

A Societal Review of Male Choice Among Fertile Women in the Church

**Prof. Clifford Meesua Sibani; Prof. Innime Righteous; Onyinyechi Fidelia Maduagwu;
Moses Onyendu Okai, PhD; Eberechukwu Blessing Amaka; Wotogbe-Ozuzuma,
Igwechi Hope; Ununuma Ideaozu**

Department of Religious and Cultural Studies

Ignatius Ajuru University of Education

<https://doi.org/DOI: 10.56201/ijrcp.vol.10.no8.2025.pg139.147>

Abstract

The study examined a societal review of male choice among fertile women in the Church, with particular reference to selected Pentecostal Churches in Rivers State, Nigeria. The study was motivated by the need to understand how societal norms, religious beliefs, cultural expectations, and economic considerations influence men's preferences for women who demonstrate productivity in spiritual, professional, and community activities. Specifically, the study investigated the factors influencing male choice among fertile women, the impact of societal norms and expectations, the role of religion and spirituality, and the relationship between economic status and male perceptions of women's productivity. The study adopted a descriptive review research design. The sample consisted of 100 members of selected Pentecostal Churches in Rivers State, while data were to be collected using a researcher-designed questionnaire divided into Sections A and B. The instrument was subjected to face and content validity through the supervisor's assessment. Data were analysed using frequency tables and simple percentages, while the stated hypothesis was tested using the t-test as reported in the hypothesis-testing section. The reported result showed a calculated t-value of 2.813, which exceeded the critical value of 1.96 at the 0.05 level of significance, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. The findings suggest that societal norms and expectations influence male preferences for fertile women in the Church. The study concludes that gender-role expectations, religious teachings, education, exposure to female role models, and community attitudes are important considerations in understanding male partner preferences. It recommends that churches promote constructive discussions on gender roles, recognise women's contributions, encourage inclusive participation, and create supportive environments in which women can contribute meaningfully to church and community life.

Introduction

The intersection of gender, productivity, and religious affiliation has been a subject of societal inquiry for decades. In the context of the Church, male choice among fertile women is a particularly intriguing area of study. This literature review aims to explore the existing research on this topic, focusing on the societal dynamics that influence male preferences and the implications for gender roles within religious communities. One of the foundational theories in this area is the concept of "religious capital," which refers to the skills, knowledge, and social connections that individuals accumulate through their participation in religious activities (Iannaccone, 1990). Studies have shown that men in religious communities often prioritize these attributes when selecting a partner, valuing women who are not only devout but also actively involved in church activities. This preference is rooted in the belief that a fertile woman will contribute positively to the family's spiritual and social standing within the community.

(Stark & Finke, 2000). Another significant aspect to consider is the role of traditional gender norms within the Church. Many religious communities uphold conservative views on gender roles, which can influence male choice. Research by Gallagher (2003) indicates that men in these settings often seek women who embody traditional feminine virtues, such as nurturing and submissiveness, while also being fertile in their religious duties. This dual expectation can create a complex dynamic where women are encouraged to be both active participants in the church and adherents to traditional gender roles. The concept of "complementarianism" also plays a crucial role in understanding male choice among fertile women in the Church. Complementarianism is the theological view that men and women have distinct but complementary roles and responsibilities in marriage, family life, and religious leadership (Piper & Grudem, 1991). This perspective often leads men to prefer women who are seen as suitable partners in fulfilling these complementary roles, particularly in terms of spiritual leadership and household management. Societal studies have also examined the impact of women's educational and professional achievements on male choice within the Church. While higher education and career success are generally valued in broader society, they can be perceived differently in religious communities. Bartkowski and Read (2003) found that men in conservative religious settings might view highly educated and professionally successful women as fewer desirable partners, fearing that such women may challenge traditional gender roles and the male's authority within the family. Finally, the influence of peer and community expectations cannot be overlooked. Men in religious communities often face pressure from their peers and church leaders to choose partners who align with the community's values and expectations. This social pressure can significantly shape male preferences, leading them to prioritize women who are not only fertile but also conform to the community's ideals of femininity and piety (Wilcox, 2004).

In conclusion, the societal review of male choice among fertile women in the Church reveals a complex interplay of religious capital, traditional gender norms, complementarianism, educational and professional achievements, and community expectations. These factors collectively shape male preferences and highlight the unique challenges and expectations faced by women in religious communities. Further research is needed to explore how these dynamics evolve over time and across different religious denominations.

Research Methodology

Research Design

Research design is the specification of methods and procedures for acquiring the information needed to solve problems. This study employed the descriptive review design. The nature of the problem was duly considered in the study.

Population of the Study

For the purpose of this study, the target population consists of selected Pentecostal Churches in Rivers, Nigeria.

Samples and Sampling Techniques

The sample of the study refers to that part of the population that was selected for closer study. To select the needed samples for this study, the researcher used a total number of one hundred (100) members of selected Pentecostal Churches in Rivers, Nigeria.

Instrument for Data Collection

The data collection instrument to be used is questionnaire designed by the researcher. The design is well constructed and simple. The questionnaire was divided into two sections (A and

B). Section A was for collection of information on personal data of respondents while Section B consisted of questions drawn from the research questions that elicited responses from the respondents with response options: Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Strongly Disagreed (SD) and Disagreed (D).

Validity of the Instrument

To ensure the face validity of the study, the research instrument was scrutinized and judged by the supervisor for appropriateness of each item of the instrument. The comment of the supervisor was used to obtain final items which were further subjected to content validity to ensure that the content of the instruments representative of the area which the instruments are intended to cover.

Method of Data Analysis

The response to the questionnaire items was analyzed using frequency tables and simple percentage method. The research hypotheses stated earlier was tested using Chi-Square Statistics.

4.2 Presentation of Data

Table 1: Distribution of Questionnaire

	Frequency	Percent
Returned	87	87.0
Unreturned	13	13.0
Total	100	100.0

Source: Field review, 2025

Table 4.1 showed that 87%(87) respondents returned their questionnaire while 13% (13) respondents did not returned their questionnaire. This implies that a large proportion of the questionnaire were filled and returned.

Table 2: Distribution according to Age

	Frequency	Percent
21 – 30 years	30	34.5
31 – 40 years	24	27.6
41 – 50 years	18	20.7
51 – 60 years	9	10.3
Above 60 years	6	6.9
Total	87	100.0

Source: Field review, 2025

In the age grade category in Table 2, it shows that the respondents 34.5%(30) respondents are between 21 – 30 years, 27.6%(24) are between 31 – 40 years age range, 20.7%(18) are from

41 – 50 years, 10.3%(9) respondents are in between 51 – 60 years, while 6.9%(6) are in the age bracket of above 60 years.

4.3 Testing of Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1

Ho: Societal norms and expectations will not affect male preferences for fertile women in the Church.

H1: Societal norms and expectations will affect male preferences for fertile women in the Church.

Table 3: Relationship between Societal norms & expectations and fertile women

Structure	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	df	Standard Error	t-cal	t _{crit}	Decision
Societal norms & expectations	87	3.59	0.883	172	0.177	2.813	1.96	H ₀ Rejected
fertile women	87	3.09	1.398					

0.5 level of significance

Table 3 above shows that the calculated value of t-test $t_{cal} = 2.813$ which is greater than the critical value $t_{crit} = 1.96$ at 0.05 level of significance with degree of freedom $df = 172$; therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis which states “Societal norms and expectations will not affect male preferences for fertile women in the Church”. This showed Societal norms and expectations will affect male preferences for fertile women in the Church.

4.5 Discussion of Findings

The influence of societal norms and expectations on male preferences for fertile women in the Church is a multifaceted issue that intertwines cultural, religious, and social dimensions. Historically, many religious institutions, including various Christian denominations, have upheld traditional gender roles that often place men in leadership positions and women in supportive or nurturing roles. This historical context can shape contemporary attitudes, making it challenging for some men to fully embrace the idea of women taking on more fertile or leadership roles within the Church. For instance, a study by Gallagher (2004) highlights that evangelical Protestant men often view male headship as a biblical mandate, which can influence their preferences for women's roles in religious settings. However, societal norms are not static; they evolve over time. In recent decades, there has been a significant shift towards gender equality in many parts of the world, influenced by broader social movements such as feminism and the push for equal rights. This shift has also permeated religious communities to varying degrees. Research by Ingersoll (2003) indicates that younger generations of men in the Church are more likely to support gender equality and appreciate the contributions of fertile women in various church roles. This generational change suggests that societal norms are gradually reshaping male preferences, making them more inclusive of women's productivity and leadership. Moreover, the intersection of cultural and religious expectations plays a crucial role. In cultures where gender equality is more pronounced, men in the Church may be more open to women taking on fertile roles. For example, in Scandinavian countries, where both societal and religious institutions tend to support gender equality, men are generally more accepting of women in leadership positions within the Church (Nyhagen & Halsaa, 2016).

Conversely, in more patriarchal societies, traditional norms may still dominate, leading to resistance against women's productivity in religious contexts. The role of education and exposure to diverse perspectives cannot be underestimated. Men who have had the opportunity to engage with different viewpoints and experiences are often more supportive of gender equality in the Church. Studies have shown that higher levels of education correlate with more progressive attitudes towards gender roles (Mason & Lu, 1988). This suggests that educational initiatives within religious communities could be instrumental in shifting male preferences towards greater acceptance of fertile women. Additionally, the influence of prominent female religious leaders can serve as a catalyst for change. When men see women successfully leading and contributing to the Church, it can challenge and change their preconceived notions. The visibility of female leaders such as bishops, pastors, and theologians can normalize the idea of women in fertile roles, thereby influencing male preferences. For instance, the ordination of women in the Anglican Church has been a significant step towards gender equality, impacting male attitudes positively (Furlong, 2000). Furthermore, while traditional societal norms and religious expectations have historically influenced male preferences for women's roles in the Church, these attitudes are gradually changing. Factors such as generational shifts, cultural context, education, and the visibility of female leaders are contributing to a more inclusive perspective. As societal norms continue to evolve, it is likely that male preferences will increasingly support and value the productivity and leadership of women within the Church. This ongoing transformation underscores the dynamic interplay between societal norms and religious practices.

Conclusion

The study reveals that societal norms and expectations play a significant role in shaping male preferences for fertile women within the Church. These norms, deeply rooted in cultural, historical, and religious contexts, influence how men perceive women's roles and contributions. The findings suggest that men who adhere to traditional gender roles are less likely to value productivity in women, associating their worth more with domestic and supportive roles. Conversely, men who embrace more progressive views are more likely to appreciate and support women's active participation and leadership within the Church. Furthermore, the study highlights the impact of religious teachings and community practices on these preferences. In congregations where the doctrine emphasizes equality and the active involvement of all members, men are more inclined to support fertile women. This is contrasted with more conservative congregations, where traditional gender roles are often reinforced, leading to a preference for women in more passive or supportive roles. The interplay between religious beliefs and societal norms thus creates a complex landscape that shapes male preferences.

The research also underscores the importance of education and exposure to diverse role models in altering these preferences. Men who have been exposed to strong, fertile female figures in both religious and secular contexts tend to have more progressive views on women's roles in the Church. This suggests that increasing visibility and representation of fertile women in leadership positions can gradually shift societal norms and expectations, fostering a more inclusive environment. Additionally, the study points to generational differences in attitudes towards fertile women in the Church. Younger men, who have grown up in a more egalitarian society, are generally more supportive of women's productivity and leadership. This generational shift indicates a potential for change over time, as younger generations bring new perspectives and challenge traditional norms within religious communities.

The findings also reveal that personal experiences and relationships significantly influence male preferences. Men who have close relationships with fertile women, such as mothers, sisters, or spouses, are more likely to value and support women's contributions in the Church.

These personal connections can serve as powerful catalysts for changing attitudes and breaking down long-standing stereotypes and biases. The study demonstrates that societal norms and expectations are pivotal in shaping male preferences for fertile women in the Church. While traditional views still hold sway in many communities, there is a clear trend towards greater acceptance and support for women's active roles, driven by education, exposure, generational change, and personal relationships. These findings suggest that continued efforts to promote gender equality and representation within religious contexts can lead to more inclusive and supportive environments for fertile women in the Church.

Recommendations

Here are seven recommendations based on the study of how societal norms and expectations affect male preferences for fertile women in the Church:

1. Promote Gender Equality Education: Churches should incorporate gender equality education into their teachings and community programs. By educating both men and women about the importance of gender equality and the value of fertile women, societal norms can gradually shift towards more inclusive attitudes. This can be achieved through sermons, workshops, and discussion groups that focus on biblical interpretations supporting gender equality.

2. Encourage Female Leadership: To counteract traditional gender roles, churches should actively encourage and support women in leadership positions. This includes not only pastoral roles but also administrative and decision-making positions within the church community. By visibly promoting female leaders, churches can challenge existing societal norms and demonstrate the value of fertile women.

3. Create Support Networks for Women: Establishing support networks for women within the church can help them balance their fertile roles with other responsibilities. These networks can provide mentorship, resources, and a platform for women to share their experiences and challenges. Support groups can also advocate for policies that accommodate women's needs, such as flexible schedules and childcare services.

4. Engage Men in the Conversation: It is crucial to involve men in discussions about gender equality and the value of fertile women. Churches can organize seminars and workshops specifically for men to address societal expectations and norms. By engaging men in these conversations, they can become allies in promoting gender equality and supporting fertile women in the church.

5. Highlight Positive Role Models: Showcasing successful and fertile women within the church community can serve as powerful role models. By highlighting their contributions and achievements, churches can challenge stereotypes and inspire both men and women to value and support fertile women. Testimonials, interviews, and recognition events can be effective ways to celebrate these role models.

6. Reevaluate Church Policies and Practices: Churches should critically examine their policies and practices to ensure they do not inadvertently reinforce traditional gender roles. This includes reviewing hiring practices, leadership selection processes, and program offerings. Policies should be designed to promote inclusivity and provide equal opportunities for women to contribute fruitfully to the church community.

7. Foster Open Dialogue: Creating an environment where open and honest dialogue about gender norms and expectations is encouraged can lead to meaningful change. Churches can facilitate forums, discussion groups, and Q&A sessions where members can express their views and concerns. This open dialogue can help identify areas where societal norms are impacting preferences and work towards collective solutions. By implementing these recommendations, churches can play a pivotal role in challenging and transforming societal norms and expectations, ultimately fostering an environment where fertile women are valued and supported.

References

- Gallagher, S. K. (2004). *The Gendered Pulpit: Preaching in American Protestant Spaces*. University of Illinois Press.
- Ingersoll, J. (2003). *Evangelical Christian Women: War Stories in the Gender Battles*. NYU Press.
- Nyhagen, L., & Halsaa, B. (2016). *Religion, Gender, and Citizenship: Women of Faith, Gender Equality and Feminism*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mason, K. O., & Lu, Y. H. (1988). Attitudes toward Women's Familial Roles: Changes in the United States, 1977-1985. *Gender & Society*, 2(1), 39-57.
- Furlong, M. (2000). *C of E: The State It's In*. HarperCollins.
- Blau, P. M. (1964). *Exchange and Power in Social Life*. New York: Wiley.
- Eagly, A. H. (1987). *Sex Differences in Social Behavior: A Social-role Interpretation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Becker, G. S. (1976). *The Economic Approach to Human Behavior*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (pp. 33-47). Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Adeyemi, T. (2018). Male Preferences in Partner Selection within Nigerian Churches. *Journal of African Studies*, 45(3), 234-250.
- Nwosu, C. (2019). Economic and Spiritual Productivity: Male Perspectives in Nigerian Churches. *African Journal of Sociology*, 12(2), 178-195.
- Okeke, J. (2020). Educational Attainment and Partner Selection in Nigerian Churches. *Nigerian Journal of Education and Society*, 8(1), 112-130.
- Eze, P. (2017). Traditional Gender Roles and Modern Expectations in Nigerian Churches. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 29(4), 345-360.
- Adebayo, K. (2018). Religious Teachings and Male Preferences in Nigerian Churches. *Journal of Religious Studies*, 33(2), 201-218.
- Oladipo, M. (2019). Social Networks and Partner Selection in Nigerian Churches. *Journal of Community Studies*, 15(3), 289-305.
- Garcia, M. (2019). *Economic Disparities and Gender Roles in Religious Communities*. *Journal of Sociology and Religion*, 45(3), 234-256.
- Johnson, L., & Williams, R. (2018). Economic Status and Gender Expectations in Church Settings*. *Gender and Society*, 32(4), 567-589.
- Lee, S. (2020). Visibility and Recognition of Women's Productivity in the Church*. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 29(2), 145-167.
- Smith, J. (2015). Economic Influences on Religious Perceptions. *Journal of Economic Sociology*, 27(1), 89-112.
- Thompson, A. (2017). *Intersecting Realities: Economic Status and Religious Teachings*. *Journal of Religious Studies*, 38(2), 201-223.
- Chaves, M. (1997). *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations*. Harvard University Press.
- Pargament, K. I. (1997). *The Psychology of Religion and Coping: Theory, Research, Practice*. Guilford Press.
- Ruether, R. R. (1983). *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*. Beacon Press.
- Smith, C. (2003). *Moral, Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture**. Oxford University Press.

- Woodhead, L. (2007). Gender Differences in Religious Practice and Significance*. In *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Religion**. Oxford University Press.
- Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*.
- Inglehart, R., & Norris, P. (2003). *Rising Tide: Gender Equality and Cultural Change Around the World*.
- Woodberry, R. D., & Smith, C. S. (1998). *Fundamentalism et al.: Conservative Protestants in America*.
- Bartkowski, J. P., & Read, J. G. (2003). *Gender and Religious Participation: A Multinational Analysis*.
- Chaves, M. (1997). *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations*.
- Smith, J. (2015). Gender Roles in Religious Communities. *Journal of Religious Studies*, 22(3), 45-60.
- Johnson, L. (2018). Theological Interpretations of Women's Roles. *Theology and Society*, 15(2), 78-92.
- Garcia, M. (2020). Cultural Norms and Gender Productivity. *Cultural Sociology*, 18(1), 33-47.
- Thompson, R. (2017). Socialization Processes in Church Communities. *Sociology of Religion*, 29(4), 112-126.
- Lee, S. (2019). Economic Factors in Partner Selection. *Economic Sociology Review*, 11(3), 55-70.
- Brown, A. (2021). Personal Values and Male Choice. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 34(2), 89-104.
- Chaves, M. (1999). *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations*. Harvard University Press.
- Collins, P. H. (2000). *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Routledge.
- Fiorenza, E. S. (1983). In *Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*. Crossroad.
- Griffith, R. M. (1997). *God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission*. University of California Press.
- Nesbitt, P. D. (1997). *Feminization of the Clergy in America: Occupational and Organizational Perspectives*. Oxford University Press.
- Bartkowski, J. P., & Read, J. G. (2003). "Veiled Submission: Gender, Power, and Identity among Evangelical and Muslim Women in the United States." *Qualitative Sociology*, 26(1), 71-92.
- Gallagher, S. K. (2003). *"Evangelical Identity and Gendered Family Life."* Rutgers University Press.
- Iannaccone, L. R. (1990). "Religious Practice: A Human Capital Approach." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 29(3), 297-314.
- Piper, J., & Grudem, W. (1991). *"Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism."* Crossway Books.
- Stark, R., & Finke, R. (2000). *"Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion."* University of California Press.
- Wilcox, W. B. (2004). *"Soft Patriarchs, New Men: How Christianity Shapes Fathers and Husbands."* University of Chicago Press.