

Islamic Perspectives of Family Planning: Implications for Population Control in African Context

Journal of Management and
Social Sciences
© The Author 2023
Reprints and permission
fountainjournalmanagementands@gmail.com

Opeloye, Muibi Omolayo

Osun State University, Nigeria

Background

Of the 7.7 billion current world population, the Muslims account for 1.8 billion representing 24.1 percent. According to Mickeal Lipka *et al.* Islam (2017) is the world's fastest growing world religion. In his postulation, Muslims will grow more than twice as fast as the overall world population between 2015 and 2060 and in the second half of this century will likely surpass Christianity as the world's largest religion. While the world's population is projected to grow 32 percent in coming decades, the Muslim population is expected to increase by 70 percent from 1.8 billion in 2015 to nearly 3 billion in 2060, representing 31.1 percent which will be 3 in 10 of the world's population.

The population is unevenly distributed among the six continents with Africa accounting for roughly 17 percent of the total, the second largest only after Asia. Africa is the second largest and second most populous continent of the world with an estimated population of 1.2 billion people. African countries are all growing fast in population because there is a large number of women who have no access to planning their family. Besides, the combination of Islamo-African culture of polygyny is a strong factor. In most countries of the continent the population growth is in excess of 2 percent every year. Africa's population growth is frightening with prediction placing the continent's population at 2.4 billion by 2050. By 2100 more than half of the world growth is expected to come from Africa reaching 4.1 by 2100 to claim over 1/3 of the world population. The most populous country in Africa is Nigeria followed by Ethiopia, Egypt, Democratic Republic of Congo and South Africa.

Islam is estimated to constitute about 48 percent of African population. It is the dominant religion in North Africa, the Horn of Africa, the Swahili Coast and most of the West Africa with minority migrant population in South Africa. Within a relatively short time, Africa has gone from having a majority of followers of traditional religions to being predominantly of Muslims and Christians. Since our concern in this study is Islam, we must identify the factors that have accounted for embracing the faith. The principal factors include first and foremost the natural appeal of Islam through which the

Corresponding author:

Muibi Omolayo Opeloye, Department of Religious Studies, Osun State University, Osogbo, Ikire Campus, Nigeria

Email: opeloyem@yahoo.com

converts are attracted to embrace the faith and secondly the compatibility of some Islamic practices with the indigenous cultural African norms and practices an example of which is polygyny.

Islam is the other major religion in the continent alongside Christianity, with 48 percent of its population being Muslims, it accounts for one-quarter of the world Muslim population. Most African countries (including the Muslim dominant ones) remain poor which largely makes their population a liability. This is why the issue of family planning or birth control becomes relevant as a means of controlling population growth rate.

Ambali (2003), a renowned Nigerian Muslim jurist and former Grand Qadi of Kwara State of Nigeria, discussing family planning asserts that the concept in its present form can be traced to Margret Sanger's birth control movement in the United States of America in 1912 as well as to Malthus, the great economist in England at the tail end of 18th century. The fact must be stated however that the Muslims attitudinal disposition to the concept is ambivalent in view of the controversial nature of the subject as will be unfolded in this study.

Theoretical Framework

This study is predicated on moderation theory. Somer (2014) states that moderation theories treat moderation as "some kind of adaptation or willingness to cooperate or compromise and focus on discovering which interests or ideological attributes make it happen". This implies that moderation consists in the acceptance of the attributes of the centre in human actions or systems. From a religious angle, Ushama (2014) addresses the subject of moderation and states that God exposed human beings to the subject of moderation in order for them to apply it as a "significant source and essence of life in all walks of life". He adds that "moderation is not limited to partial implementation or enforcement of Islamic religious teachings or rulings or systems but it is a comprehensive method to be applied in every aspect of life by every individual or group or nation".

However, moderation is not only central to the Islamic religion but also resonates in some other religions such as Christianity and Buddhism. Moderation is believed to resonate at many levels in Buddhism. The idea of moderation in the religion, for instance, was birthed by the dissatisfaction of the religious leader Budha with the solitary and glamorous experiences he had. To corroborate this, in the Muslims' scripture, in *Surah 2. 143*, Muslims are described as *Ummatan Wasatan* (nation in middle course) i.e a community that is just and maintains balance; that is not tilting to any extreme. This concept resonates in different passages of the scripture including *Surah 17: 29* and *Surah 4: 171*.

I consider the theory applicable realising the position of extremity taken by some countries including Tunisia in their family planning policy. The danger inherent in that can be seen from the experience of Canada which due to her drastic birth control policy that has led to her population decline is now

struggling to boost the population by encouraging migration into the country. Arising from the foregoing, the purpose of this paper therefore is to examine Islamic view of family planning and the Muslims attitude with a view to determining how it affects population whether positively or negatively and to present as model, countries with moderate family planning policies that operate within the confines of pristine Islamic principles.

Islamic Perspectives of Family Planning

The universally approved method of controlling population growth is through birth control or family planning; though Muslim scholars have preference for family planning rather than birth control because humans lack capacity to control birth. The rationale for family planning is that it allows child spacing so as to guarantee the health of the mother and child especially at birth and ensure that every birth is intended, with couple having children when they desire to and when they are ready.

Scholars' opinions are divided over desirability or otherwise of family planning to the extent that arguments are advanced for and against the concept with each group using the Qur'an and hadith texts to support their views (Oloso, 2011). Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi (1961) is a good example of scholars who are opposed to the view while Sayyid Sabiq and Jad el Haqq represent those favourably disposed to it. The argument will flow if arguments against are presented before argument in favour. The following are therefore the arguments against:

- 1) That children are described in the Qur'an as adornments of this life, therefore it is desirable to engage in procreation. *Surah* 18: 46 in this regard reads 'wealth and children are the adornment of the life of the world: But the things that endure, good deeds are best in the sight of your Lord as rewards...' In *Surah* 25:74, wives and children are seen as source of comfort as it reads 'And those who say: 'Our Lord bestow on us from our wives and offspring the comfort of our eyes and make us leaders of the pious.
- 2) That the more populous a community is the stronger they become and the closer they will be to Allah. *Surah* 4:1 is cited to buttress this. More spectacular is the hadith cited in support of the view which reads: *Marry the loving and the fertile women, for I will compare your numbers to the rest of the nations on the day of resurrection (ibn Kathir vol 2, p. 125)* In the same vein another hadith reads: *Verily the best members of this Ummah (community) are those who have the most wives (Ibn Kathir vol 2 P. 124).*

- 3) That many passages of the Qur'an emphasise reliance on Allah (*tawakkul*) for our needs. *Surah* 11:6 in this regard reads: 'And no moving (living) creature is there on earth but its provision is due from Allah' (cf *Surah* 65:2-3).
- 4) That many Qur'anic passages teach belief in predestination or premeasurement (*Qadar*) including *Surah* 54:49 which reads 'Verily We have created all things with *Qadar* (i.e Divine preordainments of all things before their creation).
- 5) That any contraceptive device that prevents pregnancy results in infanticide. Consequently, *coitus interruptus (al azl)* is tantamount to termination of life. One of verses of the passages of the Qur'an cited in support of this view is *Surah* 17:31 which declares: '*And kill not your children for fear of poverty. We shall provide for them as well as for you. Surely the killing of them is a great sin*'.

The corresponding arguments in favour of family planning are as follows:

- 1) Granted that children are described to be assets in the cited verses, the scripture also describes them not only as trial (*fitnah*) but also as enemy. The import of this is that multiplicity of children may become a burden especially when the parents are unable to provide for their needs and ensure their proper upbringing as enjoined by Islam. *Surahs* 8: 28, 34:37 and 64: 14-15 can be cited to support the view.
- 2) Largeness of population does not necessarily guarantee strength. Indeed, *Surah* 9: 25 stresses the inherent danger in uncontrolled population as experienced by prophet Muhammad when his large army at the battle of Hunain did not guarantee victory, whereas, in the past he had won many battles with smaller army. The question can be asked, what is the population of Israel that is terrorising the Arab nations?
- 3) Just as Islam teaches reliance on Allah and predestination, so it teaches that Muslims should not take God for granted. Despite the fact that Allah has power to act as He wills, He grants man the freedom to use his discretion. *Surah* 13: 11 *Allah will not change the condition of people until the people themselves change their condition.*
- 4) It is wrong to argue that *coitus interruptus* or any form of contraception amounts to killing. We ought to realise that contraception only prevents pregnancy. Killing does not take place until there is life. *Coitus interruptus (al azl)* is believed to have been encouraged by the Prophet as will be mentioned shortly.
- 5) Child spacing as enjoined in *Surah* 2:233 and *Surah* 46:15 is a form of family planning. The passages give the duration of suckling as 2 years or 36 months including the pregnancy period. The former declares "*the mothers should suckle their children for two years, (that is) for those (parents) who desire to complete the term of suckling...*" while latter

asserts "... and the bearing of him and the weaning of him is thirty months."

Putting the pros and cons of these arguments in perspective, the argument which favours family planning to my mind is considered more plausible. The reason is not farfetched. This is because planning as a concept is not alien to the Qur'anic precepts taking cognisance of the interpretation of Prophet Yusuf's (Joseph) dream in which believers are taught to start planning for the difficult times from the period of ease. It is advised that the harvests of the seven fertile years should be left in the ears (except the amount for consumption) to stay longer so that they use what remains of the harvests during the seven years of draught (Ibn Kathir, Vol 5, p. 173). This being the case, the concept of family planning cannot be an anathema. Indeed, Islamic medicine as early as the 10th century had known about birth control (family planning) in view of the fact that the famous early Muslim writers namely Avicenna or Ibn Sina (980-1037) and Al- Razi or Ibn Rushd (d 923 or 924) refer to different methods of contraception in their writings (www.bbc.co.uk).

Writing in support of family planning, Khalid Akbar (nd) cites copiously from Islamic sources faulting the arguments of the antagonists of family planning. According to him, no Qur'anic text forbids prevention of conception. It is erroneous to use Qur'anic verses which prohibit infanticide or termination of life to discourage birth control. This is because contraception does not amount to killing a human being. From the perspective of hadith, the principle of preventing conception was accepted during the life of the Prophet as some of his followers were encouraged to practice '*azl (coitus interruptus)*. There are many *ahadith* on '*azl* which formed the earliest legal reasoning of the Muslims on contraception and were essential instruments of argument in later Islamic thought on contraception.

With regard to jurisprudential views, opinions are divided as already noted, nevertheless the great jurist of Shafii school of thought, Imam Al-Ghazali as cited by Khalid Akbar opines that there is no justification for prohibiting '*azl* as prohibition in Islam is possible only by adducing original text (of the Quran or hadith) or by analogy with a given text. In the case of contraception, there is no such text, nor is there any principle on which to base prohibition. In his view *coitus interruptus* is permitted absolutely and this permission could be ratified by analogical reasoning. For instance, a man could refrain from marriage, or marry but abstain from mating or have sexual mating but abstain from ejaculation inside the vagina ('*azl*). Although it is better to marry, have intercourse and have ejaculation inside vagina, abstention from all these is by no means forbidden or sinful.

Al-Ghazali makes distinction between infanticide and contraception arguing that a child could not be formed merely by the emission of the spermatic fluid but by the settling of semen in the woman's womb; for children are not created by the man's semen alone but of both parents together. Therefore, contraception could not be compared with infanticide which is the killing of an existing being while contraception is different. He argues further that in the process of contraception the emissions of male and female are analogous to two elements: offer (*ijab*) and acceptance (*qabul*) which are components of a legal contract in Islamic law of marriage. Someone who submits an offer and then withdraws it before the other party accepts it is not guilty of any violation, for a contract does not come into existence before acceptance. For the same reason, there is no real difference in the man's emission or retention of the semen unless it actually mixes with the woman's emission.

Another scholar cited by Akbar, this time an eminent Nigerian scholar, Professor Ismail A Balogun who in response to the question: whether or not a Muslim can practice any other method of contraception apart from *coitus interruptus*, said the answer can only be in affirmative as long as other methods are not injurious either to the man or woman. The question is like asking whether a Muslim can today wear cloths different in shape from those worn by the Prophet and his companions during their time.

Another scholar is Shaikh Ali Jad al- Haq, the Grand Mufti of Egypt who reacted to the projection of family planning as a distrust in the popular belief that Allah will take care of a family's need regardless of how big it grows. In his view contraception through withdrawal or any other method does not mean distrust in Allah's generosity or mercy. In this regard he recalls what the Prophet said to the camel man who was afraid of losing his valuable beast. The man was instructed to first take precaution of tying up the camel and trust in Allah's care for her. Commenting on the Quranic verse which says "there is no creature on earth for whom Allah does not create a means of livelihood", Umar the Second Caliph explains that the man who trusts Allah is one who believes that Allah will make the seed grow but he does not neglect to sow the crop. This interpretation goes to show that human forethought and effort are not incompatible with Allah's care for his creation. The kernel of this paper therefore is that Islam has nothing against planning towards having few, well-educated and well trained children rather than breeding many untrained ones in poverty and become a burden for the society. What is more, when it comes to the issue of child spacing which is an ingredient of planning, Islam has its provisions as contained in *Surahs* 2: 233 and 46:15 as already noted. It is interesting to note that the thirty months of both pregnancy and weaning stipulated in the passages is in tandem with the African indigenous practice of three years' child spacing.

Implications of Family Planning on population Growth

If the population of a country or continent would be an asset, it must be matched by the developmental indices which invariably would result in high GDP and per capita income (Fatubarin, 2011). Since we are looking at this subject from the Islamic perspective, it will be appropriate to assess the population growth rate in relation with the GDP in selected African countries, more especially the Muslim dominant countries and compare with non-Muslim countries to determine the extent to which Islamic factor comes into play. The table below is for the purpose of illustration.

Table 1: Showing Population, Growth Rate, GDP and Per Capita Income of Selected Countries

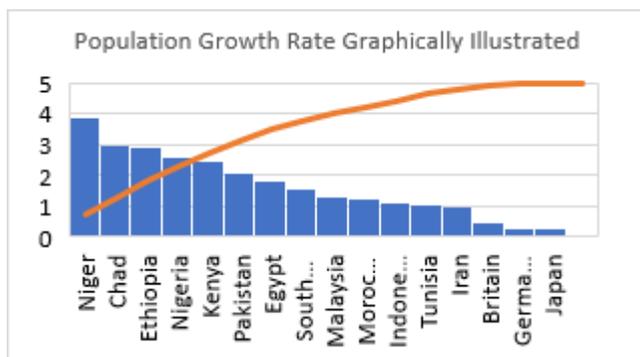
Countries	Population (2017)	Growth Rate	GDP (USD)	Per capita income
Nigeria (W. Africa)	190.8m	2.6 per cent	275.8 billion	1,968 USD
Chad (W. Africa)	14.9m	3.0 per cent	9.9 billion	669.89 USD
Niger (W. Africa)	21.42m	3.88 per cent	8.12 billion	378 USD
Kenya (E. Africa)	51.6m	2.48 per cent	74.94 billion	1,507 USD
Ethiopia (C. Africa)	105m	2.9 per cent	80.56 billion	1, 890 USD
South Africa	57.7m	1.55 per cent	349.4 billion	6, 160 USD
Morocco (N. Africa)	35.74m	1.23 per cent	109.1 billion	3.007 USD
Tunisia (N. Africa)	11.53m	1.06 per cent	46.26 billion	3, 490 USD
Egypt (N. Africa)	97.55m	1.80 per cent	235.4 billion	2, 412 USD
Malaysia (Asia)	31.62m	1.29 per cent	314.5 billion	9,944 USD
Iran (Asia)	81.16m	0.99* per cent	439.5 billion	5,415 USD
Indonesia (Asia)	268.409m	1.1 per cent	1.016 Trillion	4,051 USD
Pakistan (Asia)	197m	2.1 per cent	305 billion	1,641 USD
Japan (Asia)	126.8m	0.26 per cent	4.872 trillion	38,428 USD
Germany (Europe)	82.89m	0.3 per cent	3.677 trillion	44,469 USD
Britain (Europe)	66.02m	0.58 per cent	2.80 trillion	39,720 USD

Source: <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/islam>

The following observations can be made from this table:

- 1) The 16 countries listed in the table are made up of 9 African countries, (3 of which are Afro-Arab); 5 Asian countries (1 of which is non-Muslim) and 2 European countries. They are so selected for purposes of comparison.

- 2) The 2 European countries (Germany and Britain) and the non-Muslim Asian country (Japan) being highly developed countries record impressive GDP and per capita income with population growth less than 1 percent.
- 3) Only Pakistan out of the 4 Muslim Asian countries has more than 2 per cent population growth rate, the others have a little above 1 percent while indeed Iran a homogeneously Muslim State has a record of less than 1 percent growth rate. They have better GDP and per capita income than the selected African countries.
- 4) Of the 3 Afro-Arab nations listed in the table, 2 countries namely Tunisia and Morocco have population growth rate a little above 1 percent with GDP and per capita income better than Egypt's.
- 5) Of the 6 other African countries 4 (Nigeria, Chad, Niger and Ethiopia) are clearly in the range of 3 percent population growth rate with poor GDP and per capita income. South Africa and Kenya fair better with the former having 1.55 and the latter 2.48 growth rate percent respectively.
- 6) Some Muslim minority countries like Kenya and Ethiopia too have relatively high population growth rate percent, the former having 2.48 percent and the latter 2.9 percent an indication that African culture is also a contributory factor.
- 7) The nations within 1 to 1.5 percent growth rate bracket should be seen as keying into population control concept. They are mostly the Asian countries and the Afro Arab nations such as Iran, Indonesia, Malaysia, Tunisia and Morocco.
- 8) A close look at the growth rate pattern in the table shows that the developed countries record the lowest, next to them are the Asian countries (3 out of 4) as well as the Afro-Arab Countries (2 out of 3) and next to them are the sub-Sahara African countries. These are illustrated graphically below.



Source: Author's Compilation, 2023

As can be observed from the graph above, the five Sub-Sahara African countries record very high population growth rate above 2.5 percent while the two North African countries (Tunisia and Morocco) record low population growth rate, a little above 1 percent which shows differential in their commitments to family planning policy implementation. This study will use Tunisia as an example of Muslim country that has extreme commitment to birth control and Nigeria as an example of Muslim dominant country that shows lackadaisical attitude to family planning ideals.

Tunisia is one of the Muslim countries with low population. As at 2017, the country's population was 11.53 million with 1.06% growth rate and per capita income of 3,490 USD. Since its independence in 1956 the country has embarked upon birth control measures to curb excessive growth. Tunisia has been pioneering family planning in Maghreb with much success. The country is described by Richard Curtiss (1996) as a country that is working. According to him, the most important factor in the country's economic success is attributed to its family planning programme which is extraordinary. For instance, Tunisia is the only Muslim country apart from Turkey which prohibits polygamy and repudiation without offering grounds for divorce in law court. According to Tunisia health authorities, 60% of Tunisian women practice contraception; family allowances is limited to the first 3 children since 1988; raising age of marriage to 17 years for girls and 20 years for boys since 1964; unrestricted advertising and distribution of contraception materials since 1961. The social security policy favours reduction of family size.

Most of these legislations owe their origin to the writings in the 1930s of Tunisian reformer Taher Haddad and the pronouncement of the religious leader Shaikh Fadhel Ben Achour who claimed that the laws are not contrary to Islamic precepts. This assertion is erroneous. Prohibition of polygamy is contrary to Islamic teaching as contained in *Surah* 4:3 of the Qur'an. In the light of this, any family planning device that runs counter to Islamic precepts is not worthy of emulation. The practice in Tunisia only goes to show the heavy influence of the West on its family planning policies.

The other extreme for discussion is Nigeria's situation. The country's population as at 2017 was put at 190.8 million with 2.6% growth rate and 1,968 USD per capita income as indicated in the table above. It is the most populous African country. The rate at which the population is growing is alarming and frightening. According to Nigerian Tribune of Friday 21 June 2019, quoting the United Nations report, 733 million population is projected for Nigeria by 2050 to make the country the world's third most populated. In another report as given also in Nigerian Tribune of Monday 24 June 2019, the Nigerian population is currently 200.9 million at the growth rate of 3.2 percent

providing a yearly growth of 6,428,800 people; that is 17,565 people daily which translates to 732 people per hour.

Despite so many years of trying to get Nigeria committed to family planning policy, it has not worked for the country. Former President of Nigeria, General Badamosi Babangida's attempt to limit the number of children per woman in matrimony to four did not work. Nigerian government has continued to work with key stakeholders to address the social- cultural norms which constitute obstacle to buying into family planning. The focus is on dispelling myths and misconceptions about family planning and expanding the provisions of family planning services. The general anti- family planning attitude of some of our *ulama*' and many Nigerian Muslims is also not in tandem with Islamic teachings. Islam does not teach Muslims to raise children they cannot provide for. We should know that seeing such children roaming the streets is a blemish for the religion as it is a burden for the nation.

Generalisation may not reflect the true picture of the Nigerian situation in view of the research findings of Anyawu (2013) from the study titled: Family Planning in Nigeria: A Myth or Reality? The study which focused on Nkanu Local Government Area of Enugu State (a homogenous Christian community), reveals that family planning in the area is very high even when the method in use is traditional. This goes to suggest that Christian communities are more inclined to family planning concept.

It is important to find a mid-way that is amenable to Islamic tenets in between the two extremes. In view of the need for adherence to Islamic tenets in formulating family planning policies, the Iranian experience is considered apposite at this juncture. Iran had been known for her commitment to family planning ideals. According to a UN report, the country's birth control policies were so effective that Iran was topping the list of greatest fertility decrease. In 1989 following the war with Iraq, realising that the costs of the burgeoning population were going to exceed its capacity to provide adequate food, education, housing and employment, the government formulated a policy that allowed two children per family. However, in 2006 there was reversal to pronatalism during the time of Ahmadinejad which annulled the policy of two children. The change was due to perilously low fertility rate that started to cause negative population growth. The president called for an increase in population from 70 to 120 million.

By 2012, the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei described Iran's contraceptive services as wrong and against Islamic principles. Iranian authorities there and then started to cut down on birth control programmes (Ali Khamenei, 2014). One thing that is significant about Iran's experience is that despite being an Islamic Republic of note, it accepts family planning concept, the moderations later introduced were only made to ensure compliance with Islamic principles. It is important to note that despite the policy reversal, Iran with population of 81.16 million as at 2017 has less than 1% growth rate and per capita income of 5,415 USD which are indices of good economy.

With the Tunisian and Nigerian family planning policies described above, we are confronted with two scenarios, the Tunisian experience is a scenario in which strict implementation of family planning leads to infringements on Islamic precepts while the Nigerian experience is a scenario in which the lackadaisical attitude to the policy also leads to infringement on Islamic principles. The unique Malaysian family planning model which stands between the two extremes commends itself to us being a model which does not in any way infringe on Islamic precepts and yet makes its population an asset. Malaysian population as at 2017 was 31.62 million with 1.23% growth rate and 9,944 USD per capita income as indicated in the table.

According to Nurul Huda Muhammad Razif (2019), polygamy is allowed in Malaysia but it is not widely practised. A man can go into polygamous marriage on the condition that he can prove in the court of law that he has the wherewithal to support multiple families and can treat all the wives equally and has justifiable reason for marrying additional wives. This is in fulfilment of the condition stipulated in Qur'an chapter 4:3. The financial condition for polygamy imposed by the *shari'ah* favours wealthy men making polygamy in the country historically an elite or aristocratic privilege. According to Norliza Ahmad (2010) in reviewing the population policy in 1984, government called for a major shift from family planning to family and human resource development to achieve an ultimate population of 70 million by 2100. Under the new policy the board was renamed National Population and Family Development Board. The uniqueness of this policy lies in the combination of family planning and family resource development.

Resolving Islamic Misconceptions as a Means of Making Population an Asset

From the Islamic view point, if a nation's population must be an asset certain Muslim cultural practices that have arisen from misconceptions of some Islamic tenets would have to be resolved. For the purpose of this study five such practices have been identified especially in Nigeria as follows:

1. Marrying multiple wives (polygyny) without recourse to due process
2. Aversion to western education
3. *Almajiri* phenomenon and begging culture
4. Women seclusion (*purdah*)
5. Child Marriage

With regard to polygamous culture, it is permitted by Islam though not unconditionally. Qur'an chapter 4:3 allows polygamous marriage up to maximum of four wives with the condition that principle of justice must be

upheld in dealing with the wives and there must be wherewithal to maintain the wives and the offspring. The limit of four imposed puts a stop to the African culture of having limitless number of wives. Though Islam allows polygyny, it makes monogamy a preferred option if one will not be able to fulfil the conditions attached to it which according to *Surah 4:129* is difficult to attain. There is no gainsaying that in our society many polygamous men just raise children without caring for their sustenance and education. If a country is populated by societies made up of such families, such a population can only be a liability. It is in consequence of abuse of polygyny that some Muslim nations have decided to regulate the practice.

In Malaysia for instance permission of the wife and permission of government are required before a husband can marry a second wife. This is to ascertain that the man has the wherewithal for polygamous union. In Algeria, amendments to Algerian family code makes it more difficult to contract polygamous marriages. In Tunisia, polygamy has been outlawed since 1956. This is the first Islamic State to abolish polygamy. In Indonesia, restrictions have brought harsh penalty for unlawfully contracting polygamous union. In Egypt the country's 1985 law allows 4 wives but the husband must inform his other wives about his plan before marrying a new wife. If they object and ask for divorce, they must prove to the judge that the additional wives will do them harm. Viewing the *shariah* provisions on this subject, the practice in Tunisia is extreme and a flagrant contradiction of Islamic tenets. The practice in Malaysia is acceptable because it ensures compliance with Islamic teachings, little wonder that Malaysia has population that is an asset.

Aversion to western education as it manifests in some Muslim societies like Northern Nigeria is a misconception of Islamic view of education. Despite the fact that Islam places high premium on education, it is strange that many Muslim societies have wrong perception of western education. It is important to note that the two basic sources of Islamic teachings: Qur'an and Hadith emphasise importance of education without excluding western education. This is evident in the hadith which encourages the Muslims to seek knowledge even if it will mean travelling to as far as China, a non-Muslim country. The implication of this is that a Muslim must be ready to seek any form of useful knowledge wherever he can find it even if from non-Islamic environment.

The Boko Haram sect of Nigeria therefore gets it wrong preaching against western education. If Northern Nigeria is more backward than Southern Nigeria educationally it is due to their attitude to western education. We have to understand Islamic education concept from the perspective of the resolutions at the First World Conference on Muslim Education held in Makkah in 1977 which compartmentalises education into two: 1) perennial knowledge which is based on divine revelation and 2) acquired knowledge incorporating social, natural and applied science susceptible to quantitative growth and multiplication... (Opeloye, 2000). If a nation's population must be an asset its

citizenry must imbibe western education which is the veritable tool for development.

Almajiri phenomenon and beggary are cultures extraneous to Islamic precepts. *Almajiri* is derived from Arabic word *al-Muhajirun* which literally means emigrants and colloquially 'seekers of Islamic knowledge'. It refers to the traditional method of acquiring knowledge in Hausa/Fulaniland whereby boys and girls at tender ages are sent out by their parents or guardians to other villages and cities for Quranic education under a knowledgeable Islamic scholar. Three categories of *almajiris* are found in the urban cities of Northern Nigeria: those who lead blind parents to beg; those who act as fronts for parents and those who beg for themselves. These children coming from very poor families constitute menace to the society and have always been a burden to the nation as well as embarrassment to Islam the way they go about roaming the streets, picking remnants of food leftover from dustbins for consumption.

AbdulHamid *et al.* (2016) in a recent study quoting National Council for the welfare of destitute in Nigeria says there are about seven million children and teenage *almajiris* in the Northern part of the country with Kano accounting for more than one million. The way beggary is professionalised gives the impression that it is enjoined by Islam whereas nothing can be farther from the truth. The Qur'anic and hadith provisions on this practice is more of disapproval than encouragement. *Surah 2: 273* makes this crystal clear as it reads: *(Charity is) for (the poor) who in Allah's cause are restricted (from travel) and cannot move about in the land (for trade or work),. The one who knows them not thinks that they are rich because of their modesty. You may know them by their mark, they do not beg of people at all...* The prophet's hadith corroborates this when it declares that *'the hand that gives is better than the hand that receives'*.

In the light of this, begging has no basis in Islam, If anything, what Islam propagates is dignity of labour. A society populated by people who indulge in the culture of begging, rather than hard work, can only be a liability to the nation. Establishment of *Almajiri* Integrated Schools across the country and introduction of formal *almajiri* education by the Goodluck Jonathan government had been part of efforts to get rid of the menace without success. The Federal Government of Nigeria has recently taken a bold step to have abolished the practice which is highly commendable. The latest development in this regard is that the *almajiris* in northern Nigeria have been repatriated to their various states of origin for rehabilitation in view of the menace they constitute to various communities.

The culture of women seclusion (*purdah*) is not peculiar to Islam and indeed it had pre- Islamic origin. It was a socio-religious culture prevalent among the Persians, Hindu communities in South Asia as well as the Pre

Islamic Arabs. Purdah without doubt was adopted by Islam and it is rigorously observed under the Taliban in Afghanistan. There are many practitioners also in the Northern and Southern Nigeria. It is characterised by physical segregation within the house achieved with wall partitioning, curtains or screen. A woman's withdrawal into purdah usually limits her activities within the home thereby unable to engage in any form of gainful employment. The usual garment worn is flowing gown in form of *burqa* or *kimar* with *niqab* or veil to conceal the face which may or may not expose the eyes.

The question then arises how compelling is the practice for the Muslim women? The answer can be deduced in the following passages of the Qur'an viz: Surahs 33: 32-33; 33:59 and 24: 30-31. In the first passage the instruction contained therein is specifically directed to the Prophet's wives to stay within the home to be able to perform the duties required of them as wives of the Prophet. This is the passage usually cited to support the practice even though other scholars will argue that it is not applicable to the generality of the believers.

As for the second passage which addresses wives of the Prophet and the believers in general, the instruction contained therein has to do with women's dress specifications while the third passage contains more detailed instruction on the mode of dressing. But more importantly, this same passage addresses both believing men and women to lower their gaze when they meet one another. With this passage it becomes crystal clear that women are not barred from going out. Indeed, they have the option of going about their normal business which is why dressing specification is justifiable. There is no gainsaying that keeping women indoors deprives them the right to contribute their own quota to socio-economic development of the nation. Women in many Islamic countries today feature in public life contributing to the nation's development. Where they are denied such opportunity, they remain as liabilities for the nation. It is well known in the early history of Islam that Aishah the wife of prophet Muhammad participated in the battle of Camel fought during the reign of Caliph Ali.

Lastly the child marriage culture by definition is a formal marriage or an informal union entered into by an individual before reaching the age of puberty. The Prophet's betrothal with Aishah when she was 9 years of age is usually cited as justification for the practice. Another justification is *ijbar* factor in Islamic marriage law of Maliki school which is contrary to the practice in other schools that recognise the bride's consent under *ijab* and *qabul* (offer and acceptance) principle in marriage. This is the practice whereby the parent forces his daughter to marry against her wish. This practice is more in vogue in the North than elsewhere in Nigeria and it is one of the factors contributing to women backwardness in western education. With the enactment of Child Rights Acts in many countries including Nigeria, the age of marriage for girls has been raised to 18 years.

Conclusion

From the foregoing analysis emerges two extreme attitudes towards population control, both of which are not necessarily in tandem with Islamic dictates. One extreme represents the nations legislating against express provision of the *Qur'an* as in the case of Tunisia where polygamy is outlawed. The other represents societies where treasured Islamic family values are thrown to the winds procreating offspring that may not be productive to the society. While it cannot be said that Islam is opposed to family planning, the policy statements of The Academy of Islamic Research (AIR 1965:64) as outlined below sheds further light on what may be considered as Islamic position on population or birth control:

- 1) As far as Islam is concerned, it is desirable to increase the number of offspring and multiply on the consideration that multitude is calculated to give strength to the Islamic nation, socially, economically and militarily and enhance its prestige and render it stoutly invulnerable.
- 2) Where personal needs make birth control/ family planning imperative, spouses are free to act according to individual conscience and sense of religion.
- 3) *Shariah* provisions forbid enacting ordinances by which people are compelled to stop child bearing in any form whatsoever.
- 4) Abortion for the purpose of limiting child bearing or the use of means which lead to infertility for this purpose is forbidden in Islamic law.

Granted that these resolutions represent the position of Islam, what is more important in the African context is paramountcy of good governance. This is because Africa as a continent has abundant resources yet untapped to meet the needs of its growing population. Using the example of Nigeria believed to be most populous African country, the population can be turned to an advantage like it is in countries like China or Indonesia that have better GDP and per capita income.

In the light of the foregoing the following recommendations are proposed:

- 1) Good governance is *sine qua non* to meaningful development, therefore, African nations' political class should leave no stone unturned ensuring enthronement of good governments in different countries of the continent.
- 2) Population control or birth control for the Muslims is a sensitive issue which should be approached with caution. Those to be engaged in its propagation should be Muslims who have the right perspective of the concept.

- 3) Imams and preachers (*du'at*) as leaders should do more by way of enlightening their followers with a view to correcting misconceptions of pristine Islamic tenets common among the faith adherents.
- 4) Population commissions in many countries are active only when census is approaching which is an abnormality, the organ of the government should consistently evolve activities round the year geared towards public enlightenment.
- 5) The issue of registration of birth and death which in many countries is held with levity should be taken more serious by the government as a means of having more accurate population figure.

References

- Ambali, M. A. (2003). *The Practice of Muslim Family Law in Nigeria*. Zaria, Tamaza Publishing Company Ltd.
- Anyawu, J. I. (2013). Family Planning in Nigeria: Myth or Reality: Implication for Education. *Journal of Education and Practice*, ISSN 2222-1735 (paper) ISSN 2222-288x (on line).
- Ayo Fatubarin (2011). *Population Education*. Ilesa, Keynotes Publishers Ltd.
- Khalid F. Akbar (nd). Family Planning and Islam: A Review. pdfs.semanticscholar.org (on line).
- Khan, Muhammad Muhsin (2007). *Interpretation of the Meanings of the Noble Qur'an in English Language*. Darussalam Publishers and Distributors, Riyadh.
- Maududi Sayyid Abul A'la (1961). *Birth Control: Its Social, Political, Economic, Moral and Religious Perspectives*. Delhi 6, Markazi Maktaba Islami Publishers.
- Micheal Lipka & Conrad Hackett (2017). Why Muslims are the World Fastest Religious Group. www.pewresearch.org (on line).
- Norliza Ahmad (2010). Status of Family Planning in Malaysia. www.incomp.org.my (on line).
- Nurul Huda Mohammad Razif (2019). The Changing Face of Polygamy in Contemporary Malaysia. www.wolf.cam.ac.uk (on line).
- Oloso, K. K. (2011). Family Planning Polemic: The Shariah Solution. *Ife Journal of Religions*, Department of Religious Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.
- Opeloye, M. O. (2000). The Place of Religion in Educational System in Nigeria. *Muslim Education Quaterly*, Cambridge.
- Rafatu AbdulHamid et al. (2016). Child Abuse Among Muslim Families and Youth Development in Northern Nigeria. *SAWAP International Journal*, 7(5), 226-236.
- Richard Curtiss (2017). Tunisia's Family Planning Success Underscores its Economic Growth. www.wrmea.org (on line).

-
- Sayyid Ali Khamenei (2014). Ayatollah Ali Khaenei on Iran's Population Policy. *Population and Development review*, 40(3), 573-575.
- Shaikh Safiur-Rahman Al- Mubabarakpuri Trasl (2003). *Tafsir Ibn Kathir. (Abridged)*, Vol. 2 and 5, Darussalam, Riyadh.
- Somer, M. (2014). Moderation of religious and secular politics, a country's centre and democratisation. *Democratisation*, 21(2), 1-39.
- Ushama, T. (2014). Is Islam a religion of moderation or extremism? A study of key Islamic teachings. *Asian Social Science*, 10(8), 184-197.