth in a non-industrialised economy such as Nigeria. Apparently, overpopulation is strongly correlated with poverty (Ewuji & Yakubu, 2012). Jhingen (2005) as cited by Amadi, (n.d.) argued that high population retards per-capita income and also impacts investment; as the population expands, scarcity of land and vital resources often create competition and the cost of goods and services are higher.

However, for a Third World country like Nigeria, sustaining the current population will hinder economic growth and development, due to the lack of an industrial base to absorb high numbers into the labour force. When educated Nigerians compare its population to that of China, many assume a false sense of normalcy about our population growth. They forget that many multinational conglomerates have giant investments in China, gainfully hiring Chinese people to work in factories (Dumont, 2018). In contrast, Nigeria does not have many factories to absorb the millions roaming the streets in search

of employment. Its Bureau of Statistics (2016) reported that underemployment and unemployment rose from 37.2% to 40%. Unemployment is now 44% as of 2022 (National Bureau of Statistics 2023.). The statistics are worse for younger people (age 15 to 35), for whom unemployment stood at 55.65 % and the dependency rate was 88.2% in 2005. The figure for youth unemployment had risen to 70% as at 2016 (Karim & Surajo, 2017). And up it has remained as at 2022 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023).

The current Nigerian economy can employ barely a quarter of its youthful population within the current estimated population of over 220 million Nigerians. When the country attains 300 million people or more in thirty years' time, the possibilities of hiring will be seriously stalled by overpopulation. Within Nigeria, the effect of overpopulation is already manifesting itself very glaringly in the form of desperation to gain employment so as to survive in a difficult country with too many applicants. The situation has compelled many to seek the few advertised jobs.

On previous occasions, advertisements for jobs have received overwhelming responses. For example, during the recruitment by Nigeria Immigration Service in 2014, this office received 125,000 applications, but only 4,500 were employed, and even then, scores of people were trampled to death in overcrowded stadiums across the country during recruitment exercises (Ojeme, et al. 2014). In 2016, there were advertisements to recruit young men and women into the Nigerian Police Force; over 900,000 Nigerians applied, but only 10,000 were recruited (Adepegba, 2016). A similar application for police recruitment peaked at 313,032 applications for 10,000 vacancies (Adepegba, 2019).

Due to overpopulation, recruitment exercises are often characterised by fierce competition for any sort of employment. Due to high unemployment, the desperation to gain employment has led to

fierce competition resulting in under employment which spiked to 40%, with the misery index reaching 59% (Proshare, 2018). The misery index may be a result of acceptance of very low salaries by underemployed graduates, leading to their unhappiness and despondency. Nigeria's minimum wage and salary structure are among the lowest in the world, and this trend has adversely impacted the country's poverty level and development status. According to the 2022 Bureau of Statistics figures, 133 million Nigerians or 63% of the population live below the poverty level and the requisite minimum international standard of \$3.2 is never attained (National Bureau of Statistics; n.d.; Udo, 2018; World Bank, 2017). Due to the non-industrial based economy, high unemployment, low salaries and the high foreign exchange rate that has rendered the local currency almost worthless, Nigerians have remained poorer than many countries.

Because of overpopulation and the pressure for limited land, the level of insecurity in Nigeria is at an all-time high as innocent people are killed daily by bandits and Fulani herdsmen. In addition, kidnappers are on a rampage kidnapping for costly ransoms or for primitive ritual rites where victims are brutally killed. With tertiary institutions graduating half a million students annually, many have been redundant for close to a decade, and Nigerian graduates frequently cannot find employment (Okafor, et al 2018). Their harrowing ordeal without employment is summarised by Editor (2016a). In their attempts to survive, some graduates of tertiary institutions have become involved in fraudulent and illicit activities. Those who are more daring commit armed robberies and other sexual crimes like rape and prostitution.

Due to fierce competition for grazing routes, all Fulani herdsmen are grazing cattle all over Nigeria. In keeping to their nomadic lifestyle of seeking fertile arable lands, some criminal Fulani herdsmen invaded farmlands, and unleashed mayhem by killing farmers, and raping women

(NAN, 2019). Acts of reprisal are countered with unimaginable brutality, such as the burning of villages and killings of more rural residents, including women and children, across Southern Kaduna and other Middle Belt states (Bagu & Smith, 2017). These killings and burning of villages have been on going on a biweekly basis across Southern Kaduna, Benue and Plateau states respectively. For example, in April 2023, many were killed by Fulani herdsmen in Oturkpo local government area and further afield also in Tiv villages all in Benue State. These killings are rotationally organised to stretch the few security forces that are undermanned and often arrive late. Since their kinsman former President Buhari assumed office in May 2015 to May 2023, 63,111 Nigerians have been killed by Fulani herdsmen (Vanguard, 2023). In Benue state alone 6,000 have been killed with over 2 million internally displaced refugees (Duru, 2023). From May to July 2023 over 346 villagers in Plateau State have been killed and others displaced by Fulani herders (Oloko, 2023).

With the above background, here is the direction of this study; there is the research problem, theoretical perspective, methodology and causes of overpopulation. Then next the literature review focused on the relationship between population studies and Social Work. After that, we discuss the perspective of foreign social workers to curb over population. This paper ends with a discussion conclusion and recommendations.

## 2. Research problem

The growing population in Nigeria is a huge problem for policymakers and for civil society.

The inability of the government to initiate and enforce policies to lower the population growth rate could aggravate the situation further as the country has about 218 million people (Worldometres, 2022). This inaction constitutes a major research problem that defies recommendations. The inaction has left ethnic conflagrations due to the scarcity of arable

farmlands, kidnappings, violent crimes, banditry, and killings all over Middle Belt and Northern Nigerian states and Fulani herdsmen killing farmers over grazing rights all over Nigeria (Akinyetun, 2016). This danger justifies the interest among NGOs and social workers in assisting the poor and vulnerable populations, who are too numerous to be assisted in Internal Displacement Camps (IDPs) scattered all over the Middle Belt and Northern Nigerian states.

## 3. Theoretical perspective

The population theory of Rev Thomas Malthus (1776–1834) is applied as a theoretical perspective in this paper because Nigeria is facing an overpopulation crisis similar to that in the time of Rev Malthus. His thesis was based on observation of the geometric rate of population growth due to the amount of procreation in his native England. He decried this geometric population growth, which was in contrast to the arithmetic rate of growth in food production. Given the limited land available, he advised families to utilise the profits from their economic activity for investment and not for consumption or procreation of more children (Malthus, 1798). Although Malthus' papers on population growth were published early in the eighteenth century, his core concerns remain highly relevant in the twenty-first century due to the fulfilment of his prognosis in all Third World countries. His recommendations are especially urgent in Nigeria and many Third World countries experiencing urban decay due to overpopulation, high unemployment, hunger, social problems, and violent crimes. The on-going palliatives have been rendered ineffective by overpopulation across Nigerian cities. Malthus's theory is very apt.

## 4. Methodology

The methodology consists of qualitative research that is based on the documentary method "Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic material." (Bowen, 2009 p. 27). As is often the case in qualitative research,

this requires that the data presented be thoroughly assessed and interpreted in order to elicit the meaning so as to attain coherence to the literature to be presented. Atkinson and Coffey (1997) refer to documents as “social facts, which are produced, shared, and used in socially organised ways” (p. 47 cited in Bowen 2009). The documentary method will enable us to know how Nigeria got into this problem of overpopulation. The methodology in question is similarly traced to the work of earlier Social Work practitioners and how they intervened in family planning measures. The documentary research relies on the population chart displayed at the beginning of this study. The chart indicates population estimates from the year 1955 to 2020 and its pattern of growth. Documentary research relies on a secondary source, which is already available in the public domain. It includes World Wide Web sources, online peer-reviewed journals, opinion articles, news dailies, and textbooks. The advantages of the documentary method are the following. There is an efficient and less time-consuming process in data selection. With the creation of the World Wide Web, there is an availability of documents in the public domain. There is a cost-effective means of data selection especially when data is not easily available. Documents are not affected by the research process because there is no connection with the researcher. Finally, documents cover different topics and have a long time span.

### **5. The causes of overpopulation in Nigeria**

It is relevant to explain the meaning of population and overpopulation. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2011), population is “the whole number of people or inhabitants in a country or region.” Overpopulation is the condition of having more people than can live on the earth in comfort, happiness, and health and still leave the world a better place (Kinder, 1998, p. 1). Put differently overpopulation is the exponential increase in the number of people in a given geographical area; such increase is

disproportionately across the demographics of a population and exceeds the overall statistical figures derived from the most recent national population census. If such disproportionate numbers of people exceed the available resources and financial ability of a country to manage the population’s needs and curtail future growth, policymakers will be unable to plan effective development strategies while the numbers keep rising (Osam, 2019 p. 184). Below are the causes of overpopulation.

#### **5.1 Medical intervention**

Medical intervention has led to different forms of immunisation for children. The general Nigerian population is more enlightened on hygiene and periodic blood tests for communicable and non-communicable diseases, as well as modern forms of medication. These improvements have increased the survival rate of children and extended the life span of Nigerians to 55 years (News Agency of Nigeria, NAN 2019).

#### **5.2 The desire to procreate male children**

The desire for male children cuts across all ethnic groups. In Nigeria our cultural traditions expect couples to have male children, and women are blamed and denigrated for producing only female children (Olawajun, et al, 2015). They experience even worse sanctions for not giving birth to any child. For reasons that are culturally related, men attempt sexual encounters outside their matrimonial homes just to get a male child. Apart from polygamy, the others have multiple partners, thereby contributing to the fast pace of population growth.

There seem to be two main reasons why many men desire male children. The most popular one is to preserve the family name so as to continue the lineage to subsequent generations. It is also believed that sons protect the compound and inherit properties left by the deceased parents whereas the daughters are married out. The second reason for having many (preferably male) children is to be financially assisted by one’s

grown children when the parents grow old and retire.

### **5.3 Lack of family planning and birth control measures**

The unwillingness of couples to use birth control measures cuts across the rural-urban divide (Babalola & Oyenubi 2018), socioeconomic status, educational attainment, and even religious affiliation (Duze & Mohammed, (2006). Rather than adhere to family planning, highly educated Nigerians are often influenced by cultural and familial factors when it comes to the number of children they wish to have. Family planning procedures are skipped as complacency sets in. When allied health officials invite people to town hall meetings, few show up due to a lack of interest. Many are aware of family planning procedures but deliberately refuse to adhere to the procedures designed to curb high procreation rates (Owoseye, 2018).

### **5.4 Poor planning**

A study of the causes of the population explosion in Calabar Cross River State identified poor family planning, polygamy, illiteracy, poverty, culture, and religion as the main contributing factors. The effects of this population explosion included a poor standard of living, poor educational standards for children, an increase in family stressors, malnutrition, health complications for the breadwinner, infections and morbidity, malnutrition, overcrowding, and an increase in violent crimes (Michael et al, 2014).

### **5.5 Religious beliefs and additional reasons**

In the Islamic faith, it is legal to marry four wives and procreate many children. Those who divorce may remarry again. If the trend of procreating five or more children per woman were sustained, then the family could be very large. In spite of low salaries and general economic hardships, many Muslims across the geographical regions have continued to engage in polygamy, with dire consequences that push children to the precipice. Faced with life without parental support, begging

on the streets becomes an option for many children, as in other impoverished countries in West Africa with a large Muslim population.

The other faiths have a similar problem with high procreation rates. There are four categories of people who procreate many children. First are the devoted Christians. They do not practice polygamy due to its condemnation by the Holy Bible, but monogamous over procreation is widely practiced. They detest any form of abortion or contraceptives leaving the number of children to the will of God. As a consequence, they end up procreating from six to eighteen children or even more. The second group consists of those people who are unable to control their sexual cravings and have embraced polygamy. They may be nominal Christians who cannot obey the biblical teaching of sexual faithfulness to a committed partner. The third category is composed of people in a desperate search to have male children so they have multiple sex partners; in the process, they end up with many children. The fourth group is traditionalists or animists. This includes native doctors who have the liberty to procreate an unlimited number of children. In a rare case of overpopulation, a deceased native doctor Simon Odo had over 300 children from 56 wives (Agency Report, 2023). There are similar cases like that in the rural areas of Nigeria.

## **6. Literature review**

### **6.1 The relationship between social work and the population**

The field of population studies is multidisciplinary (Fiorendo, 1973). Most of the consequences of overpopulation among the poor and vulnerable clients fall within the jurisdiction of the social sciences. The impact on social work practitioners, who work on the frontline with clients who have physical, emotional and psychological problems, can be considerable. The unemployed rural and urban poor are the most vulnerable social class directly impacted by overpopulation as they have little or no educational skills and many basic needs. This



demographic group is the most likely to be poor, they may have many children, some of whom may become social deviants, leading to violent crimes in Nigeria (Agboti & Nam, 2018). Social Workers are concerned when parents are unemployed and poor such that they are not able to cater to many children. That is why family planning has to be emphasised because when families are overwhelmed by too many children, it could lead to poverty due to lean finances to cater to the wellbeing of families. This may lead to social vices like prostitution, teenage pregnancies and other violent crimes such as thefts and burglaries that have led to the arrest and incarceration of minors and adults. In Nigeria the problem of runaway children and street children originated from the breakdown of the family and the unstable social background which is not supported by the hands-off approach of state and federal governments (Adegbami & Uche, 2016). In the long run, the physical emotional and psychological impact of street children spills over to the communities who are later attacked and disposed of their belongings when these children become teenagers. One common reality that seems puzzling is that although the developed nations have their own social problems, their population density is far lower than that of poorer Third World countries in Africa, Asia and South America where illiteracy and poverty rates are high and access to contraceptives are low (Nargund, 2009).

Social Work is a helping profession that assists clients to live a functional life. Social workers also enable clients to attain physical, emotional and psychological well-being through sustained counselling sessions. Practitioners in the field are concerned with issues of poverty, social justice, homelessness, domestic abuse, and violation of human rights, especially among the most vulnerable people. Consequently, they condemn social exclusion and advocate for social policy reforms in such areas as health insurance and social welfare benefits for the poor (Bliss, 2015; IFSW, 2012). Social workers oppose racism,

discrimination of any type chauvinistic attitudes towards women, and abuse of the elderly or the disabled or perceived acts of injustice on minorities of all ethnic religious and social groups. Below are details of the intervention.

## **6.2 Intervention by social workers: family planning**

Family planning refers to the use of modern contraception and other methods of birth control to regulate the number, timing, and spacing of human births. It allows parents, particularly mothers, to plan their lives without being overly subject to sexual and social imperatives (Encyclopaedia, 2008 p. 1). The literature of Nigerian social workers in family planning is not available. It can be found in the writings of social workers from foreign countries, including Kapil (1971), Greenblatt (1972); Fiorendo (1973), Meyer and Stone (1974) and Batool (2017). Although women's reproductive health and the use of contraceptives are within the ambit of gynaecology, social workers complement gynaecologists by counselling clients to make the right decisions in family planning. Greenblatt (1972, p. 56) outlined the responsibilities of social workers as to provide information, refer and facilitate medical care, provide transport to the clinic, follow up medical referrals, administer medical payment, give personal counselling, lead group discussion, supervise outreach, follow up aids, advocate for clients on family planning. Some social workers have actively engaged with government agencies and NGOs in some countries to popularise family planning so that poor families can have fewer children (Greenblatt, 1972; Meyer & Stone, 1974). Social Work practitioners are highly passionate about the potential of the unborn falling into the same circle of endemic poverty as the generations before. In the predominantly Roman Catholic Philippines, Fiorendo (1973) counselled women to use various means to bring down the growing population. Similarly, Meyer and Stone (1974) and Greenblatt (1972) spent many years counselling on family planning issues in the

United States. Foreign social workers were actively involved in family planning in a few countries. This was based on one-on-one counselling of clients and the in-depth information passed on that had Social Work implications. There are differences in emphasis. NGOs pay little attention to the physical, emotional, psychological and social effects of absentee fathers and how they affect children throughout their developmental lifespan. Most NGOs do not emphasise the consequences of divorce and unstable homes where the man suddenly ends the marriage, leaving the poor woman to fend for many children. Dealing with the dire impact of socioeconomic circumstances such as the increased cost of living, high rental costs and tuition fees for children falls within the boundaries of social workers. That is why, in other countries identified above, social workers collaborated with other public health professionals and volunteered to counsel the public to curb over-procreation, so as to avoid the pit falls that can have severe social consequences. Nigeria's government and local social workers can use the above perspective of counselling as an intervention in overpopulation problem.

### **6.3 Social work perspective**

Development must give young females the opportunity for education. Child marriage is the bane of young girls seeking education and opportunity. According to the News Agency of Nigeria NAN, "Worldwide, more than 700 million women alive today were married as children; 17 per cent of them or 125 million live in Africa" (2018). When it comes to child marriage Bangladesh is higher at 53%, but Nigeria follows closely at 42%. Both countries share the same experience of illiteracy, poverty and overpopulation. Batool (2017) described the lopsided development of young Bangladeshi females who were married off in their early years of formation, thereby depriving them of attaining education. According to Section 23 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, "A person under the age of 18 is incapable of

contracting a valid marriage. If such a marriage does take place, it should be declared null and void and of no effect." However, in direct contradiction, Section 29(4b) of the same constitution technically approves child marriage [ii]. From its provision "that any woman who is married shall be deemed to be of full age." For child marriage to end, the Nigerian government must enforce its law as enshrined in the constitution.

### **Spread awareness and empower the female child**

Empowering young girls by granting them full education and other opportunities to develop skills are beneficial. "Investing in girls' education also helps delay early marriage and parenthood. In fact, if all girls had secondary education in sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia, child marriage would fall by 64%, from almost 2.9 million to just over 1 million" (Bourne, 2014: 1). Their enrolment in and successful completion of school would enhance their country's GDP and add to the strength of the local economy (Kyari & Ayodele, 2014). Older women can also be empowered with vocational training skills so as to be independent and not dependent on their husbands. Women gain further benefits from receiving higher education. Along with gaining better employment, they are highly knowledgeable about many issues that can potentially improve their lives. They can also make informed decisions about marriage, as well as deciding on family planning and the benefits of fewer children.

### **6.4 Make easy availability of contraceptives**

Various forms of contraceptives must be made readily available to the public at hospitals, private clinics, schools, market squares, and even motor parks. The use of condoms greatly reduces pregnancy. Currently, the NGO known as DKT Nigeria is aiming to promote the Contraceptive Preventive Rate (CPR) by providing contraceptives to millions of Nigerians so as to curb the high birth rate (DKT, n. d.). The problem is that Nigerian policymakers never had a family

planning programme that was introduced to health institutions (Obinna, 2017).

### **6.5 Counselling men on gender issues**

Many Nigerian men expect their wives to have mostly male children. There are situations in which, when housewives gave birth only to female children, they were victimised. In some extreme cases, separation and divorce proceedings were initiated (Elele, 2002). Some husbands absconded and left their wives and daughters to have female children (Agency Report, 2021). Social workers have a duty to counsel and even educate them about the entire reproductive process in simple parlance. Additional referrals to gynaecologists will help enlighten males to stop pressuring their spouses about procreating male children.

### **6.6 Counselling clients**

In a bid to seek male children, Nigerian men give flimsy excuses that are vain and ephemeral, such as male children inherit properties and retain family names. These explanations are irrelevant to the fact that some cultures in northern Nigeria marry off young girls at the age of 10 or 13, while others arrange marriages before the age of 18 (Girls Not Brides, n.d.; Onyido & Brambaifa, 2018). Social workers should explain to clients that females are worthy of formal education. This will potentially enable them to gain employment and also financially support their parents once they have employment. In addition, women are able to continue the lineage of their fathers by retaining their maiden names.

### **6.7 Collaboration with other professionals**

Nigerian Social workers can help to lower the population through sensitization of families and communities during outreach with public health officials. They can notify villagers about knowing their blood groups, avoiding the selection of life partners who may have traits of sickle cell anaemia, and explain the latest techniques of contraceptive use, such as the correct use of condoms or vasectomies for men and how females can take birth control pills.

Kapil (1971) identified common roles of social workers. Generic functions like educating clients through individual meetings, showing films, intake interviews at clinics, and maintenance of records were assigned to Social Work volunteers. These elements were not necessarily derived from their professional training in Social Work, but from the needs of the program as perceived at that time. There are broader roles that could be effectively performed by trained social workers: (1) direct services to individuals, groups, and communities; (2) consultation services to individuals, groups and communities; (3) programme planning functions; (4) training functions; (5) research functions; and (6) formulation of social policies. Kapil's (1971) work shows how innovative and improvisational the profession of social work can be. Inputs on population control were not necessarily derived from professional training but were based on the needs of the people. In addition to the above, there is the relevance of Non-Governmental Organisations detailed below.

### **6.8 Local and foreign NGOS**

There are other actors in the medical field, in partnership with international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), have sensitised the public regarding the relevance of family planning. The NGOs currently working on family planning issues in Nigeria include DKT International, Marie Stopes International, Society for Family Health in Nigeria, Family Planning and Reproductive Health, the United Nations Family Planning Agency (UNFPA), Path Finder International, Family Planning 2020, Nigerian Urban Reproductive Health, and Planned Parenthood Federation of Nigeria. Their aim is to encourage females of reproductive age to adhere to the strict use of condoms or other forms of family planning. Similarly, those women who have reason to eliminate immediately the possibility of having more children are advised to tie their fallopian tubes and their male partners can also undergo vasectomy. Those who are in schools, still awaiting marriages and childbirths,

can use condoms or take morning-after pills to avoid unwanted pregnancies. NGOs also emphasize safe child delivery to reduce the high infant mortality and maternal mortality rates, which are among the highest in the world (Editor, 2019b). The spacing of children and its advantages are also emphasised. There are other professionals and NGOs working on family planning projects, but Nigerians are reluctant to adhere to family planning. There are some studies that can be identified on family planning measures (Ajai et al, 2018; Etokidem et al, 2017; Ugal & Ushie, 2013).

## 7. Discussion

This study has identified the above obstacles to population control. The most vital challenge is to train more social workers and to find those interested in volunteering in family planning clinics where counselling can be initiated to curb child marriages and teenage pregnancies. The paper gave a perspective of counselling by foreign social workers to curb overpopulation. Motivated by their writings, different interventions were described for Nigerian social workers to emulate. Family planning and contraceptive use can be combined with effective social policy to limit the number of children per family. This paper argues that the problem of overpopulation should not be left solely to NGOs. Social scientists and other allied professionals can jointly organise seminars on the dangers of high population growth. At the moment Nigerian social workers have no role in family planning.

The theoretical perspective was apt as modern events in Nigeria and other countries have vindicated Thomas Malthus's theory of geometric population growth and attendant problems. His prognosis remains highly relevant as President Tinubu's administration food palliatives cannot feed a quarter of the population of hungry Nigerians suffering due to the removal of the petrol subsidy. Nigeria is the most populous Black Country in the world but unable to be self-sufficient in food production. The

consequence is hunger and starvation in virtually every state. Although the country is endowed with rich natural and human resources, revenue from petroleum export has dwindled, thus impacting Nigeria's foreign reserves which are also low. At the moment, the value of Nigeria's currency has depreciated, leading to a declining standard of living characterised by endemic poverty, despondency, and high youth unemployment (Karim & Surajo, 2017). The problem has reached a deplorable level, with Nigerians immigrating to other countries and youths committing suicide at an alarming rate (Agbelo, 2019). The government's inability to initiate any social welfare schemes to counter extreme poverty means that Nigerians will remain despondent and angry. The study also related overpopulation to the problems of insecurity, Fulani bandits, clashes between herdsmen and farmers, and ensuing killings. The general state of abductions and killings has left Nigerians living in fear to seek alternative means of relocating to urban areas. Other social problems plaguing Nigeria are unwanted pregnancies, untimely deaths of abandoned babies; violent crimes, congested classrooms, a shortage of adequate housing, homelessness, the emergence of slums, and dilapidated infrastructure. The physical protection of lives and property seems to be the most challenging. Without the security of lives and property, no one including social workers will venture out to meet clients for counselling, nor will they fulfil their professional duties when kidnappings and killings are so rife. Sadly, family planning is resisted by many people who have a personal interest in retaining the practice of polygamy. The prevalence of polygamy is the most vital factor in rapid population growth. The greatest numbers of street children are from the far northern states of Nigeria where polygamy is rife and the widening gap in the use of contraceptives between northern and southern Nigeria is prominent (Babalola & Oyenubi (2018). The general public is procreating at an average rate of 5.5 children per couple, thereby frustrating pleas

for birth control (Fayekun, 2017). Due to cultural inclinations that encourage large families, the directive for Nigerian couples to adhere to family planning procedures is often ignored even after many sessions during antenatal clinics. The one instruction couples adhere to is child spacing. Since the Nigerian government has failed to intervene by initiating a population control policy that limits the number of children each woman can have, Nigeria will continue to experience the adverse effects of overpopulation with adverse consequences of hunger and starvation. There is no palliative that can feed over 200 million hungry Nigerians unless people learn to have fewer children and government secures the farmlands where Fulani herdsmen and bandits have laid siege to kill innocent Nigerians whose only offense is to go to their farms.

### 8. Conclusion

All social problems that impact humans are within the jurisdiction of the social sciences. Although social relationships and interactions of individuals across settings are within the ambit of Sociology, the negative outcomes of all social interactions that impact the physical, emotional, and psychological well-being of individuals are within the jurisdiction of Social Work. The specialised training of social workers is suited for intervention in all social contexts, including the problem of overpopulation. This research has shown the correlation between overpopulation, social problems arising from poverty hunger and starvation, and general insecurity in Nigeria. From the study, three main facts have been established. First, Nigeria has a major overpopulation problem. Second, in spite of assertions that a large population benefits the economy and also boosts a country's GDP, this study has identified serious social problems related to poverty and high unemployment, which are fuelling violent crimes and insecurity. Third, Social workers have significant roles in family planning. They should spread awareness about the dangers of early marriage, and

polygamy and intensify their family planning counselling to all clients and individuals they encounter. Unless the government initiates and enforces a population control policy, it will threaten the gains of Nigeria's fragile economy, and leave unemployed youths poorer as social unrest and instability may threaten the fragile unity of the country. How the overpopulated people can afford the high prices of food and essential commodities to survive in this era of hunger and very bad economy amidst low salaries and high unemployment is anyone's guess.

### 9. Recommendations

As earlier asserted, the problem of overpopulation should not be left solely to NGOs. Other professionals can jointly organise seminars on the dangers of high population growth. Volunteers can be useful if they form NGOs and construct grant proposals to receive development funding from global organisations like UNESCO, UNICEF, Save the Children, and CUSO to advocate for anti-poverty measures and possibly partner with public health officials to advocate for family planning.

The government should hire social workers to educate rural and urban dwellers on the benefits of family planning.

The government should outlaw child and polygamous marriages and set a limit of three children for married couples. Government must enforce limits on procreation and apprehend those who are flouting the laws against polygamy. Agencies must register each child born. Deaths must be equally recorded.

Government should outlaw traditional birth practices to avoid unregistered childbirths. There should be financial incentives for those who adhere to family planning measures.

Punishment should be meted out to those who violate the laws governing the birth of too many children. If possible, such individuals must be required to pay higher taxes and experience a

denial of privileges by the state and federal government. Repeat offenders could be jailed to serve as a deterrent.

Christian and Muslim leaders should be instructed to encourage congregants to promote family planning. Similarly, senior government officials should organise periodic meetings with Islamic clerics about polygamy and how to curtail it.

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