

A Sociological Implications Of Paternity Fraud In Nigeria

Idama, Maxwell Omamuyo, PhD

Department Of Sociology, Faculty Of Social Science, Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria

Eghele, Edison Edirin,

Department Of Sociology And Anthropology, Faculty Of Social Science, University Of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria

Abstract

Paternity fraud, defined as the deliberate misrepresentation of a child's biological father, has emerged as a significant social phenomenon with profound sociological implications for Nigerian society. This study examines the prevalence, causes, and societal consequences of paternity fraud through a sociological lens, drawing on empirical data from DNA testing centres across Nigeria. Recent reports indicate that approximately 25% of paternity tests conducted in Nigeria yield negative results, suggesting that one in four men tested are not the biological fathers of the children they believe to be theirs. The research adopts a quantitative methodology, utilising survey data from 384 respondents across six Nigerian states to investigate the social, cultural, and familial ramifications of paternity fraud. Findings reveal that paternity fraud is deeply embedded in cultural pressures surrounding childbearing, patriarchal lineage systems, and economic insecurities that compel women to engage in deceptive practices. The implications extend beyond individual emotional trauma to encompass broader societal concerns, including the erosion of trust in marital relationships, challenges to inheritance systems, threats to child identity and well-being, and the destabilisation of the family as a fundamental social institution. The study further identifies significant gaps in the Nigerian legal framework, which currently provides no explicit criminal sanctions or civil remedies for victims of paternity fraud. This research contributes to the growing body of literature on family dynamics in contemporary Nigeria and offers recommendations for legal reform, public awareness initiatives, and the integration of DNA testing into healthcare and birth registration systems to mitigate the societal impact of paternity fraud.

Keywords: *Paternity fraud, sociological implications, DNA testing, Nigerian family, marital trust*

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I. Introduction

The institution of the family serves as the foundational unit of society, shaping social norms, values, and intergenerational relationships. In Nigeria, the family occupies a particularly significant position within the sociocultural landscape, functioning as the primary agent of socialisation and the cornerstone of community life. However, contemporary Nigerian society faces unprecedented challenges to family stability, among which paternity fraud has emerged as a profoundly disruptive phenomenon with far-reaching sociological implications. Paternity fraud, defined as the deliberate misrepresentation of a child's biological father, constitutes a deception that fundamentally challenges the integrity of marital relationships, inheritance systems, and the psychosocial well-being of all parties involved (Metuonu, 2025).

The prevalence of paternity fraud in Nigeria has garnered increasing attention in recent years, largely due to the accessibility of DNA testing technology. According to the 2025 Annual DNA Testing Report by Smart DNA Nigeria, one of the leading genetic testing companies in the country, the paternity exclusion rate currently stands at 25%, indicating that one in every four men who undergo paternity testing discovers they are not the biological fathers of the children they presumed to be theirs (Punch Newspapers, 2025). This statistic represents a slight decline from the 27% reported in 2024, yet the figure remains alarmingly high and warrants comprehensive sociological investigation. The report further revealed that firstborn children are disproportionately affected, with firstborn sons accounting for 64% of negative results, reflecting the cultural emphasis placed on male children in Nigerian society (Daily Post Nigeria, 2025).

The significance of paternity fraud extends far beyond individual cases of deception. At its core, paternity fraud challenges the very foundations of trust upon which familial relationships are built. The discovery that a man has been deceived into raising a child who is not biologically his own can result in severe psychological trauma, including depression, anxiety, and in extreme cases, suicidal ideation (Ikalume, 2025). The emotional devastation experienced by victims is compounded by the financial implications, as men who have invested years of resources in raising children they later discover are not biologically related to them face not only emotional

loss but also material deprivation. Furthermore, children who are products of paternity fraud may experience identity crises, confusion regarding their heritage, and the psychological burden of discovering that the man they regarded as their father is not biologically related to them.

The sociological implications of paternity fraud in Nigeria are multifaceted and demand rigorous academic inquiry. This phenomenon intersects with deeply entrenched cultural norms surrounding marriage, childbearing, and lineage. Traditional Nigerian society places immense pressure on women to bear children, particularly male children, to continue family lineages and secure their positions within their marital homes (Metuonu, 2025). This cultural imperative, combined with economic insecurities and patriarchal power structures, creates conditions in which some women may resort to deception to fulfil societal expectations and maintain their marriages. The prevalence of paternity fraud thus serves as an indicator of deeper societal issues, including gender inequality, economic vulnerability, and the commodification of childbearing within traditional kinship systems.

This study aims to examine the sociological implications of paternity fraud in Nigeria through a comprehensive analysis of its prevalence, causes, and consequences. The research adopts a quantitative methodology to investigate the experiences and perceptions of Nigerian adults regarding paternity fraud, drawing on survey data collected from across multiple states. By situating paternity fraud within the broader context of Nigerian family dynamics and cultural norms, this study contributes to understanding the ways in which contemporary social changes, including increased access to DNA testing, international migration, and economic pressures, are reshaping family relationships in Nigeria. The findings are expected to inform policy recommendations for addressing the legal, social, and psychological dimensions of paternity fraud, ultimately contributing to the strengthening of family institutions in Nigerian society.

II. Literature Review

Conceptualising Paternity Fraud

Paternity fraud, also referred to as paternity misattribution, constitutes a complex social phenomenon that has been defined in various ways across legal, sociological, and psychological literature. At its most fundamental level, paternity fraud refers to the deliberate misrepresentation of a child's biological father, wherein a woman intentionally deceives a man into believing and accepting that he is the biological father of a child when this is not the case (Ikalume, 2025). This definition encompasses scenarios where a woman who has engaged in extramarital relationships presents another man's child as her husband's offspring, thereby perpetrating a fraud that has profound emotional, financial, and social consequences. The intentional nature of the deception distinguishes paternity fraud from paternity misattribution, which may occur without the mother's knowledge or intent, such as in cases of baby swapping in hospitals or errors in assisted reproductive procedures (Iwowo et al., 2026).

The legal conceptualisation of paternity fraud has been explored by scholars who emphasise the elements of deceit and concealment inherent in the act. In the Nigerian legal context, fraud is defined under civil law to include acts, omissions, and concealments by which undue and conscienceless advantage is taken of another person (Iwowo et al., 2026). Applying this definition to paternity matters, paternity fraud involves making a definite false statement or withholding the truth regarding a child's parentage with the full intention of concealing the biological reality from the presumed father. This deception fundamentally undermines the principle of informed consent that underlies familial relationships and parental responsibilities.

Scholars have drawn important distinctions between paternity fraud and other forms of marital infidelity. While adultery involves a breach of marital trust through sexual relations with someone other than one's spouse, paternity fraud extends beyond the act of infidelity to encompass a deliberate and sustained deception regarding the child's biological origins (Ikalume, 2025). The fraudulent aspect lies not in the infidelity itself but in the subsequent concealment and misrepresentation that causes an innocent man to assume parental responsibilities for a child who is not biologically his. This distinction has significant implications for legal responses to paternity fraud, as it elevates the issue from a private matter of marital conduct to a public concern involving fraud and deception that may warrant legal intervention.

Prevalence and Patterns of Paternity Fraud in Nigeria

The prevalence of paternity fraud in Nigeria has become a subject of increasing public discourse and academic inquiry, driven largely by empirical data from DNA testing centres across the country. According to the 2025 Annual DNA Testing Report by Smart DNA Nigeria, which analysed data from thousands of tests conducted between July 2024 and June 2025, the paternity exclusion rate stood at 25%, meaning that one in every four men who underwent paternity testing were confirmed not to be the biological fathers of the children they believed to be theirs (Punch Newspapers, 2025). This figure, while representing a slight decrease from the 27% reported in 2024, remains remarkably consistent with previous years' data and suggests a persistent pattern of paternity fraud in Nigerian society (Daily Post Nigeria, 2025).

The demographic patterns revealed in the DNA testing data provide valuable insights into the social dynamics underlying paternity fraud in Nigeria. The report indicated that men initiated 88.2% of all paternity tests, with women accounting for only 11.8% of test initiations (Punch Newspapers, 2025). This significant gender disparity suggests that men are predominantly the parties experiencing doubt regarding the paternity of their children and taking proactive steps to resolve such doubts. The predominance of male-initiated testing reflects broader gender dynamics within Nigerian marriages, including power imbalances and the cultural expectation that men should assert control over their lineage and inheritance. Furthermore, the data revealed that men aged 41-50 represented the largest age cohort of those seeking testing at 41%, followed by men aged 31-40 at 38% (Daily Post Nigeria, 2025). This age distribution suggests that financial stability and accumulated doubts over time may be contributing factors to the decision to undergo paternity testing.

Geographically, the data revealed a marked concentration of DNA testing in Lagos State, which accounted for 69% of all tests conducted (Daily Post Nigeria, 2025). This geographical concentration reflects broader patterns of economic disparity in Nigeria, as Lagos serves as the country's commercial hub with higher concentrations of wealth and greater access to healthcare services, including DNA testing facilities. Outside Lagos, testing was concentrated in Delta, Ogun, and Oyo states, suggesting that awareness and access to DNA testing remain limited largely to urban and economically advantaged areas (Punch Newspapers, 2025). The ethnic distribution of testing revealed that individuals of Yoruba ethnicity accounted for 53% of tests, followed by Igbo clients at 31.3%, while Hausa clients constituted only 1.2% of tests (Daily Post Nigeria, 2025). This distribution, which does not align with Nigeria's national ethnic demographics, suggests significant cultural variations in attitudes toward paternity testing and the acceptance of genetic science across different ethnic groups.

Cultural and Social Drivers of Paternity Fraud

The sociological analysis of paternity fraud in Nigeria must situate the phenomenon within the broader context of cultural norms, social pressures, and gender dynamics that characterise Nigerian society. Scholars have identified several cultural factors that contribute to the prevalence of paternity fraud, foremost among which is the intense societal pressure placed on women to bear children, particularly male children, as a means of securing their positions within marriage and ensuring the continuation of family lineages (Metuonu, 2025). In traditional Nigerian society, a marriage is often considered incomplete without the arrival of children, and women bear the primary burden of social stigma and criticism when marriages are childless. This cultural imperative creates powerful incentives for women to conceive at any cost, even when their husbands may be experiencing fertility challenges.

The patriarchal structure of Nigerian kinship systems further compounds the pressure on women to produce children and maintain the appearance of marital fidelity (Metuonu, 2025). Inheritance systems in many Nigerian ethnic groups privilege male children and trace lineage through the paternal line, meaning that a man's social standing and legacy depend on the production of legitimate heirs. For women, the failure to produce a male child can result in social marginalisation, financial insecurity, and even divorce or the taking of additional wives. In this context, some women may resort to paternity fraud as a survival strategy, seeking to fulfil cultural expectations and protect their positions within their marital families. As Metuonu (2025) observed, the non-disclosure of paternity can stem from deeply held and complex issues related to paternity secrets, with women often being the primary recipients of accusations despite the structural inequalities that shape their reproductive choices.

Economic factors also play a significant role in driving paternity fraud in Nigeria. Scholars have noted that women may engage in paternity fraud to secure financial support for their children, particularly when the biological father is unable or unwilling to provide adequate resources (Metuonu, 2025). In a society where women's economic security is often tied to their marital status and relationships with men, the decision to attribute a child's paternity to a more financially stable man may represent a calculated decision to improve the child's life prospects. This economic dimension of paternity fraud is particularly evident in the context of international migration and the "japa" phenomenon, as the requirement for DNA testing in immigration processes has exposed numerous cases of paternity fraud (Vanguard News, 2024). The 2025 Smart DNA report revealed an 80% increase in immigration-related DNA testing requests compared to the previous year, suggesting that the pursuit of foreign opportunities is uncovering previously hidden instances of paternity fraud (Punch Newspapers, 2025).

Sociological Consequences of Paternity Fraud

The consequences of paternity fraud extend far beyond the individual victims to encompass broader societal implications that threaten the stability of families and communities. The sociological literature identifies several interconnected dimensions of harm resulting from paternity fraud, including psychological trauma, financial exploitation, threats to child identity and well-being, and the erosion of trust in marital and familial relationships. At the individual level, the discovery of paternity fraud can have devastating psychological effects on victims, who may experience depression, loss of self-esteem, and profound emotional distress as they grapple

with the betrayal of their trust and the fragmentation of their family identity (Ikalume, 2025). Documented cases of men suffering cardiac arrest, falling into comas, or experiencing suicidal ideation following the revelation of paternity fraud underscore the severity of the psychological impact (Ikalume, 2025).

The financial consequences of paternity fraud constitute another significant dimension of harm with sociological implications. Men who have been deceived into raising children who are not biologically theirs may have invested substantial resources in their upbringing, including educational expenses, healthcare costs, and general maintenance (Iwowo et al., 2026). While Nigerian law does not currently provide for compensation or restitution in cases of paternity fraud, scholars have argued that such financial exploitation constitutes a form of unjust enrichment that warrants legal remedies. The absence of legal recourse for victims of paternity fraud represents a significant gap in the Nigerian legal framework and leaves affected men with limited options for seeking justice or recovering financial losses (Iwowo et al., 2026).

Perhaps the most profound sociological implication of paternity fraud relates to its impact on children, who are often the most vulnerable parties in these situations. Children who discover that the man they believed to be their father is not biologically related to them may experience identity crises, confusion regarding their heritage, and psychological trauma that can persist throughout their lives (Metuonu, 2025). The revelation of paternity fraud can also disrupt children's relationships with their presumed fathers, who may withdraw emotional and financial support upon discovering the truth. Furthermore, children may face challenges in establishing their own identities and navigating social relationships when their paternity is called into question. As Metuonu (2025) observed, these children risk growing up with issues such as abandonment, lack of trust, and a sense of identity loss, which can have lasting implications for their psychosocial development.

Legal Framework and Gaps in Addressing Paternity Fraud

The Nigerian legal framework currently provides limited recourse for victims of paternity fraud, reflecting broader gaps in the country's family law and evidentiary systems. The Evidence (Amendment) Act 2023 establishes a presumption of legitimacy under Section 165, which holds that a child born during the continuance of a valid marriage or within 280 days of its dissolution is presumed to be the legitimate child of the husband (Ikalume, 2025). While this presumption can be rebutted through scientific evidence, including DNA testing, the legal system places the burden of proof on the party seeking to challenge paternity, creating significant obstacles for men who wish to establish the biological truth of their parentage. The Supreme Court of Nigeria has affirmed this presumption in cases such as *Idahosa v Idahosa*, holding that uncorroborated statements are insufficient to rebut the presumption of legitimacy (Ikalume, 2025).

The constitutional framework presents additional challenges to addressing paternity fraud through legal means. Section 37 of the 1999 Constitution guarantees the right to privacy, which courts have interpreted as a barrier to compulsory DNA testing (Iwowo et al., 2026). This constitutional provision means that Nigerian courts cannot compel individuals to submit to DNA testing without their consent, limiting the ability of legal proceedings to establish the truth of paternity in contested cases. In *Anozia v Nnani*, the Supreme Court held that a 57-year-old adult could not be compelled to undergo DNA testing against his will, as such compulsion would constitute a breach of his fundamental right to privacy (Iwowo et al., 2026). This interpretation of the privacy right creates significant obstacles for men seeking to establish their paternity or challenge fraudulent claims.

Beyond these procedural challenges, Nigerian law lacks explicit provisions criminalising paternity fraud or providing civil remedies for its victims. As Ikalume (2025) observed, the silence of the law regarding paternity fraud creates a fertile ground for the sowing of deception, as women who engage in such fraud face no legal consequences for their actions. Comparative jurisdictions such as the United Kingdom and Canada have developed structured parentage-testing regimes and legal remedies for victims of paternity fraud, providing models that could inform legal reform in Nigeria (Iwowo et al., 2026). Scholars have called for the enactment of a comprehensive Parentage and Paternity Act, constitutional amendments to permit court-ordered DNA testing in appropriate circumstances, and the criminalisation of deliberate paternity misattribution (Iwowo et al., 2026; Ikalume, 2025).

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on sociological theories of the family and gender to frame the analysis of paternity fraud in Nigeria. Functionalist perspectives view the family as a social institution that fulfils essential functions for society, including the socialisation of children, the regulation of sexual behaviour, and the provision of emotional and material support for members (Metuonu, 2025). From this perspective, paternity fraud represents a dysfunction that threatens the stability of the family as a social institution and undermines its capacity to fulfil its essential functions. The deception inherent in paternity fraud disrupts the trust and cooperation that are essential for family functioning, potentially leading to family breakdown and social instability.

Feminist sociological perspectives offer additional insights into the structural inequalities that shape the phenomenon of paternity fraud. While paternity fraud involves deception by women, feminist scholars emphasise

the need to understand this phenomenon within the context of patriarchal structures that constrain women's choices and create conditions of vulnerability (Metuonu, 2025). The pressure on women to bear children, the stigma associated with childlessness, and the economic insecurity that women face in patriarchal societies create powerful incentives for deception. Understanding paternity fraud in this structural context is essential for developing effective policy responses that address the root causes of the phenomenon rather than merely punishing its symptoms.

Social exchange theory provides a useful framework for understanding the decision-making processes that may lead women to engage in paternity fraud. According to this perspective, individuals make decisions based on calculations of costs and benefits, seeking to maximise rewards while minimising costs (Metuonu, 2025). For a woman facing the prospect of divorce, social marginalisation, or economic hardship due to childlessness, the decision to deceive a man about a child's paternity may represent a rational choice to preserve her position and secure resources for her child. While such decisions have profound ethical implications, understanding them within the framework of social exchange theory illuminates the structural pressures that shape individual behaviour and highlights the need for policies that address women's vulnerability through economic empowerment and social support.

III. Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research design to investigate the sociological implications of paternity fraud in Nigeria. The quantitative approach was selected for its capacity to generate statistically significant findings that can be generalised to broader populations and to identify patterns and relationships among variables of interest. Given the sensitive nature of paternity fraud and the potential for social desirability bias in responses, a quantitative methodology provides the anonymity and standardisation necessary for respondents to participate honestly and for researchers to analyse data systematically. The research design is cross-sectional, collecting data at a single point in time to capture current perceptions and experiences regarding paternity fraud among Nigerian adults.

The study population comprises adults aged 18 years and above residing in Nigeria, with sampling focused on six states selected to represent Nigeria's diverse geographical and ethnic composition: Lagos, Oyo, Enugu, Rivers, Kano, and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. A multistage sampling technique was employed to select participants for this study. In the first stage, stratified random sampling was used to ensure proportional representation across the six states, with each state serving as a stratum. Within each state, local government areas were randomly selected, followed by the selection of enumeration areas within each local government. Systematic random sampling was then used to select households within enumeration areas, and one adult respondent was randomly selected from each household for interview. This multistage approach ensured that the sample reflected the geographic and demographic diversity of the Nigerian population while providing a rigorous basis for statistical inference.

The sample size for this study was determined using the Cochran formula for sample size calculation, assuming a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. Given the absence of precise population-level data on paternity fraud prevalence, the conservative assumption of 50% was used to calculate the maximum sample size required. This calculation yielded a target sample size of 384 respondents, which was inflated to 420 to account for potential non-response and incomplete questionnaires. Of the 420 questionnaires distributed, 398 were returned, and 384 were deemed valid for analysis, representing a response rate of 91.4%. The achieved sample of 384 provides adequate statistical power for the planned analyses and allows for meaningful subgroup comparisons across demographic categories.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed specifically for this study based on the review of relevant literature and theoretical frameworks. The questionnaire was designed to capture information across several domains: demographic characteristics of respondents, knowledge and awareness of paternity fraud, personal or indirect experiences with paternity disputes, perceptions of the prevalence and causes of paternity fraud, attitudes toward DNA testing, and views on the legal and social responses to paternity fraud. The questionnaire was pre-tested with a pilot sample of 30 respondents from the target population to assess clarity, comprehensiveness, and internal consistency. Based on the pilot testing results, minor modifications were made to improve question clarity and reduce ambiguity. The final questionnaire was administered in person by trained research assistants in the local languages as needed to ensure comprehension, with responses recorded in English for standardisation.

Data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27. Descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were calculated to summarise the characteristics of the sample and responses to survey questions. Inferential statistical analyses were performed to examine relationships between variables and test hypotheses derived from the theoretical framework. Chi-square tests were used to examine associations between categorical variables, while independent t-tests and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were conducted to compare means across groups. The data are presented

in tabular form with narrative explanations to facilitate interpretation of findings. The analysis was guided by the research objectives and theoretical framework, with findings interpreted in light of the sociological literature on paternity fraud in Nigeria.

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the University where the research was conducted. All participants provided informed consent prior to participation, with the nature and purpose of the study explained in clear and accessible language. Participants were assured of their anonymity and confidentiality, with identifying information collected separately from responses and stored securely. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Given the sensitive nature of paternity fraud, special care was taken to ensure that questions were framed in a non-judgmental manner and that participants were not caused distress by the questioning. Resources for psychological support were made available to participants who expressed distress during or after the survey.

IV. Results And Discussion Of Findings

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The demographic characteristics of the survey respondents provide important context for understanding the findings regarding perceptions and experiences of paternity fraud in Nigeria. Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the 384 respondents who participated in this study.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N=384)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	192	50.0%
	Female	192	50.0%
Age Group	18-30 years	96	25.0%
	31-40 years	115	30.0%
	41-50 years	96	25.0%
	51 years and above	77	20.0%
Marital Status	Married	211	55.0%
	Single	134	35.0%
	Divorced/Separated	27	7.0%
	Widowed	12	3.0%
State of Residence	Lagos	96	25.0%
	Oyo	64	16.7%
	Enugu	58	15.1%
	Rivers	54	14.1%
	Kano	54	14.1%
	FCT Abuja	58	15.1%
Educational Level	No formal education	31	8.1%
	Primary education	58	15.1%
	Secondary education	96	25.0%
	Tertiary education	199	51.8%
Ethnicity	Yoruba	134	35.0%
	Igbo	115	30.0%
	Hausa	88	23.0%
	Others	46	12.0%

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 1 shows that the sample included an equal number of male and female respondents, ensuring gender balance in the analysis of perceptions regarding paternity fraud. The age distribution reflected a broad representation across age groups, with the majority of respondents falling within the 31-40 years age bracket (30%), followed by those aged 18-30 years and 41-50 years at 25% each. This age distribution is appropriate for a study on paternity fraud, as it captures individuals in their prime childbearing and child-rearing years. The marital status distribution revealed that the majority of respondents were currently married (55%), while 35% were single, 7% were divorced or separated, and 3% were widowed. This distribution is representative of the marital patterns in Nigerian society, where marriage remains a dominant social institution.

The geographical distribution of the sample was designed to capture Nigeria's regional diversity, with the highest proportion of respondents from Lagos State (25%), reflecting its status as Nigeria's most populous state and the centre of DNA testing activity. Oyo State accounted for 16.7% of respondents, while Enugu, Rivers, Kano, and the Federal Capital Territory each contributed between 14% and 15% of the sample. The educational profile of respondents showed that the majority had attained tertiary education (51.8%), followed by secondary education (25%), primary education (15.1%), and no formal education (8.1%). The relatively high educational level of respondents reflects the literacy requirements for participation in the survey and the urban location of many respondents. The ethnic composition of the sample included 35% Yoruba, 30% Igbo, 23% Hausa, and 12%

from other ethnic groups, providing broad ethnic representation for the analysis of cultural variations in perceptions of paternity fraud.

Awareness and Knowledge of Paternity Fraud

Table 2 presents respondents' awareness and knowledge of paternity fraud, including their familiarity with the concept and their perceptions of its prevalence in Nigerian society.

Table 2: Awareness and Knowledge of Paternity Fraud (N=384)

Item	Response	Frequency	Percentage
Heard of Paternity Fraud	Yes	350	91.1%
	No	34	8.9%
Source of Information	Media (TV/Radio)	154	44.0%
	Social Media	96	27.4%
	Friends/Family	58	16.6%
	Personal Experience	23	6.6%
	Workplace	19	5.4%
Perceived Prevalence	Very Common	134	35.0%
	Common	154	40.1%
	Rare	58	15.1%
	Very Rare	38	9.9%
Know Someone Affected	Yes	153	39.8%
	No	231	60.2%

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 2 reveals that the vast majority of respondents (91.1%) had heard of paternity fraud, indicating high levels of awareness of this phenomenon in Nigerian society. This high awareness may be attributable to extensive media coverage of paternity fraud cases, including dramatic stories of men discovering that they were not the biological fathers of their children. The sources of information about paternity fraud reveal that traditional media remains the most significant channel, with 44% of respondents reporting that they learned about paternity fraud through television or radio. Social media also emerged as an important source of information, cited by 27.4% of respondents, reflecting the growing role of digital platforms in shaping public discourse on sensitive social issues. Friends and family served as sources of information for 16.6% of respondents, while personal experience and workplace accounted for 6.6% and 5.4% respectively.

Regarding perceptions of prevalence, the majority of respondents believed that paternity fraud is common in Nigerian society, with 35% describing it as very common and 40.1% describing it as common. Only 15.1% of respondents considered paternity fraud to be rare, and 9.9% considered it very rare. This perception of high prevalence aligns with the empirical data from DNA testing centres, which indicate a paternity exclusion rate of approximately 25%. The finding that nearly 40% of respondents reported knowing someone who had been affected by paternity fraud highlights the social reach of this phenomenon and its impact beyond individual victims. These findings suggest that paternity fraud is not merely a statistical abstraction but a lived reality for a substantial proportion of Nigerian adults, with significant implications for trust in marital relationships and the perceived stability of the family institution.

Perceived Causes of Paternity Fraud

Table 3 presents respondents' perceptions of the factors that contribute to the prevalence of paternity fraud in Nigerian society.

Table 3: Perceived Causes of Paternity Fraud (N=384)

Perceived Cause	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean Score
Cultural pressure to bear children	38.0%	35.0%	15.0%	8.0%	4.0%	3.95
Economic insecurity of women	35.0%	38.0%	16.0%	7.0%	4.0%	3.93
Fear of divorce/stigma	32.0%	40.0%	13.0%	10.0%	5.0%	3.84
Patriarchal inheritance system	30.0%	35.0%	20.0%	10.0%	5.0%	3.75
Infidelity in marriages	28.0%	38.0%	18.0%	11.0%	5.0%	3.73
Lack of legal consequences	25.0%	35.0%	25.0%	10.0%	5.0%	3.65
Social media influence	20.0%	30.0%	28.0%	15.0%	7.0%	3.41
Geographical separation of spouses	18.0%	28.0%	30.0%	18.0%	6.0%	3.34

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Note: Mean scores are calculated on a 5-point scale where 5 = Strongly Agree and 1 = Strongly Disagree

Table 3 reveals that respondents identified cultural, economic, and social factors as the primary drivers of paternity fraud in Nigeria. The highest-rated cause was cultural pressure to bear children, with a mean score of 3.95, as 73% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that this pressure contributes to paternity fraud. This finding

reflects the intense cultural expectations placed on women to produce children, particularly male children, as a means of fulfilling their roles within marriage and family. The cultural pressure to bear children creates powerful incentives for women to conceal the truth about a child's paternity rather than facing the social consequences of infertility or producing a child outside the marital relationship (Metuonu, 2025).

Economic insecurity of women emerged as the second most significant perceived cause, with a mean score of 3.93, as 73% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this factor. This finding highlights the economic vulnerability that many Nigerian women face, particularly in the context of patriarchal structures that limit women's access to economic resources and opportunities. For women who depend on their husbands for financial support, the prospect of divorce or abandonment due to childlessness can be economically devastating, creating incentives to engage in paternity fraud to maintain their economic security (Metuonu, 2025). The economic dimension of paternity fraud is particularly relevant in the context of Nigeria's high poverty rates and limited social safety nets, which leave women with few alternatives to maintaining their marital relationships.

The fear of divorce or stigma received a mean score of 3.84, with 72% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that this fear contributes to paternity fraud. This finding underscores the social consequences that women face when they are unable to bear children or when their marital fidelity is called into question. In Nigerian society, divorce can result in significant social stigma and economic hardship for women, making the preservation of marriage a matter of survival for many. The patriarchal inheritance system, which privileges male children and paternal lineage, received a mean score of 3.75, with 65% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that this system contributes to paternity fraud. This finding reflects the importance of male children in Nigerian inheritance systems and the pressure on women to produce male heirs to secure their positions within their marital families.

Consequences of Paternity Fraud

Table 4 presents respondents' perceptions of the consequences of paternity fraud for individuals, families, and society.

Table 4: Perceived Consequences of Paternity Fraud (N=384)

Consequence	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean Score
Emotional trauma for father	45.0%	38.0%	10.0%	5.0%	2.0%	4.19
Breakdown of marriage/family	42.0%	40.0%	10.0%	5.0%	3.0%	4.13
Identity crisis for child	40.0%	38.0%	12.0%	7.0%	3.0%	4.05
Erosion of trust in relationships	38.0%	40.0%	12.0%	7.0%	3.0%	4.03
Financial exploitation of father	35.0%	38.0%	15.0%	8.0%	4.0%	3.92
Social stigma for all parties	30.0%	35.0%	20.0%	10.0%	5.0%	3.75
Psychological distress for child	28.0%	40.0%	18.0%	10.0%	4.0%	3.78
Threat to inheritance systems	25.0%	35.0%	25.0%	10.0%	5.0%	3.65
Strain on extended family	22.0%	35.0%	28.0%	10.0%	5.0%	3.59

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Note: Mean scores are calculated on a 5-point scale where 5 = Strongly Agree and 1 = Strongly Disagree

Table 4 demonstrates that respondents perceived the consequences of paternity fraud as substantial and far-reaching, affecting individuals, families, and broader social structures. The highest-rated consequence was emotional trauma for the father, with a mean score of 4.19, as 83% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that paternity fraud causes significant emotional distress. This finding aligns with documented cases of men experiencing severe psychological reactions to discovering that children they have raised are not biologically theirs, including depression, anxiety, and in some cases, suicidal ideation (Ikalume, 2025). The emotional trauma associated with paternity fraud stems from the profound betrayal of trust, the disruption of identity and sense of self, and the grief over lost relationships with children who are not biologically related to the presumed father.

The breakdown of marriage and family emerged as the second most significant consequence, with a mean score of 4.13, as 82% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that paternity fraud leads to marital dissolution. This finding highlights the destructive potential of paternity fraud for family stability, as the discovery of deception often leads to divorce, family fragmentation, and the disruption of the family as a unit of socialisation and support. The identity crisis for the child, with a mean score of 4.05, reflects the profound implications of paternity fraud for children's sense of self and belonging. Children who discover that the man they believed to be their father is not biologically related to them may struggle with questions of identity, heritage, and belonging that can have lasting consequences for their psychosocial development (Metuonu, 2025).

The erosion of trust in relationships received a mean score of 4.03, as 78% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that paternity fraud undermines trust in marital and familial relationships. This consequence extends beyond individual cases to affect broader social dynamics, as widespread paternity fraud can lead to pervasive suspicion in marriages and relationships, fundamentally altering the foundation of trust upon which families are built. Financial exploitation of the father, with a mean score of 3.92, reflects the economic dimension

of harm, as men who have been deceived into raising children who are not biologically theirs may have invested substantial resources in their upbringing. The threat to inheritance systems, with a mean score of 3.65, highlights the implications of paternity fraud for traditional lineage and inheritance practices that depend on accurate knowledge of biological parentage.

Attitudes Toward DNA Testing and Legal Reform

Table 5 presents respondents' attitudes toward DNA testing for paternity determination and legal reforms to address paternity fraud.

Table 5: Attitudes Toward DNA Testing and Legal Reform (N=384)

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean Score
DNA testing should be mandatory at birth	40.0%	35.0%	15.0%	7.0%	3.0%	4.02
Paternity fraud should be criminalised	45.0%	32.0%	12.0%	8.0%	3.0%	4.08
Legal remedies should be available for victims	42.0%	35.0%	13.0%	7.0%	3.0%	4.06
Men have a right to know their biological children	48.0%	35.0%	10.0%	5.0%	2.0%	4.22
DNA testing undermines family trust	15.0%	25.0%	25.0%	25.0%	10.0%	3.10
DNA testing should be more accessible and affordable	50.0%	38.0%	8.0%	3.0%	1.0%	4.33
Public education on paternity fraud is needed	45.0%	40.0%	10.0%	4.0%	1.0%	4.24
Cultural norms discourage DNA testing	20.0%	30.0%	25.0%	18.0%	7.0%	3.38

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Note: Mean scores are calculated on a 5-point scale where 5 = Strongly Agree and 1 = Strongly Disagree

Table 5 reveals strong support among respondents for DNA testing and legal reforms to address paternity fraud. The highest-rated statement was that DNA testing should be more accessible and affordable, with a mean score of 4.33, as 88% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this proposition. This finding reflects widespread recognition that the financial and logistical barriers to DNA testing prevent many men from establishing the truth of their paternity, limiting the detection and prevention of paternity fraud. The high level of support for increased access to DNA testing aligns with the geographic concentration of testing in Lagos and other urban centres, suggesting that many Nigerians who might seek testing are unable to do so due to cost or accessibility constraints.

The statement that men have a right to know their biological children received a mean score of 4.22, with 83% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing. This finding reflects the widespread belief that men should not be deceived about their biological parentage and that the truth is fundamental to the integrity of familial relationships. The support for criminalisation of paternity fraud, with a mean score of 4.08, indicates that respondents perceive paternity fraud as a serious offence that should be punished under the law. This finding suggests public support for legal reform to address the current gaps in the Nigerian legal framework, which provides no explicit criminal sanctions for paternity fraud. The statement that legal remedies should be available for victims received a mean score of 4.06, with 77% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that affected men should have recourse to justice and compensation.

The statement that DNA testing should be mandatory at birth received a mean score of 4.02, with 75% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with this proposition. This finding reflects a desire for systematic prevention of paternity fraud through the integration of DNA testing into the birth registration process, although the practical implications of such a policy would require careful consideration of costs, logistics, and potential unintended consequences. The statement that public education on paternity fraud is needed received a mean score of 4.24, with 85% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing. This finding suggests that respondents perceive awareness-raising and education as important components of a comprehensive response to paternity fraud, addressing the cultural norms and social pressures that contribute to its prevalence.

V. Conclusion And Recommendations

Conclusion

This study has examined the sociological implications of paternity fraud in Nigeria, drawing on survey data from 384 respondents across six states to investigate the prevalence, causes, consequences, and societal perceptions of this phenomenon. The findings reveal that paternity fraud is a pervasive social issue that affects a substantial proportion of Nigerian families, with implications that extend far beyond the individual victims to encompass broader concerns of family stability, gender relations, and social trust. The study found that the vast majority of Nigerians are aware of paternity fraud, with nearly 40% of respondents knowing someone who has

been personally affected by this phenomenon. This high level of awareness and personal connection underscores the significance of paternity fraud as a social issue that demands attention from policymakers, social institutions, and the broader society.

The study identified cultural pressure to bear children, economic insecurity of women, and fear of divorce or stigma as the primary perceived causes of paternity fraud in Nigeria. These findings highlight the structural inequalities and cultural norms that shape women's reproductive choices and create conditions conducive to deception. The pressure on women to produce children, particularly male children, as a means of securing their positions within marriage and society represents a fundamental driver of paternity fraud that cannot be addressed through legal measures alone. Similarly, the economic vulnerability of women in patriarchal societies creates incentives for deception that must be addressed through broader economic empowerment and social support initiatives.

The consequences of paternity fraud were perceived by respondents as severe and far-reaching, encompassing emotional trauma for fathers, breakdown of marriages and families, identity crises for children, and erosion of trust in relationships. These findings underscore the destructive potential of paternity fraud for the family as a social institution and for the individuals within it. The discovery of paternity fraud can have devastating psychological effects on all parties involved, with implications that may persist throughout their lives. The erosion of trust in relationships extends beyond individual cases to affect broader social dynamics, as pervasive suspicion in marriages threatens the foundation of the family as a unit of socialisation and support.

The study found strong support among respondents for DNA testing and legal reforms to address paternity fraud, including calls for increased accessibility and affordability of DNA testing, criminalisation of paternity fraud, and the provision of legal remedies for victims. This public support for reform reflects recognition that the current legal framework is inadequate to address the challenges posed by paternity fraud and that systematic interventions are needed to prevent deception and provide justice for victims. However, the study also identified cultural norms that may discourage DNA testing and limit the acceptability of such interventions in traditional settings, highlighting the need for culturally sensitive approaches that respect cultural values while promoting truth and accountability.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to address the sociological implications of paternity fraud in Nigeria:

Legal Reforms: The Nigerian government should enact comprehensive legislation to address paternity fraud, including the criminalisation of deliberate paternity misattribution and the provision of civil remedies for victims. Legislation should establish clear legal procedures for establishing paternity, including provisions for court-ordered DNA testing in appropriate circumstances while respecting constitutional protections of privacy. The enactment of a comprehensive Parentage and Paternity Act, as recommended by legal scholars, would provide a framework for addressing the legal dimensions of paternity fraud and ensuring justice for victims (Iwowo et al., 2026). Such legislation should also address the rights of children affected by paternity fraud, including provisions for their protection, identity, and well-being.

Healthcare and Birth Registration: The integration of DNA testing into healthcare and birth registration systems should be explored as a means of establishing paternity at birth and preventing paternity fraud. While the implementation of mandatory DNA testing at birth would require careful consideration of costs, logistics, and potential unintended consequences, the expansion of access to voluntary DNA testing through public healthcare facilities could help to identify and prevent paternity fraud. Birth registration processes should be strengthened to include accurate recording of paternity information, with DNA testing available as a verification mechanism when there are questions about biological parentage.

Economic Empowerment of Women: Addressing the economic dimensions of paternity fraud requires efforts to empower women economically and reduce their vulnerability to exploitation and deception. Initiatives to improve women's access to education, employment, and financial resources can reduce the incentives to engage in paternity fraud as a survival strategy. Social protection programmes that provide economic support for single mothers and vulnerable families can also contribute to reducing the economic pressures that drive some women to deception. Such initiatives should be accompanied by efforts to challenge patriarchal structures that limit women's economic opportunities and create conditions of dependence within marriage.

Public Education and Awareness: Comprehensive public education campaigns are needed to raise awareness of the prevalence and consequences of paternity fraud and to promote ethical behaviour and accountability in family relationships. Education campaigns should address the cultural norms that contribute to paternity fraud, including

the pressure on women to bear children and the stigma associated with childlessness. Public education should also promote awareness of the availability and importance of DNA testing for establishing paternity and should address misconceptions about genetic science that may limit the uptake of testing. Faith-based organisations, community leaders, and traditional institutions should be engaged in these education efforts to ensure their cultural relevance and effectiveness.

Cultural and Social Change: Addressing the root causes of paternity fraud requires cultural and social change that challenges patriarchal norms and promotes gender equality in family relationships. Efforts should be made to reduce the cultural pressure on women to bear children as a condition of marriage and to promote acceptance of diverse family forms, including childless marriages and families with adopted children. Inheritance systems that privilege male children and paternal lineage should be reformed to ensure fairness and to reduce the pressure on women to produce male heirs. Such reforms should be pursued through a combination of legal change and cultural dialogue that engages traditional institutions and community leaders.

Support Services: The establishment of support services for victims of paternity fraud is essential to address the psychological and social consequences of this phenomenon. Counselling services should be available for men who discover that they are not the biological fathers of their children, as well as for children and other family members affected by paternity fraud. Such services should address the emotional trauma, identity issues, and family relationship challenges that arise from the discovery of paternity fraud. Support groups for affected individuals can provide peer support and reduce the social isolation that often accompanies these revelations.

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