

## Correlates of Family Cohesion Among Rural Dwellers in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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### Abstract

*The study ascertained the correlates of family cohesion among rural dwellers in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Data obtained from 150 rural dwellers using a multi-stage sampling procedure, were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Correlation analysis. The study revealed farming as the primary occupation of 63.7% of the respondents and their average household size comprised seven persons; most (94.8%) of the respondents were functionally literate and their average age is 48 years. Result also revealed that a high level of family cohesion existed among 89.0% of the respondents and that the age of household heads; educational status of household heads; and the respondents' household sizes were significant correlates of family cohesion. It is recommended that enlightenment campaigns be organised by social workers, religious leaders, Non-Governmental Agencies and other development agents involved on the need for individuals to be physically and emotionally matured before going into marriages in the rural areas since the age of household heads in the study area significantly correlates with family cohesion.*

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### Introduction

Universally, family is a fundamental unit in all human societies (Esere, Yusuf and Omotosho, 2011) and is considered as a means for proper functioning of the society (Abbas, Ali, Mehdi, Taiebeh and Reza, 2013). Since time immemorial, family has been a unifying force of the society and the most important institution in which future generations are raised, norms and values transferred and where informal support and care are exchanged (Dykstra, Liefbroer, Kalminjn, Knin and Mulder, 2006). As a socio-biological institution, it is within this unit that basic qualities such as love, forgiveness, kindness, respect and sacrificial spirits are acquired. Most times, families are the first and last source of support for individuals (Fields, 2006).

As the smallest unit of the society, families serve several important functions such as family formation and membership, economic support, nurturance, socialization and protection of vulnerable members (Patterson, 2006). According to Ekong (2010), family is the sole agency for perpetuation of life among rural dwellers. The Centre for Social Justice, (2010) report that individuals within the family environment obtain physical, emotional, material and psychological development from each other. The report also state that individuals learn from each other unconditional love, understand right and wrong, gain empathy, respect and self-regulation which enable positive relations in school, work place and the society at large.

In rural areas, where about two-third of the families are actively engaged in agricultural activities as their source of livelihood (Adepoju and Adejare, 2013), family members form the first and basic work force. Families in rural areas do not just exist as a reproductive and child rearing unit but also as an economic unit where members of the family

tills the soil, plants, harvest crops and carries out cooperatively other necessary farm function (Mishra, 2009). A united family enhances increase agricultural productivity than a disunited family hence the need for family cohesion among rural dwellers. Family cohesion is the level of emotional bonding or togetherness and commitment members of the family has for each other ((Annunziata, Hogue, Faw, and Liddle, 2006; Black and Lobo, 2008; Gonzales, Millsap, Gottschall, Wong and Kim, 2012)). It is a necessity among people living in the rural areas due to the fact that most of these farm families operates at a small scale or subsistence level and cannot afford paid labour and as such utilizes family members as the ready source of labour (Ironkwe, Ekwe, Okoye and Chukwu (2009).

However, family life have undergone changes during the past decades globally (Musau, Kisor and Otor, 2015). Many families in rural areas have been and are still at war with themselves simply because of their failure to arrest, manage or restore conflicting issues between members of the family (Okonkwo, 2017). According to George and Ukpung (2013), lots of families can best be described as neighbours as they merely live under the same roof without familial interpersonal interaction. Many families have faced increase trauma and challenges over the years which if not addressed will continue to negatively affect its functions for individual and for the community (Akor, 2013).

Families in Nigeria, according to Dada and Idowu (2016), are also plaque with numerous challenges. National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria (2018) reported that from 2010 to 2017, 49% of households in Nigeria experienced at least one event of conflict and violence against family members. In the South-South region in particular of which Akwa Ibom State is inclusive, the report also stated that about 22% of households had incidence of conflict and disharmony in the family from 2010 to 2017. According to Adigeb and Mbua, (2015), most families faces diverse issues of psychological distress, lack of finance to care for children, communication gap between parent and children, high rates of divorce, increase marital conflict, escalating cost of welfare programmes, drug abuse, antisocial behaviour of the young ones and emotional problems which result in depression and instability within households.

The crisis in the family has the capacity to disrupt the very foundation of the society and their values make it imperative for family cohesion to be advocated. Family values must be upheld and cohesion encouraged to save the family from imminent collapse. Family cohesion (the emotional bonding that binds family together) helps families to perform their duties and functions properly and balanced (Jackson, 2010). Cohesiveness in the family breeds an atmosphere of healthy family environment characterized by members comfortably expressing their feelings, showing supportiveness, relying on one another and exhibiting low interpersonal conflict (Voss and Massatti, 2008). Families with high cohesion enable members to contribute meaningfully to their own development and prosperity as well as the betterment of the society. It worthy to note that families exhibiting some form of open annoyance does not necessarily mean that they are not cohesive. If a conflicting situation exhibited is not intense, ongoing and destructive (involving physical abuse, divorce and other extreme cases) such family cannot be considered as not being cohesive because according to Okonkwo (2017), disagreement and other conflicting situation is a regular phenomenon in family life and cannot be avoided. Managing such situation well can still makes the family to be cohesive. Nevertheless, there is a dearth of information on family cohesion among rural dwellers families in Akwa Ibom State. This research aims to fill the research gap by ascertaining the correlates of family cohesion of rural dwellers in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The specific objectives include:

1. Description of the socioeconomic characteristics of the rural dwellers in Akwa Ibom State.
2. Determination of the level of family cohesion of the respondents.
3. Determination of the socioeconomic correlates of family cohesion of the respondents.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Akwa Ibom State. The State, located in the South-South geopolitical and South-Eastern ecological zones of Nigeria, lies between latitudes 4°31" and 5°31" North and longitudes 7°35" and 8°25" East. The estimated total area of the State is 7,245,935km<sup>2</sup> and her estimated population is 3,920,208 (National Population Commission, 2006). Akwa Ibom State shares borders with Cross River State to the East, Abia State to the North and Rivers State to the West. A multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select the respondents for the study. The first stage involved the simple random selection of three (Abak, Etinan and Eket) out of the six Agricultural Development Project (ADP) zones in Akwa Ibom State; the second stage involved the purposive selection of fifty villages from rural areas in each of the three selected ADP zones. The purposive sampling procedure employed at the second stage ensured that only villages considered rural were selected for the study. Furthermore, a person from each of the selected villages was randomly selected making it a total sample of 150.

Frequency counts and percentages were used to analyze the socioeconomic characteristics of rural dwellers in Akwa Ibom State. The level of family cohesion of the respondents was ascertained using summated scores from the 42-item Family Cohesion Scale (FCS) adapted from Family Adaptation and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES IV) package (Olson, 2011). The midpoint of the range of summated scores (105) served as a cut-off point between low and high level of family cohesion. The Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) analysis was used to determine the socioeconomic correlates of the respondents' family cohesion. The correlation coefficient, *r*, is given as:

$$r = \frac{n\sum XY - \sum X \sum Y}{\sqrt{[n\sum X^2 - (\sum X)^2][n\sum Y^2 - (\sum Y)^2]}}$$

Where,

*n* = number of paired values

*x* = socio-economics variables

*y* = Family cohesion scores.

## Results and Discussion

**Socioeconomic characteristics of the rural dwellers in Akwa Ibom State:** The socioeconomic characteristics of rural dwellers in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria are shown in Table 1. Data from the Table reveals that majority of the rural dwellers (70.0%) were males which agree with the report of National Bureau of Statistics (2018) that there are more males of active production age than females in Nigeria. The mean age of the respondents is 45 years which is almost synonymous with Okoro, Akinbile and Oni (2015) who reported that the mean age of rural dwellers in Akwa Ibom State was 43.99 years. Majority of the respondents (78.7%) are married and 95.0% had formal education. The findings reveals high literacy level of rural dwellers in Akwa Ibom State corroborating Okon, Agom, Ukpe and Amusa (2016) who observed that majority of the rural dwellers in Akwa Ibom State had formal education. Asa and Archibong (2016) also reported a high level of literacy among rural dwellers in Akwa Ibom State. Farming constituted 63.7% of the respondents' primary occupation followed by trading (24.0%) and salaried job (8.7%). The findings corroborate Nkpoyen and Amusa (2019) who reported that majority of the rural dwellers had farming as their primary occupation. Asa (2008) also reported that farming is the livelihood activities most rural dwellers in Akwa Ibom State engage in. Majority of the rural dwellers practice Christianity which is in tandem with Anele (2013) and Okoro *et al*, (2015) who averred that the predominant religion of rural dwellers in Akwa Ibom State is Christianity. The average household size comprised of seven persons while the average monthly income of the respondents was ₦25,743 which is relatively low and agrees with Asa and Solomon (2010) who reported a low level of income among rural dwellers in Akwa Ibom State. Most (64.0%) of the respondents were household heads; their average age

was 48 years and most of them had formal education. The result is in consistent with Etuk and Odebode (2016) who asserted that majority of the household heads in rural areas of Akwa Ibom State had formal education.

**Table 1: Socioeconomic characteristics of rural dwellers in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria**

Characteristics	Frequency (N=150)	Percentage	Mean
<b>Sex</b>			
Males	105	70.0	
Females	45	30.0	
<b>Age (Years)</b>			
Less than 30	14	9.3	45
30 – 40	50	33.3	
41 – 50	46	30.7	
51 – 60	21	14.0	
Greater than 60	19	12.7	
<b>Marital status</b>			
Single	30	20.0	
Married	113	75.3	
Divorced/separated	2	1.3	
Widowed	5	3.3	
<b>Educational Status</b>			
No formal education	7	4.7	
Primary education	56	37.3	
Secondary education	74	49.3	
Tertiary education	13	8.7	
<b>Primary occupation</b>			
Farming	101	67.3	
Trading	36	24.0	
Salaried (Government & Private)	13	8.7	
<b>Religion</b>			
Christianity	144	96.0	
Non-Christianity	6	4.0	
<b>Monthly income (₦)</b>			
1001 – 20,000	77	51.3	25,743
20,001 – 40, 000	56	37.3	
40,001 – 60,000	11	7.3	
60,001 – 80,000	6	4.0	
<b>Household size</b>			
1 – 5 person(s)	61	40.7	7
6 - 10 persons	83	55.3	
11 – 15 persons	6	4.0	
<b>Household headship</b>			
Yes	96	64.0	
No	54	36.0	
<b>Age class of household heads (Years)</b>			
Less than 30	4	4.2	48
30 – 40	31	32.3	
41 – 50	31	32.3	
51 – 60	15	15.6	
Greater than 60	15	15.6	

### Educational status of household heads

No formal education	5	5.2
Primary education	44	45.8
Secondary education	38	39.6
Tertiary education	9	9.4

Source: Field Survey, 2019

**Level of family cohesion of rural dwellers in Akwa Ibom State:** The level of family cohesion of the respondents was ascertained using information from the 42-item Family Cohesion Scale (FCS) adapted from Family Adaptation and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES IV) package. The range of summated scores of the family cohesion scores (FCS) is shown in Table 2. In the Table, 89.0% had high level of family cohesion based on the family cohesion scores categorization while 11.0% of the respondents had low level of family cohesion. The findings show that majority of the rural dwellers had high family cohesion thereby corroborating Nkan (2019) who reported a high level of family cohesion in Akwa Ibom State. The high level of family cohesion in the family of the respondents ascertained in the study suggest some form of togetherness, commitment and support shown and experienced by family members. This also shows that members of the family live in unity, support and spent time with each other. Additionally, extremely important of family in Akwa Ibom State enhances their belief in strong family system which brings about strong family bond thereby enhancing strong societal norms (Nkan, 2019). Also high cohesion in family does not necessarily mean absence of disagreement and quarrel but if does not result in casualty and separation and can be managed and settled amicably, one can dismiss such occurrence and still consider such family to be cohesive.

**Table 2: Distribution of the respondents based on the level of family cohesion.**

Level of family Cohesion	Family Cohesion Scale (FSC) Score	Frequency	Percentage
Low	<105	16	11.0
High	≥105	134	89.0
<b>Total</b>		<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field survey, 2019

**Socioeconomic correlates of family cohesion of rural dwellers:** The Pearson's product moment correlation analysis result in Table 3 shows that a significant relationship exists between the age of household heads and the family cohesion at 10% level ( $r=0.219$ ,  $p<0.10$ ). The correlation coefficient is positive implying that a direct relationship between the two variables showing that the higher the age of the head of household, the higher the family cohesion. The finding is in consonance with Sari and Puspitawati (2017) who averred that the age of household heads is associated with the family cohesion. Table 3 also shows that there is a significant different relationship between the educational status of households heads and family cohesion at 5% level ( $r=0.316$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). The implication is that the higher the educational status of household heads, the higher the level of family cohesion. The result corroborates Zheng and Penning (1997) who reported that the higher the educational status of household heads, the higher the level of the harmonious relationship in the family. Data in Table 3 show that at 0.10 significant level, an indirect relationship exists between household size and family cohesion ( $r= -0.427$ ,  $p<0.10$ ). This implies that as household sizes of the respondents increase, their family cohesion decreases. From the result in Table 3, no significant relationship exists between household income and family cohesion of the respondents

( $r=0.025$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). This implies that household income does not necessarily associate with the cohesiveness of the family.

From Table 3, the age of the household heads had a positive relationship with the family cohesion of the respondents suggesting that having a mature and productive household heads indicate that they are able to manage their households in such a way that enhances family cohesion. Mature household heads always express readiness to bear risks and cater for their household's wellbeing (Etuk and Odebode, 2016). The educational status of the household heads being positively correlated with the family cohesion of the respondents could be as a result of the fact that majority of the household heads obtained one form of formal education or the other which exposes them to information that help in enhancing the family cohesion and wellbeing of their family. Education of household heads according to Babatunde, Omotesho, Olurunsanya and Owokoki (2008) has positive influence on the wellbeing and cohesion of rural families in Nigeria.

Table 3 also revealed that the household size is indirectly related to the family cohesion of the respondents. This portrays that large household size result in low family cohesion. Although large household size implies sufficient supply of household labour for livelihood activities like farming (Ironkwe, Ekwe, Okoye and Chukwu (2009), but large household size could mean high dependency on households resources resulting in a negative effect on the wellbeing of the household which could be due to inability of the household head to comfortably care for their needs.

**Table 3: Correlation analysis result showing the socioeconomic correlates of family cohesion of the respondents**

Socioeconomic variables		Family Cohesion
Age of household heads	Pearson correlation	0.219*
	Sig (2-tailed)	0.096
	N	150
Educational status of household Heads	Pearson correlation	0.316**
	Sig (2-tailed)	0.045
	N	150
Household income	Pearson correlation	0.025
	Sig (2-tailed)	0.764
	N	150
Household size	Pearson correlation	-0.427*
	Sig (2-tailed)	0.084
	N	150

Note: \*\* and \* = Correlation is significant at 0.05 and 0.10 levels (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Version 22.0 computer printout, 2019

#### Conclusion and Recommendation

It can be concluded, from the study, that majority of the rural dwellers in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria had a high level of family cohesion in their households; and that the ages of household heads as well as their educational status and household sizes of rural dwellers in the study area are significant socioeconomic correlates family cohesion in rural areas of Akwa

Ibom State. Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that an enlightenment campaign should be organized by social workers, religious leaders and other development agents involved in rural development in the rural areas on the need for individuals to be physically and emotionally matured before going into marriage since the ages of the household heads was significantly related to family cohesion in the study area. Also, there is need for Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Governmental agencies to sensitize rural dwellers on the need for population control/reduced household sizes since an inverse relationship existed between household sizes and family cohesion in the study area.

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