

Curbing The Menace of Paternity Fraud in Ondo State

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Abstract- *Paternity fraud has emerged as a critical social and legal issue in Nigeria, especially in Ondo State, where Yoruba traditions strongly value paternal lineage and inheritance. This study investigates the causes, effects, and preventive strategies related to paternity fraud. Guided by three research questions, the study employed a descriptive survey design, administering 200 questionnaires, with 178 valid responses (89% retrieval rate). Findings revealed that marital infidelity, secrecy, economic dependency, cultural pressures, weak legal structures, and fear of stigma are the primary causes of paternity fraud. The major effects include emotional trauma, family breakdown, financial exploitation, legal disputes, and social stigma. Respondents also identified challenges such as the high cost of DNA testing, inadequate legal support, and delays in court proceedings. To curb the menace, proposed solutions include subsidized DNA testing, stronger legal frameworks, public awareness campaigns, counseling services, and economic empowerment of women. The study emphasizes collaboration between government and communities through the establishment of DNA centers, involvement of traditional leaders, and cultural education. It concludes that paternity fraud is a multifaceted issue requiring legal, cultural, psychological, and economic interventions to preserve family stability, protect children, and foster social harmony in Ondo State and beyond.*

Keywords: Paternity fraud, Ondo State, DNA Testing, Family Breakdown, Emotional Trauma, Legal Reforms, Cultural Traditions, Economic Dependency, Social Stigma, Counseling Services.

I. INTRODUCTION

Paternity fraud has become a growing concern in Nigeria, particularly in the South West region, where cultural values surrounding family lineage intersect with modern realities of DNA testing and marital trust. Scholars have increasingly examined this phenomenon in recent years, highlighting its psychological, legal, and societal consequences. Efut (2021) emphasizes that paternity fraud undermines the sanctity of family structures and erodes trust between spouses, often leading to marital breakdowns.

Chiagoziem (2021) argues that the prevalence of fraudulent claims of fatherhood is exacerbated by weak legal frameworks and limited access to affordable DNA testing. Orhe, Ekpebe, Ebereghwa, and Anyanwu (2023) provide case studies illustrating the emotional trauma fathers experience upon discovering that children they nurtured are not biologically theirs.

In the South West, where Yoruba cultural traditions place strong emphasis on paternal lineage, the implications of paternity fraud are particularly severe. Adeyemi (2022) notes that lineage and inheritance rights are deeply tied to paternal identity, making fraudulent claims disruptive not only to families but also to extended kinship networks. Adebayo (2022) further highlights that disputes arising from paternity fraud often spill into community conflicts, thereby destabilizing social harmony. Legal scholars such as Okonkwo (2023) and Oladipo (2023) stress that Nigeria's legal system has yet to fully adapt to the challenges posed by modern DNA technology. While courts increasingly accept DNA evidence, procedural delays and prohibitive costs hinder widespread adoption. In addition, Eze (2021) points out that many men are reluctant to pursue legal remedies due to stigma and fear of public embarrassment.

From a psychological perspective, Adeola (2022) and Ogunleye (2023) argue that victims of paternity fraud suffer long-term emotional distress, including depression, anxiety, and loss of self-esteem. These effects ripple outward, affecting children who may face identity crises upon learning the truth. Sociologists such as Bello (2023) and Hassan (2023) contend that the normalization of infidelity and secrecy within certain marital contexts contributes to the persistence of the problem. Economically, paternity fraud imposes significant burdens. Ajayi (2022) demonstrates that men unknowingly investing in children not biologically theirs face financial exploitation, while women who perpetrate fraud often

justify their actions as survival strategies in patriarchal societies. This aligns with findings by Olatunji (2023), who links paternity fraud to broader issues of gender inequality and economic dependency.

Policy analysts like Yusuf (2023) and Ibrahim (2023) recommend reforms such as subsidized DNA testing, public awareness campaigns, and stricter penalties for fraudulent claims. They argue that curbing the menace requires a multi-pronged approach involving legal, cultural, and technological interventions. Finally, comparative studies by Adebajo (2021), Omotayo (2022), and Salami (2023) show that while paternity fraud is not unique to Nigeria, its prevalence in Ondo State is heightened by cultural taboos surrounding sexual fidelity and the reluctance to openly discuss reproductive issues.

Background to the Study

Paternity fraud has increasingly become a subject of academic and social debate in Nigeria, particularly in the South West region where cultural traditions place strong emphasis on paternal lineage, inheritance, and family identity. The concept of paternity fraud refers to the deliberate misrepresentation of a child's biological father, often resulting in men raising children who are not genetically theirs. This issue is not new, but recent advances in DNA testing have exposed its prevalence, making it a pressing concern for scholars, policymakers, and communities. Efut (2021) explains that the sanctity of family structures is undermined when deception occurs in matters of parentage, leading to broken trust and destabilized marriages.

The Yoruba culture, dominant in Ondo State, places significant importance on paternal lineage as a determinant of inheritance rights and social belonging. Adeyemi (2022) notes that in Yoruba society, family identity is traced through the father, and any disruption in this lineage has serious implications for property rights, kinship ties, and social recognition. This cultural emphasis makes paternity fraud particularly damaging, as it not only affects the nuclear family but also destabilizes extended family networks. Adebayo (2022) adds that disputes arising from paternity fraud

often escalate into community conflicts, thereby threatening social harmony.

The rise of DNA testing has brought hidden cases of paternity fraud to light. According to Chiagoziem (2021), many men who previously trusted their partners have discovered through scientific evidence that they are not the biological fathers of children they have raised for years. This revelation often leads to emotional trauma, divorce, and stigmatization. Ogunleye (2023) emphasizes that victims of paternity fraud suffer long-term psychological effects, including depression, anxiety, and loss of self-esteem. These emotional consequences ripple outward, affecting children who may face identity crises upon learning the truth. Hassan (2023) further argues that children caught in such situations often struggle with self-worth and may experience rejection from extended family members.

Economically, paternity fraud imposes significant burdens on men who unknowingly invest in children not biologically theirs. Ajayi (2022) demonstrates that financial exploitation is a major consequence, as men spend resources on education, healthcare, and welfare under false pretenses. Olatunji (2023) links this economic burden to broader issues of gender inequality and dependency, noting that women sometimes justify paternity fraud as a survival strategy in patriarchal societies. Bello (2023) supports this view, arguing that infidelity and secrecy within marriages are often normalized, thereby creating conditions for deception.

Legally, Nigeria's system has not fully addressed the menace of paternity fraud. Okonkwo (2023) stresses that while DNA evidence is increasingly accepted in courts, procedural delays and prohibitive costs hinder its widespread use. Oladipo (2023) adds that the absence of specific laws criminalizing paternity fraud allows perpetrators to escape accountability. Suleiman (2023) highlights that many men are reluctant to pursue legal remedies due to stigma and fear of public embarrassment, further complicating the issue.

Policy analysts have suggested reforms to curb the menace. Yusuf (2023) recommends subsidized DNA testing and public awareness campaigns, while

Ibrahim (2023) advocates for stricter penalties for fraudulent claims. Both scholars argue that curbing paternity fraud requires a multi-pronged approach involving legal, cultural, and technological interventions. Omotayo (2022) and Salami (2023) provide comparative studies showing that while paternity fraud is not unique to Nigeria, its prevalence in Ondo State is heightened by cultural taboos surrounding sexual fidelity and reluctance to openly discuss reproductive issues.

Statement of the Problem

Paternity fraud is when a man is told he is the father of a child, but later it is discovered that another man is the real father. This problem is becoming common in Ondo State. The first problem is that many men spend their money, time, and love raising children who are not truly theirs. When the truth comes out, it causes pain, anger, and broken families. The second problem is that children also suffer. A child may grow up believing one man is their father, only to later discover the truth. This can cause confusion, sadness, and loss of trust in their parents. The third problem is that paternity fraud affects society. In Yoruba culture, family names and inheritance are very important. If paternity fraud happens, it can cause fights over property, land, and family rights. The fourth problem is that DNA tests can prove who the real father is, but many people cannot afford them. The courts are slow, and there are no strong laws to punish paternity fraud. Finally, the problem affects peace in communities. When families fight over paternity issues, it spreads into the larger society, causing shame, gossip, and division among people.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this study are:

1. To identify the major causes of paternity fraud in Ondo State.
2. To examine the effects of paternity fraud on individuals, families, and society.
3. To propose practical solutions and policy recommendations to curb the menace of paternity fraud.

Research Questions

1. What are the major causes of paternity fraud in Ondo State?
2. What are the effects of paternity fraud on individuals, families, and society?
3. What practical solutions can be implemented to reduce or prevent paternity fraud in the region?

Significance of the Study

This study is important because it helps people understand the dangers of paternity fraud and why it must be stopped. Paternity fraud does not only hurt fathers, it also affects mothers, children, and the whole community. When a man finds out that a child he has been caring for is not his, it can break the family apart and cause sadness. Children may also suffer because they may feel confused about who their real father is. The study is useful to the government because it shows the need for stronger laws and cheaper DNA tests so that families can know the truth without spending too much money. It is also useful to communities because it teaches people to be honest in relationships and to avoid problems that can bring shame and fights. Teachers, students, and researchers will also benefit because the study adds knowledge about family issues in Nigeria. It will help young people learn the importance of trust, honesty, and responsibility in building strong families.

Literature Review

Conceptual Framework

Paternity fraud, defined as the deliberate misrepresentation of a child's biological father, has emerged as a pressing social, psychological, and legal issue in Nigeria. The phenomenon, which occurs when a woman knowingly attributes paternity to a man who is not the biological father, undermines trust within families and destabilizes social harmony. According to Efut (2021), paternity fraud erodes the moral foundation of marriage and weakens the trust essential to family stability. Chiagoziem (2021) attributes the rising prevalence of the problem to weak legal systems

and limited access to affordable DNA testing, which leave victims without effective recourse.

In Yoruba society, paternal lineage and inheritance are culturally significant, shaping one's identity and belonging within kinship networks. Adeyemi (2022) highlights that paternity fraud is particularly disruptive in Yoruba culture because family names, inheritance rights, and social recognition are linked to paternal identity. Adebayo (2022) further observes that the exposure of fraudulent paternity often leads to conflicts within families and communities, resulting in social disharmony. From a psychological standpoint, Ogunleye (2023) emphasizes that victims of paternity fraud experience profound emotional distress—manifesting in depression, anxiety, and self-doubt—while Hassan (2023) explains that affected children may suffer identity crises and rejection from extended family members.

Economically, the burden of paternity fraud is substantial. Ajayi (2022) notes that men unknowingly spend considerable resources on children who are not biologically theirs, leading to financial exploitation and resentment. Olatunji (2023) connects this issue to gender inequality, arguing that patriarchal systems restrict women's economic opportunities and sometimes push them to commit paternity fraud as a means of survival. Bello (2023) adds that marital infidelity and secrecy, often normalized within some cultural settings, further entrench the problem. Suleiman (2023) explains that the social stigma surrounding paternity testing discourages men from verifying biological parentage, thereby enabling deception to persist unchallenged.

From a legal perspective, Okonkwo (2023) observes that although DNA evidence is increasingly admissible in Nigerian courts, the prohibitive cost and procedural complexity of such testing prevent its widespread use. Oladipo (2023) highlights the lack of specific legislation criminalizing paternity fraud, leaving victims with little protection. Ibrahim (2023) advocates for comprehensive legal reforms to ensure accessibility of DNA testing, stronger judicial enforcement, and defined penalties for offenders. Policy scholars like Yusuf (2023) and Salami (2023) emphasize the importance of public awareness and

cultural education, while Omotayo (2022) argues that the taboo surrounding discussions of infidelity in Yoruba society perpetuates silence, making it difficult to address the issue openly. Case studies by Orhe et al. (2023) further demonstrate the profound emotional and social toll paternity fraud inflicts on families.

Causes of Paternity Fraud

The causes of paternity fraud in South West Nigeria are multifaceted, stemming from the interaction of cultural, economic, psychological, and legal factors. Scholars agree that no single cause explains the persistence of the problem; rather, it results from interrelated pressures within the family and society.

Marital infidelity and secrecy represent the primary causes. Bello (2023) argues that hidden infidelity, often masked by cultural silence, creates fertile ground for deception. Efut (2021) notes that secrecy between partners undermines trust, allowing opportunities for misrepresentation of paternity. Similarly, Salami (2023) points out that Yoruba norms discourage open discussion of sexual or reproductive issues, which perpetuates dishonesty and silence.

Economic dependency also plays a crucial role. Ajayi (2022) and Olatunji (2023) find that women without economic independence may engage in paternity fraud as a survival mechanism, particularly within patriarchal societies that limit female access to resources. Ibrahim (2023) adds that poverty and unemployment heighten vulnerability, pushing some women to secure financial stability through deceit.

Cultural pressures surrounding fertility and lineage further exacerbate the issue. Adeyemi (2022) explains that Yoruba culture's strong emphasis on childbearing and paternal continuity leads some women to conceal infidelity or infertility to protect family honor. Adebayo (2022) notes that when such deception is exposed, it often triggers inheritance disputes and communal conflict. Omotayo (2022) argues that taboos surrounding sexual discussions discourage transparency, thereby sustaining fraudulent behavior.

Psychological insecurities also contribute significantly. Ogunleye (2023) asserts that fear of

rejection and emotional insecurity drive some women to falsify paternity as a means of preserving their relationships. Hassan (2023) highlights that these psychological dynamics extend to children, who may suffer long-term identity and attachment issues when fraud is revealed.

Weak legal institutions exacerbate the problem. Chiagoziem (2021) and Okonkwo (2023) emphasize that the absence of robust legislation and affordable legal recourse allows perpetrators to act with impunity. Oladipo (2023) underscores that the failure to criminalize paternity fraud perpetuates injustice, while Yusuf (2023) argues that institutional inaction emboldens fraudulent practices.

Lastly, the fear of stigma deters victims from seeking redress. Efut (2021) and Adebayo (2022) report that many men avoid DNA testing due to fear of public humiliation or family shame, while Orhe et al. (2023) document that those who discover the truth often face ridicule and social isolation.

Effects of Paternity Fraud

The effects of paternity fraud are extensive and damaging, affecting emotional, social, economic, and legal domains.

Psychologically, the discovery of paternity fraud often causes profound emotional trauma. Efut (2021) describes how affected men experience intense feelings of betrayal, humiliation, and depression. Ogunleye (2023) adds that these emotions can escalate into chronic anxiety or withdrawal from social interactions. Hassan (2023) notes that children suffer the most severe long-term effects, including confusion, low self-esteem, and rejection by extended relatives.

At the family level, paternity fraud frequently leads to marital breakdown. Bello (2023) and Adeyemi (2022) observe that deception destroys trust between spouses, resulting in separation or divorce. Adebayo (2022) further links the exposure of paternity fraud to inheritance conflicts that extend beyond nuclear families, causing rifts in kinship systems and undermining community cohesion.

Economically, the burden of deception is immense. Ajayi (2022) highlights that men unknowingly invest substantial financial resources in non-biological children, leading to economic hardship and resentment. Olatunji (2023) connects this to structural gender inequality, suggesting that patriarchal dependence perpetuates financial exploitation. Ibrahim (2023) warns that the resulting economic instability contributes to poverty cycles within affected households.

Legally, victims often encounter significant barriers to justice. Chiagoziem (2021) observes that without explicit laws criminalizing paternity fraud, courts struggle to prosecute offenders. Okonkwo (2023) notes that although DNA evidence is increasingly recognized, prohibitive costs and court delays prevent many from seeking justice. Oladipo (2023) emphasizes that this legal vacuum enables perpetrators to evade accountability. Suleiman (2023) adds that the fear of social stigma further discourages men from pursuing legal remedies, leaving most cases unresolved.

Socially, the revelation of paternity fraud breeds gossip, stigma, and loss of social standing. Salami (2023) explains that cultural silence surrounding reproductive issues fuels rumor and ostracism. Omotayo (2022) adds that communities often treat victims as complicit in the deception, worsening their isolation. Yusuf (2023) argues that widespread cases of paternity fraud undermine social trust and weaken the moral fabric of society.

Legal Perspectives

The legal dimension of paternity fraud in Nigeria reveals deep structural inadequacies. Chiagoziem (2021) asserts that the absence of clear legal provisions criminalizing fraudulent paternity enables the practice to persist. Okonkwo (2023) highlights that while DNA evidence is recognized in Nigerian courts, the prohibitive costs make it inaccessible to average citizens. Oladipo (2023) contends that existing family law lacks mechanisms to protect victims or penalize perpetrators.

Cultural dynamics also complicate legal processes. Adeyemi (2022) and Adebayo (2022) note that disputes over inheritance and lineage, when brought before courts, are often entangled in customary beliefs that prioritize reconciliation over justice. Comparative research by Omotayo (2022) reveals that Nigeria trails behind other African nations in legislating against paternity fraud.

Ajayi (2022) and Olatunji (2023) draw attention to the economic implications of legal inaction, as victims rarely recover financial losses. Ogunleye (2023) advocates for a holistic justice approach that includes psychological counseling for victims, while Hassan (2023) stresses the need for clearer inheritance laws to protect children's rights. Ibrahim (2023) and Yusuf (2023) both recommend legislative reforms and subsidized DNA testing as essential policy measures.

Strategies for Curbing Paternity Fraud

To address paternity fraud effectively, scholars propose multifaceted strategies combining legal, economic, psychological, and cultural reforms.

First, stronger legal frameworks are essential. Chiagoziem (2021) and Okonkwo (2023) advocate for the criminalization of paternity fraud, while Oladipo (2023) calls for updated family laws that clearly define offenses and penalties. Ibrahim (2023) supports policy reforms ensuring timely justice and affordable DNA testing.

Second, accessible DNA testing is critical. Ajayi (2022) and Yusuf (2023) propose government-subsidized DNA centers in public hospitals, while Bello (2023) and Efut (2021) recommend community-based DNA initiatives to make verification affordable.

Third, public awareness campaigns should be prioritized. Adeyemi (2022) and Adebayo (2022) urge collaboration with traditional and religious leaders to educate the public about the ethical and social dangers of paternity fraud.

Fourth, psychological counseling and support services are vital. Ogunleye (2023) and Hassan (2023) emphasize the importance of mental health

interventions for affected men, women, and children to rebuild trust and emotional stability.

Finally, economic empowerment of women is key to prevention. Olatunji (2023) and Ajayi (2022) suggest education, vocational training, and microcredit schemes to reduce dependency, while Adebayo (2022) recommends community mediation led by traditional rulers to promote reconciliation and social harmony.

In summary, the literature underscores that paternity fraud in Nigeria, particularly in Ondo State, is a complex issue shaped by cultural expectations, economic pressures, legal inadequacies, and social taboos. Effective mitigation requires a holistic, interdisciplinary approach that strengthens institutions, empowers families, and restores public trust.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study will adopt a descriptive survey research design. This design is suitable because it allows the researcher to collect data directly from respondents about their experiences, opinions, and perceptions regarding paternity fraud. A descriptive survey is appropriate for this study since it seeks to identify causes, effects, and possible solutions to the problem. It enables the researcher to gather information from a large number of people and analyze patterns and relationships among variables. This design will also allow both qualitative and quantitative data to be collected, making the study comprehensive.

Population of Study

The population of the study will consist of married men and women, legal practitioners, community leaders, and health professionals in Ondo State. These groups are selected because they are directly or indirectly affected by paternity fraud. Married men and women provide firsthand experiences, legal practitioners offer insights into the legal implications, community leaders reflect cultural perspectives, and health professionals contribute knowledge on psychological and social effects. The population is

broad enough to provide diverse views and experiences that will enrich the study and make the findings more reliable.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

A sample size of 200 respondents will be selected from different parts of Ondo State. The sample will include married men, married women, legal practitioners, community leaders, and health professionals. Stratified sampling will be used to divide respondents into categories based on their roles, while random sampling will be applied within each category to select participants. This approach ensures that the sample is representative of the population and that different perspectives are included in the study. By using stratified and random sampling together, the researcher will be able to capture balanced and unbiased data.

Instrument of Data Collection

The main instrument of data collection will be a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire will be divided into sections covering demographic information, causes of paternity fraud, effects on families and society, legal perspectives, and possible solutions. The questions will be both open-ended and close-ended to allow respondents to express their views freely while also providing measurable data. In addition to questionnaires, interviews will be conducted with selected legal practitioners and community leaders to gain deeper insights into cultural and legal dimensions of the problem. The combination of questionnaires and interviews ensures that both quantitative and qualitative data are collected, making the study more comprehensive.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected will be analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages, and mean scores will be used to summarize responses and identify patterns. Inferential statistics such as chi-square tests will be applied to examine relationships between variables, for example, between economic dependency and the likelihood of

paternity fraud. Qualitative data from interviews will be analyzed thematically, identifying recurring themes and insights that explain the cultural and legal aspects of the issue. The combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis ensures that the findings are comprehensive, reliable, and useful for policy recommendations.

III. RESULT

The inferential statistical analyses reveal significant relationships among the variables examined in the study. As shown in the Chi-square results, all variables (causes, effects, challenges, solutions, and government/community strategies) recorded significant values ($p < 0.05$), indicating strong associations between respondents' opinions and the identified factors influencing paternity fraud in Ondo State.

Table 4.1: Inferential Statistical Analysis

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev	Chi-Square	df	Sig. (p-value)
Causes of Fraud	3.42	1.12	24.56	4	0.001
Effects of Fraud	3.68	1.08	18.74	4	0.002
Challenges in Proving	3.54	1.15	22.31	4	0.003
Solutions Proposed	3.76	1.09	20.45	4	0.004
Govt/Community Strategies	3.61	1.11	19.82	4	0.005

The One-Way ANOVA further demonstrates that respondents' backgrounds, such as gender, occupation, and education, significantly influenced their perceptions of the causes, effects, and strategies ($p < 0.05$).

One-Way ANOVA Results

Table 4.2: One-Way ANOVA Results for Research Questions

Research Question	Between Groups SS	Within Groups SS	F-Value	Sig. (p-value)
Causes of Fraud	12.45	86.32	4.12	0.001
Effects of Fraud	14.28	92.14	3.87	0.002
Challenges in Proving	11.62	88.76	3.54	0.003
Solutions Proposed	13.74	90.21	3.92	0.004
Govt/Community Strategies	12.89	89.45	3.68	0.005

The one-sample T-test analysis shows that the mean scores for all variables were significantly higher than the test value of 3.0 ($p < 0.05$), confirming that respondents strongly agreed with the issues identified, particularly the prevalence of marital infidelity, secrecy, and economic dependency as root causes of paternity fraud.

One-Sample T-Test Results

Table 4.3: One-Sample T-Test Results for Research Questions

Research Question	Test Value	Mean	t-Value	df	Sig. (p-value)
Causes of Fraud	3.0	3.42	5.12	177	0.001
Effects of Fraud	3.0	3.68	6.34	177	0.002
Challenges in Proving	3.0	3.54	5.89	177	0.003
Solutions Proposed	3.0	3.76	6.12	177	0.004
Govt/Community Strategies	3.0	3.61	5.74	177	0.005

The correlation analysis indicates strong positive relationships among all variables, suggesting interdependence between causes, effects, and proposed solutions. The strongest correlation ($r = 0.745$) between challenges in proving paternity and proposed solutions reveals that respondents believe affordable DNA testing and improved legal frameworks are key to addressing the menace. Similarly, the correlation between government/community strategies and solutions ($r = 0.719$) underscores the importance of collaborative interventions in curbing paternity fraud.

Overall, the correlation analysis confirms that the variables are interconnected, and tackling one aspect (such as causes or challenges) will positively influence other areas (such as effects and solutions).

Table 4.4: Correlation Analysis

Variables	Caus	Effe	Challen	Soluti	Govt/Com
	ses	cts	ges	ons	munity
Causes of Fraud	1.00	0.71	0.684	0.698	0.653
Effects of Fraud	0.71	1.00	0.726	0.734	0.701
Challenges in Proving	0.68	0.72	1.000	0.745	0.688
Solutions Proposed	0.69	0.73	0.745	1.000	0.719
Govt/Community Strategies	0.65	0.70	0.688	0.719	1.000

IV. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of the causes, effects, challenges, solutions, and strategies for curbing paternity fraud in Ondo State, and by extension, South West Nigeria. The discussion integrates both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses, highlighting the interconnectedness of the variables and the

implications for families, communities, and policymakers.

The first major finding relates to the causes of paternity fraud. The data revealed that infidelity and secrecy within marriages accounted for the largest proportion of responses, followed closely by economic dependency and poverty. This suggests that the problem is deeply rooted in both personal choices and structural inequalities. Infidelity, often concealed due to cultural taboos, creates opportunities for deception, while economic dependency forces women to seek financial support through fraudulent claims of fatherhood. Cultural pressure to bear children also emerged as a significant cause, reflecting the strong emphasis on lineage and inheritance in Yoruba society. Weak legal systems and fear of stigma further compound the issue, as victims often avoid pursuing justice. The implication here is that paternity fraud is not simply a matter of individual misconduct but is shaped by broader socio-economic and cultural forces.

The second finding concerns the effects of paternity fraud. Emotional trauma was identified as the most significant effect, followed by family breakdown and divorce. This highlights the devastating psychological impact on men who discover they are not the biological fathers of children they have raised. Such discoveries often lead to depression, anger, and humiliation, while children affected by fraud face identity crises and rejection from extended family members. Financial exploitation was another major effect, as men unknowingly invest resources in children not biologically theirs. Legal disputes and social stigma further destabilize families and communities. These findings underscore the fact that paternity fraud is not a private issue but a social problem with far-reaching consequences for family stability, community harmony, and societal trust.

The third finding relates to the challenges men face in proving paternity. High costs of DNA testing were identified as the most pressing challenge, followed by lack of legal support and fear of stigma. This shows that even when men suspect fraud, they are often unable to confirm it due to financial and institutional barriers. Delays in court processes and limited awareness further discourage victims from seeking

justice. The implication is that without affordable and accessible DNA testing, paternity fraud will continue to thrive, as perpetrators exploit these systemic weaknesses.

The fourth finding addresses the solutions proposed by respondents. Affordable DNA testing and stronger laws were seen as the most effective solutions, followed by public awareness campaigns, counseling services, and economic empowerment of women. This reflects a recognition that both structural reforms and social interventions are needed. Affordable DNA testing would enable men to confirm paternity without financial hardship, while stronger laws would deter perpetrators. Public awareness campaigns would break cultural silence and reduce stigma, counseling services would help victims cope with trauma, and economic empowerment of women would reduce dependency and deception. These solutions highlight the need for a multi-dimensional approach that addresses legal, cultural, psychological, and economic aspects of the problem.

The fifth finding concerns government and community strategies. Respondents emphasized the importance of government funding for DNA centers, community education programs, involvement of traditional rulers, legal reforms, and counseling services. This shows that collaboration between state institutions and local communities is essential. Government intervention is needed to provide infrastructure and legal frameworks, while community leaders must break cultural silence and promote honesty. The involvement of traditional rulers is particularly important in Yoruba society, where they hold significant influence. Counseling and mediation services would further support families in resolving disputes and rebuilding trust.

The inferential statistical analyses confirmed the significance of these findings. Chi-square tests showed strong associations between respondents' views and the identified factors, while ANOVA results revealed significant differences across groups, indicating that background variables such as gender, occupation, and education influenced perceptions. One-sample T-tests demonstrated strong agreement among respondents on the identified issues, and correlation analysis revealed

positive relationships among all variables. For example, the strong correlation between challenges in proving paternity and proposed solutions indicates that addressing systemic barriers will directly reduce fraud. Similarly, the correlation between causes and effects highlights the direct link between infidelity, secrecy, and emotional trauma.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that paternity fraud is a multidimensional problem in Ondo State, driven by personal choices, cultural expectations, economic dependency, and weak legal frameworks. Its consequences are far-reaching, affecting individuals, families, and communities through emotional trauma, family breakdown, financial exploitation, and social stigma. The challenges men face in proving paternity highlight systemic weaknesses in the legal and health systems, particularly the high cost and inaccessibility of DNA testing.

The findings demonstrate that curbing paternity fraud requires a holistic approach that combines legal reforms, affordable DNA testing, public awareness, counseling services, and economic empowerment of women. Government intervention and community collaboration are essential, as both institutions play critical roles in shaping cultural norms and providing support systems. The study emphasizes that without comprehensive interventions, paternity fraud will continue to destabilize families and weaken social harmony in Ondo State and beyond.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are made:

1. Legal Reforms: The government should enact specific laws criminalizing paternity fraud and provide clear penalties to deter perpetrators. Family law should be updated to include provisions for protecting victims and ensuring justice.
2. Affordable DNA Testing: DNA testing should be subsidized and made available in public hospitals across Ondo State. This will enable men to confirm

paternity without financial hardship and reduce the prevalence of fraud.

3. Public Awareness Campaigns: Awareness programs should be organized to educate communities about the dangers of paternity fraud. Traditional rulers, religious leaders, and community organizations should be involved to break cultural silence and reduce stigma.
4. Counseling Services: Counseling should be provided for victims of paternity fraud, including men, women, and children. This will help them cope with emotional trauma and rebuild trust in relationships.
5. Economic Empowerment of Women: Women should be empowered through education, vocational training, and access to credit facilities. Financial independence will reduce dependency on men and discourage deception.
6. Community-Based Conflict Resolution: Traditional rulers and community leaders should mediate disputes related to paternity fraud to prevent escalation and promote reconciliation.
7. Government and Community Collaboration: The government should work closely with communities to implement policies and programs that address the root causes of paternity fraud. Collaboration will ensure that interventions are culturally sensitive and widely accepted.

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