

FAMILY PLANNING EDUCATION: THE CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Family planning is a birth control method which is aimed at assisting parents to choose when to have a child rather than by chance. This paper has examined critically what family planning entails in relation to Christian perspective. It also reviewed some methods of family planning, their objectives and the need for family planning education. It also reviewed family planning education and its relevance to Christian lives especially on married couples. The educational implication was also looked at. Finally, it examined the Christian perspective on family planning education and recommendations were also made and then conclusion.

Introduction

Here in Nigeria, we have family planning education but there is no law controlling it. People are free to have as many children as they like but the government is appealing to the people to consider four children as maximum. The African traditionalists believe that, each woman has been allotted the number of children she should bring into the world by the creator. The Christians believe in the words of the Holy Book (Bible). "Go ye into the world, increase, multiply and replenish the earth". For many, this comment should be carried out irrespective of the changing times and modifications in our traditional way of living. Since Nigerian citizens are largely religiously inclined and belong to either one religious system or the other, the need, therefore, arises to investigate the Christian Perspective or view on Family Planning Education.

Definition of Family Planning Education

Family planning education could be critically analytically said to be a kind of education that is concerned with a birth control method which is aimed at assisting parents to choose when to have a child rather and not to have way of life where couples and individuals voluntarily decide on how many children they want and when to have them to ensure better living condition for the family.

Family planning education started in 1912, by a Nurse Margarrette Shangai, at New York City who tried to open the first family planning clinic because of high mortality rate which killed Margarrette's best friend after her 12th pregnancy. In 1930, family planning education spread to Britain. Then, its first inception in Nigeria was in 1950.

According to Delano (1988), family planning is a means by which individual or parents space the process of conception, pregnancy and childbirth at intervals mutually determined by both husband and wife in order to have the desired number of children they can conveniently maintain. Indeed, family planning is a process that is applied naturally or artificially to regulate the birth of children. Newman (1977) stated that, it is a regulation of human reproductive capacity, which involves the prevention of unwanted pregnancy by contraception techniques. Onyeogubalu (2005), opined that, it is a process whereby couples choose if and when they will have a child or to choose the number of children that they will have. He said further, that, it is unreasonable to bring more children into the world than parents can afford to maintain well. Parents should produce only the number of children that their circumstances in life permit them to find, clothe, educate and generally look after them properly in sickness and in health.

Methods of Family Planning

Family planning methods could be divided into two categories — the natural method of family planning (NFP) and the artificial method.

The natural methods can be sub-divided as follows:

1. The Calendar Method.

2. The Basal Body Temperature Method (B.B.T.).
3. The Symptom - Thermal Method (S.T.).
4. Billings Ovulation Method (B.M.).

Golden (1999), viewed this method as methods, practices, beliefs, or customs handed down from generation to another, which existed before the advent of modern contraceptives. It is a method that helps the client to know the anatomy and physiology of her reproductive system. This enables her to know when she is expected to ovulate so that she will abstain from sex in order to avoid pregnancy. It will also help the woman to know her fertile period and make use of it.

The artificial methods are many. They can be sub-divided into two important groups.

- a) Contraceptives; and
- b) Abortifacients.

The word "Contraception" means "against conception". It has been defined as the intentional prevention of the fertilization of the human ovum by special devices, drugs and techniques. Basically, whatever is used to prevent pregnancy following sexual intercourse is called a contraceptive.

The contraceptive act in different ways as is clear from what follows:

1. Contraceptive pills or injections of hormonal steroids.
2. Sterilization.
3. Spermicidal.

Abortifacients, includes:

- 1) Silent Abortion.
- 2) The coil or loop.
- 3) The modern low dosage pill.
- 4) Direct abortions.

Objectives of Family Planning Education

The objectives of family planning education could be itemized as follows:

1. To encourage the building up to healthy and happy families.
2. To protect the health of mothers and children and reduce child mortality by spacing babies.

The Need for Family Planning Education

One may ask, why is it that, we need family planning? Are children not always welcomed and the greater the number, the better? Iwudo (2002), worried against the dangers of unbridled procreation observed that, if we study fully the new economic and social problems, we could advise ourselves to discard the old preference for many children and adopt family planning as a policy.

Furthermore, if people keep having big families, time will come when there would not be enough food to go round even if couples share. Any child born into a family needs love and affection. Sometimes, this is neglected when the children are too many and this practice may hamper the proper

development of the children. So, family planning education is needed especially by women who have had more than four children. It is a well-known fact that over fertility is not without its attendant risks and consequences.

Family Planning Education and Its Relevance

Family planning education could be said to be a sine qua non for a qualitative family. Family planning education will equip the couples with the knowledge on how to improve family well-being. Couples with fewer children are better able to provide them with enough food, clothing, housing and schooling.

Secondly, family planning education helps nations develop. In countries where women are having far fewer children than their mothers did, people's economic situations are improving faster. Thirdly, it helps in reducing couples' economic burdens and worries and enables them to participate in self-improvement activities.

Finally, family planning education helps the couples to enjoy relationships that exist between husband and wife without fear of unwanted pregnancies. Hence, it will help for promotion of good neighbourliness,

family joy, and lasting peace.

Christian Perspective on Family Planning Education

Most of the major religions in Nigeria do not have specific doctrine about family planning and for that, the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on family planning or their view will be discussed.

The church realizes that for some countries like India, Japan and China, there is a real problem of over-population. Secondly, the church realizes that for individual families, and most especially for women today, living in an urban or career oriented society, too many children may present an unbearable burden. The church recognizes therefore, that a vast social change, especially in relation to the family and the sexes, has taken place and that twenty years from now, one half of the earth's population will live in cities.

When the church therefore, speaks on this important question of birth control or family planning, it is worthwhile listening to it rather than to the individual voices of its members because it is God's own voice that speaks.

The Catholic Church teaches:

- 1) That parents alone have the right to determine the number of children in their families. They have a responsibility before, God, to do so as wisely as they can,
- 2) That neither state, church nor any other organization can take this right from them.
- 3) That God has provided perfectly adequate natural physiological structures to enable man and woman to regulate their fertility.
- 4) That it is never lawful to directly or indirectly induce an abortion.
- 5) That contraceptive sterilization is immoral.
- 6) That all artificial methods of birth control are immoral because they harm either the man, the woman, the child in the womb, the child at the breast or endanger human society.

It therefore, forbids Christians from using pills, the coil (I. U. D.), the condom, foams, the withdrawal, etc. All in all, the church is its wisdom, actively encourages research into the nature of man and the laws that govern his fertility.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The writers therefore, recommends that, parents should study their own patterns of fertility so that in a real relationship with God, they can plan and rear their families. It is for this reason that the church recommends the various methods of natural family.

Planning such as Billing Ovulation Method

These methods are based on the simple observance of nature in regards to human fertility. They do not interfere with the body in any way. They are not contraceptive or abortifacient. They teach how to have babies as well as how to avoid conception. They are based above all, on faith and trust in God.

Educational Implication of Family Planning

- 1) Parents should try as much as possible to realize the importance of family planning and the consequence of its neglect to the family at large.
- 2) Religious ministers and leaders should be involved in propagating the message of family planning to couples irrespective of their different denominations.
- 3) The government should try as much as possible to establish and equip family planning units in every locality and hospital.

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