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## **Influence of Nigerian Television Authority's (NTA) Health Watch Magazine Programme on Family Planning Choice among Couples In South East, Nigeria**

<sup>1</sup>Loveth Ebere Okoye, <sup>2</sup>Eugenia Chinweokwu Eneome, <sup>3</sup>Fatima Ijeoma Emetumah & <sup>4</sup>Oluchi Vera Anukam

<sup>1,2</sup> Department of Mass Communication, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Anambra State

<sup>3,4</sup> Department of Mass Communication, Federal Polytechnic Nekede, Owerri, Nigeria



**ORCID:**

<sup>1</sup> <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-8256-5335>

<sup>2</sup> <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-3633-4135>

<sup>3</sup> <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6178-7327>

<sup>4</sup> <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-9891-5990>

**\*Corresponding Author:** [mercyloveth2k@gmail.com](mailto:mercyloveth2k@gmail.com)

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### **Abstract**

This study appraised the influence of the NTA Health's Watch Magazine programme on family planning choice among couples in southeast Nigeria. The purpose of this study, which was grounded in the Diffusion of Innovation Theory (DOI), was to determine whether or not respondents were familiar with the NTA's health watch programme and whether or not the campaign had a significant impact on respondents' attitudes towards family planning. A total of 400 reproductive couples were selected at random from the population of 23,281,688 people in the five states in Nigeria's South East (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo) using quantitative survey approach. The researchers used questionnaire as the research instrument. Results revealed that there were significant correlations between the broadcast media campaign on family planning and the level of awareness of the family planning practices among the respondents; and that there was significant positive relationship between broadcast media campaigns and the practice of family planning among the respondents. It is therefore concluded that broadcast media health campaigns must be collaborated with engagement communications for full health impact. In line with the findings made in this study, it is recommended that mass media campaign for the health programmes should be reinforced and be complimented with other engagement communication paradigms for policy objectives to be achieved.

**Keywords:** Communicating, family, planning, choice, couples, reproductive



## Introduction

The importance of reproductive health communication among married couples cannot be overlooked, as it has been seen to impact family contraceptive use and family stability (World Health Organisation, WHO, 2016). According to the WHO (2016), communication has the ability to regulate fertility among couples, deliberate actions, and behaviours, including the agreement on the desired number of children. Since marital fertility involves the participation of the wife and husband who may differ in their reproductive goals (in terms of number and sex composition of children, the timing of having the children), successful planning and decision-making about family size and use of contraceptives require effective communication of both marital partners (Yeatman & Sennott, 2014).

The United Nations Children' Funds, UNICEF (2017) corroborates the foregoing and argues that since most contraceptive methods are developed for women, and family planning services are primarily provided to individual women, too, husbands' agreement for its success is imperative. UNICEF (2017) observes that family planning programmes, for several decades, have virtually ignored men, pointing out that it is obvious that husbands play a crucial role in fertility decision-making throughout the world. UNICEF (2018), while citing Maharaj & Cleland (2005) on male reproductive intentions found that inter-spousal communication, as reported by more than 3 000 couples, was significantly associated with having a smaller family size.

The United Nations Population Funds, UNFPA (2018) posits that since the 1990s, the family planning field has recognized the importance of couples' communication in the voluntary uptake of modern contraceptive methods, pointing out that several studies (Schwandt et al., 2021; Naja-Sharjabad, 2021; Shattuck, 2011) show a positive association between couples discussing their fertility intentions with joint decision making on whether or when to have children. WHO (2019) adds that in the last decade, evidence has emerged on the importance of ensuring interventions promoting healthy couples' communication, with a focus on improving the quality of those discussions. Accordingly, reproductive health communication among couples can increase the uptake of modern contraceptive use, as well as achieving inclusivity of women and men by removing barriers to their active engagement and decision making, recognizing the role of family planning in supporting more equitable health relations. WHO (2019) further adds that recently, there has been attention to power related to sexual decision making and healthy sexual relationships (e.g., consent, bodily autonomy, pleasure), with a need to "better support couples in building practical skills to increase intimacy and communication).

The United Nations Maternal Mortality Estimation Inter-Agency Group, UN-MMEIG (2019) reveals that access to modern contraceptive methods and reproductive autonomy are fundamental human rights, adding that individuals must be able to access contraception as their individual right. Involvement of the male partner should not prevent women from choosing contraception free from the influence of a male partner. Therefore, while promoting healthy couples' communication to improve reproductive health outcomes is a proven HIP, it is critical to ensure that "all couples and individuals have the basic right to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children.

Michau and Namy (2021) disclosed that a high level of awareness about contraception but a very low level of use has been established in some studies in Nigeria, adding that although the unmet need for modern contraceptives was still very high, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and western Asia, in Nigeria, the 2013 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) still found that only 15% of married women of reproductive age use contraceptives. While corroborating the foregoing statistics, The International Conference on Population and Development, ICPD, (2022), further states that this is lower



than the current Sub-Saharan Africa average of 17%. According to the ICPD (2022), further analysis of the total contraceptive prevalence rate indicates wide state variations, ranging from 0.6% in Kano to 48.3% in Lagos state and zonal variations ranging from 3.2% in the North East to 38.0% in the South West. According to the 2023 NDHS, Nigerian women have about one child more than the number they want. This implies that the total fertility rate of 5.5 children per woman is 15% higher than it will be if all unwanted births were avoided (WHO, 2024).

The philosophy behind child-spacing and family planning is for families/individuals to decide when to start having babies, how many to have, when to have them and when to stop. This philosophy is guided by the fact that pregnancy before the age of 18 years or after the age of 35 years puts the lives of the mother and her baby in danger of diseases and early death (UNICEF, 2018). Furthermore, it was recommended that a woman should wait for, at least 2 years before getting pregnant again, and that there is danger to the life of the mother and her unborn baby, after a woman has had four deliveries (UNICEF, 2018).

WHO (2020) reveals that when women above the age of 35 years get pregnant, the danger of pregnancy and childbirth are more, because women's body become weak and vulnerable to diseases after having many deliveries. UNICEF (2021, p. 59) gives a vivid description of the scenario as follows:

After more than four deliveries, the woman may have problems of anaemia (thin blood, or not enough blood), serious bleeding (haemorrhage) during childbirth and the womb may tear. These may lead to the death of the woman and her baby may be in danger of having health problems (small size at birth and dying in the womb).

In a related development, UNICEF (2021 p 59) posits that a woman should wait for at least 2 years before getting pregnant again, adding that:

More babies and other children in the family may die when their mothers do not wait for up to two years before getting pregnant again. This is because the mother will stop breastfeeding and giving proper care to the child born before the new one. This will make the child not to grow well. The mother's body, also, needs to rest for two years and be strong before having another pregnancy. This will help her to get back all that she lost during the last pregnancy and childbirth.

UNICEF (2021) asserts that Since family planning can stop many of these deaths and other problems (UNICEF, 2021), the Nigeria's herculean task of achieving a 93% reduction of Maternal Mortality (MM) in 2030 should put the campaign for family planning in the front burners of her health promotion. Thus, it becomes imperative that couples of reproductive age have to be sufficiently informed about the policy thrusts of family planning, their health benefits, and the available family planning choices. It also entails that the right attitudes be influenced in the couples, so that they will significantly adopt the health behavioural practices necessary for the expected change. These can be achieved through communication.

In pursuance of the role of communicating family planning, the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) has developed a magazine programme called "Health Watch", through which family health matters are discussed for the benefits of the viewers. Health watch deals with varied health related matters, which included Child Spacing/Family Planning, Exclusive breastfeeding, Immunization, and other essential family practices (Orji, 2022).

The widespread use of mass media in the society has sparked concern about their use in public health promotion, health literacy and health promotion. The reproductive health campaign and promotion such as the family planning choice among couples of reproductive age has been highly prioritized, with various health donor agencies leveraging on various media of communication to create wide awareness and



influence positive attitudes towards contraceptive use. However, the extent to which television is used to communicate family planning choice among couples of reproductive age, as well as how the contents of television broadcasts of family planning influence users; attitudes towards contraceptive use, remains unclear, necessitating an in-depth investigation. Despite the growing relevance of television programmes in communicating family planning choice among women of reproductive age, there is a knowledge gap regarding how contents' exposure influence attitudes towards contraceptive use.

It is against this background, therefore, that this study was set to investigate the influence of the television campaign on family planning choices among couples of reproductive age in the Southeastern, Nigeria.

The general objective of this study is to appraise the influence of the NTA's Health Watch Programme in communicating the family planning choice among couples in south eastern Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Ascertain if exposure to the health watch media campaign results to increased level of awareness of the family planning choices among the couples of reproductive age.
2. Evaluate the extent to which the influencing power of the health watch media campaigns has affected the attitudes of the respondents about family planning.
3. Determine the readiness of the target populace to carry out advocacy on family planning choices as a result of the health watch media campaign on subject.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study was underpinned on the Diffusion of Innovation Theory (DOI), primarily developed by Everett M. Rogers (McQuail, 2005), pertains to the numerous attempts to apply the mass media's power to causes related to scientific progress, public health, and education (World Bank Group, 2014). The concept of "diffusion of innovation" (DOI) was developed in the field of communication to describe the gradual but steady growth and dissemination (diffusion) of a particular idea, concept, product, or thought within a specific audience or social system. Success in this endeavour is measured by the degree to which the intended audience or population adopts the new concept, behaviour, or product as part of a larger social system. Adoption, in this context, is that the target audience does something differently than it has in the past, as defined by Greehaugh, et. al. (2014) (that is, acquires and performs a new behaviour or attitude). However, as the World Bank Group (2009) points out, the adopter's perception of the idea, concept, behaviour, or product as novel or innovative is crucial to its success. Rogers (1962) and Rogers and Shoemaker (1973) envisioned four stages (information, persuasion, choice or adoption, and confirmation) in their model of information spread (Greenhaugh et al, 2014). Diffusion occurs when individuals move through the steps of being aware of the need for innovation (via exposure to information and persuasion), making the choice to use (or reject) the innovation, trying out the entrepreneurship for the first time, and then using it routinely.

According to Rogers (1962), there are five types of adopters: the early adopters, the early majority, the late majority, and the laggards. For illustration purposes, consider the curve provided beneath. First, there are the thinkers, who are eager to test out new developments before anyone else. They are bold and open to novel concepts. As a result of their high risk tolerance, marketing to this group typically requires less effort.

Since the goal of the family planning intervention is to get couples to change their sexual behaviour by using a certain method of birth control, the diffusion of innovations theory is a good fit for this research.



## Method

This study adopted a survey research approach, which was considered appropriate for this investigation because the study's context required an in-depth examination of the characteristics of a certain population (couples of reproductive age) in order to anticipate a specific patterns of behaviour. The research focused on the states in southeastern Nigeria (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Imo and Enugu), with a study population of 23, 281, 688 people. The Taro Yameni's parametric test was used to calculate a sample size of 400 reproductive adults for the study. A multi-stage sampling strategy was adopted in selecting the samples for this study. Stratified sampling techniques was first applied to define the sample size from each of the five states of the south east. The identified clusters in states were General Hospital Umuahia (70), Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University Teaching Hospital Awka (102), Federal Medical Center Abakaliki (53), Parklane Teaching Hospital Enugu (80) and Federal Medical center Owerri (95). Thereafter, judgement sampling strategy was adopted for the study. Considering the target respondents for this study (couples of reproductive age), the use of any of the types of probability sampling strategy would certainly miss out a significant proportion of the respondents. The target respondents were special class of people who can only be selected purposively hence the justification for judgemental sampling.

## Findings

### Biographic Data of the Respondents

The tables below explain the biographic characteristics of the respondents. Out of the 400 copies of questionnaire distributed, a total of 386 was recovered. Our analysis was therefore based on the number of questionnaires returned.

**Table 1: Sex of Respondents**

| Sex          | Frequency  | Percentage |
|--------------|------------|------------|
| Male         | 189        | 49.2%      |
| Female       | 197        | 50.8%      |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>386</b> | <b>100</b> |

**Source:** Field Survey 2025

In the table above, the data revealed an almost even distribution of the respondents, according to their gender characteristics. However, the slight higher number of females is an indication that the women are easier persuaded to respond to issues that deal with reproductive health.

**Table 2: Age of Respondents**

| Age           | Frequency  | Percentage  |
|---------------|------------|-------------|
| 15 – 20 years | 45         | 11.7%       |
| 21 – 30 years | 145        | 37.5%       |
| 31 – 39 years | 196        | 50.8%       |
| <b>TOTAL</b>  | <b>386</b> | <b>100%</b> |

**Source:** Field Survey 2025

The data in table 2 above revealed that the respondents between 31 years and 39 years had the highest frequency (50.8%). The respondents under 21 years and 30 years had 37.5% frequency while respondents



within 15 years and 20 years had 11.7% frequency. The implication of this frequency distribution was that majority representing more than four fifths (88.3%) were the adult index of 18years which made them competent to be able to make decisions.

**Table .3: Educational Qualification of Respondents**

| Education Level        | Frequency  | Percentage  |
|------------------------|------------|-------------|
| FSLC                   | 5          | 1.3%        |
| SSCE                   | 85         | 22.1%       |
| ND/NCE                 | 114        | 29.4%       |
| HND/FIRST DEGREE       | 123        | 31.8%       |
| 2 <sup>ND</sup> DEGREE | 52         | 13.5%       |
| OTHERS (Ph.D)          | 7          | 1.9%        |
| <b>TOTAL</b>           | <b>386</b> | <b>100%</b> |

**Source:** Field Survey 2025

In the table above, the respondents with HND/First Degree had the highest frequency (31.8%). This shows that those with HND/First Degree were more in the study. The implication of the frequency of educational qualification of the respondents is that a significant proportion of the respondents was well-informed, and therefore can vividly understand and interpret the central messages on reproductive health programmes in the NTA

**Table 4: Occupation of Respondents**

| Occupation           | Frequency  | Percentage  |
|----------------------|------------|-------------|
| Student              | 20         | 2.1%        |
| Civil Servants       | 242        | 25.2%       |
| Traders              | 284        | 30%         |
| Artisans             | 306        | 32.2%       |
| Others (Politicians) | 97         | 10.2%       |
| <b>TOTAL</b>         | <b>386</b> | <b>100%</b> |

**Source:** Field Survey 2024

The data in the table above indicate almost an even distribution in the percentage frequency of respondents who were civil servants (25.5%) and traders (30%). However, artisans had the highest frequency (32%) among the respondents. This data indicated that a significant proportion of the respondents was engaged in meaningful ventures, and therefore will be interested in the subject matter of the study

### Thematic Data

In this section, the data relating to the central theme of the study are presented in simple frequency distribution tables and analysed afterwards.

**Table 5: Has health watch magazine programme sufficiently created requisite awareness on family planning?**

| Cluster of Respondents | Options and Frequencies |                 | Total      |
|------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|------------|
|                        | Yes                     | No              |            |
| Umuahia                | 56                      | 12              | 68         |
| COOUTH/Awka            | 86                      | 14              | 100        |
| FMC/Abakaliki          | 42                      | 8               | 50         |
| Park Lane/Enugu        | 66                      | 12              | 78         |
| FMC/Owerri             | 78                      | 12              | 90         |
| <b>TOTAL</b>           | <b>328 (85%)</b>        | <b>58 (15%)</b> | <b>386</b> |

**Source;** Field Survey 2025

The implication of the data on the table above is that Television is an efficacious medium for health communication.

**Table 6: Are you properly educated on the health benefits of family planning through the NTA programme campaign?**

| Cluster of Respondents | Options and Frequencies |              |                |                | Total      |
|------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|----------------|----------------|------------|
|                        | Yes                     | No           | To an Extent   | Can't Tell     |            |
| Umuahia                | 46                      | 0            | 20             | 2              | 68         |
| COOUTH/Awka            | 70                      | 2            | 24             | 4              | 100        |
| FMC/Abakaliki          | 30                      | 2            | 16             | 2              | 50         |
| Park Lane/Enugu        | 58                      | 0            | 18             | 2              | 78         |
| FMC/Owerri             | 62                      | 4            | 20             | 4              | 90         |
| <b>TOTAL</b>           | <b>266 (69%)</b>        | <b>8(2%)</b> | <b>98(25%)</b> | <b>14 (4%)</b> | <b>386</b> |

**Source;** Field Survey 2025

Data in table 6 above implies that television is a didactic medium, being that it is imbued with the quality of daring programmes theatrically developed and presented to the target audience. Programmes communicated through communication theatre and/or theatre for development are recalled easier than audio programmes.



**Table 7: What is your disposition to family planning practice as a result of the influencing powers of mass media campaign of the subject**

| Cluster of Respondents | Options and Frequencies |                |                  |               | Total      |
|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------|------------------|---------------|------------|
|                        | Positively              | Negatively     | Somehow positive | Can't Tell    |            |
| Umuahia                | 36                      | 6              | 24               | 2             | 68         |
| COOUTH/Awka            | 50                      | 10             | 36               | 4             | 100        |
| FMC/Abakaliki          | 30                      | 4              | 16               | 0             | 50         |
| Park Lane/Enugu        | 44                      | 14             | 18               | 2             | 78         |
| FMC/Owerri             | 48                      | 18             | 24               | 0             | 90         |
| <b>TOTAL</b>           | <b>208 (54%)</b>        | <b>52(13%)</b> | <b>118(31%)</b>  | <b>8 (2%)</b> | <b>386</b> |

**Source;** Field Survey 2025

The implication of the data in table 7 above is that the NTA magazine programme was effective,given the high number of respondents who were positively disposed to the message of the campaign.

**Table 8: Has NTA Health Watch Magazine Programme on Family Planning sufficiently influenced your readiness to carry out advocacy on the family planning alternatives**

| Cluster of Respondents | Options and Frequencies |                |                    |                | Total      |
|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------|--------------------|----------------|------------|
|                        | Well Influenced         | Not Influenced | Somehow Influenced | Can't Tell     |            |
| Umuahia                | 40                      | 0              | 26                 | 2              | 68         |
| COOUTH/Awka            | 64                      | 2              | 30                 | 4              | 100        |
| FMC/Abakaliki          | 30                      | 2              | 16                 | 2              | 50         |
| Park Lane/Enugu        | 50                      | 0              | 26                 | 2              | 78         |
| FMC/Owerri             | 52                      | 4              | 30                 | 4              | 90         |
| <b>TOTAL</b>           | <b>236 (61%)</b>        | <b>8(2%)</b>   | <b>128(33%)</b>    | <b>14 (4%)</b> | <b>386</b> |

**Source;** Field Survey 2025

This further implies that the family planning programme was highly effective given that respondents can practice it and still recommend that reproductive couples should buy into it.

## Discussions

Findings from this study revealed that the NTA Health Watch Magazine Programme has created sufficient awareness on family planning choice among the respondents. A total of 328 (85%) respondents affirmed the statement while 58 respondents (15%) did not. This finding aligns with the process of



Diffusion of Innovation theory which starts with generating sufficient awareness on any intervention. Again, this finding is in tandem with the study, *"ITV Radio Healthy Living Programme and the Promotion of Family Planning among Couples in Benin City,"* by Igbe-Arase (2023), which investigated the level of audience exposure to radio family planning programmes in Benin City, as well as examined the effectiveness of family planning programmes in meeting the information needs of married couples in family planning on the residents of Benin City. Findings from the study showed that the extent of exposure to ITV radio Healthy Living family programme among Benin City residents was high and that the effectiveness of ITV radio Healthy Living family planning programme in meeting the information needs of married couples in family planning was high, the attitude of Benin City residents towards family planning campaigns are positive and that ITV radio Healthy Living family planning programme influences married couples in Benin City to practice family planning.

Our second finding revealed that a significant proportion of the respondents was positively disposed to the campaign message of the NTA Health Watch Magazine programme. Out of the 386 respondents who participated in the survey, a total 208 respondents (54%) indicated positively disposed, while a total of 118 respondents (31% said they were somehow influenced. Again, this finding is in agreement with Igbe-Arase (2023), in a study, *"ITV Radio Healthy Living Programme and the Promotion of Family Planning among Couples in Benin City,"* which found out that the attitude of Benin City residents towards family planning campaigns are positive and that ITV radio Healthy Living family planning programme influences married couples in Benin City to practice family planning. Our second finding also aligns with Obeta, et al (2024), in a study, titled, *"Effects of family planning counselling and media messages on contraceptives use by Nigerian men."* Obeta, et. al (2024) sought to determine if the use of counselling and radio messages on family planning could enhance the acceptance of contraceptive usage among men in developing countries like Nigeria, and found out that radio messages on modern contraceptive use have positive and significant effects on men's acceptance of contraceptives.

Our third finding revealed that 61% of the respondents were ready to carry out advocacy on family planning choice as a result of the Health watch Magazine programme in the NTA. This finding is in alliance with the DOI theory which has the stages of innovation adoption as well as the adoption categories. The early adopters always assist in bringing the message close to the early majority and late majority adopters. Again, this finding is in tandem with Zelalem, et al, (2024), in paper, titled, *"Association of Effective Spousal Family Planning Communication with Couples' Modern Contraceptive Use in Harar, Eastern Ethiopia,"* which revealed that effective spousal family planning communication was significantly associated with current modern contraceptive use even after controlling for socio-economic and demographic variables.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Television programmes can be a highly effective tool for promoting family planning among reproductive couples, primarily by increasing awareness, changing attitudes, and stimulating spousal communication, which in turn leads to a higher likelihood of adopting contraceptive methods. Television is effective at raising general awareness and knowledge about family planning methods and their benefits, such as improved maternal and child health, gender equality, and poverty reduction. Again, beyond mere information dissemination, television programs, especially those in entertainment-education formats, can help shift social norms, challenge misconceptions, and foster more positive attitudes towards contraception, including encouraging discussion between spouses. Studies consistently show a significant positive relationship between exposure to family planning messages on television and the actual practice of family planning. Campaigns have successfully led to increases in new and continuing contraceptive users in various regions.



To maximize the influence of television programmes in communicating family planning to reproductive couples, recommendations focus on content development, targeted outreach, and integrated communication strategies. Ensure programmes disseminate relevant and detailed information, including the variety of contraceptive alternatives, their effectiveness, correct usage, and benefits like child spacing and healthy living. Utilize entertainment components, such as soap operas, dramas, and short films, to embed family planning messages. People are more likely to adopt behaviors if motivated by characters or role models they respect and relate to. Design content that directly addresses and debunks common myths, personal ideologies, and socio-cultural/religious misconceptions about family planning methods (e.g., that contraception is solely a woman's business, or concerns about promiscuity).

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