

FROM BELIEF TO KNOWLEDGE: THE RISING PATERNITY FRAUD DISPUTE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS IN SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The phenomenon of paternity fraud, which has become one of the recurrent and prominent social problems in present day Nigeria, has earned the country a contemptuous position in its global ranking in recent times. Despite the societal condemnation and disposition towards this awful social ill and the potency of scientific innovations in detecting it, the menace continues to be persistent across the country as high de-humanizing episodes are being reported particularly in southwestern region from time to time. Premised on the above, this article investigates this prevailing problem of paternity fraud in southwestern Nigeria by exploring the nature, causes and broader implications of the social problem. This article adopts a critical-analytical method and is anchored on rational choice theory, constructivist theory and pragmatism. It further examined empirical data, expert analysis, documentary evidence and media reports to offer a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon. It also lends credence to the distinction between justified true belief and knowledge in the light of “Gettier's critique. The article argues that, while the causal factors of paternity discrepancy are multi-dimensional comprising cultural factors, socio-economic factors, gaps in regulation, and professional shortcomings, its implications include domestic violence, psychological trauma, divorce, mental health disorder and untimely death. It concludes that there is an urgent need for specific legislation, public education and upholding of professional ethics in medical and laboratory practices with a view to reducing the widespread occurrences of paternity fraud and its attendant disputes to the barest minimum.

Keywords: Paternity Fraud, Disputes, Infidelity, Deception, Southwest

Introduction

Paternity fraud has emerged as a significant global social problem in recent years, with numerous startling cases reported across both developed and developing societies. Conceptually, paternity fraud, which is also termed “misattributed paternity” or “paternal discrepancy”, refers to the intentional misidentification of a man as the biological father of a child (Efut & Chiagoziem, 2021; Metuonu, 2025). According to global data from the American Association of Blood Banks, approximately 100,000 of the 300,000 men tested annually are found not to be biologically related to children they had presumed to be theirs (Anyago & Ozioko, 2019). This suggests that roughly one in every three men worldwide may unknowingly raise a child with whom they share no genetic ties (Okechukwu & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2025). The widespread recurrence of paternity fraud has thus elevated it to the status of a complex social epidemic in the 21st century. Its severity has drawn scholarly attention from a wide array of disciplines, including Medicine, Public Health, Law, Psychology, Religion, Ethics, Sociology, Biological Sciences, Guidance and Counselling, Criminology, and Family Studies. The contentious nature of paternity fraud has led to deep familial conflicts, destabilizing previously harmonious households. Many families are currently experiencing crises or dissolution, often leaving children to endure the long-term consequences (Orhe et al., 2025). This reality persists because the affected men respond in varied ways: some

internalize the trauma, some resort to domestic violence, while others abruptly terminate their marriages, leading to emotional and economic losses.

Historically, in pre-colonial African societies, moral norms were strictly upheld across social strata, and infidelity was strongly condemned. Fear of ancestral or spiritual retribution served as a deterrent, making cases of paternity fraud rare (Orhe et al., 2025). Nevertheless, cultural pressures relating to lineage continuation and inheritance occasionally drove married women to engage in extramarital affairs, especially in pursuit of male offspring. Such women were stigmatized, believed to be cursed by spiritual forces, and were often ostracized (Akus, 2025). In contemporary times, the anxiety associated with potential co-wives and the social stigma of infertility has pushed some women into actions considered immoral. Despite these issues, traditional African societies generally resisted discriminating against children based on paternity; rather, communal systems existed to integrate all children into the kinship structure. This approach was not an endorsement of infidelity but a means of safeguarding children from suffering the consequences of parental actions (Akingboye et al., 2024). Non-scientific methods of determining paternity in Nigeria traditionally relied on perceived physical resemblance, knowledge of sexual relations around the time of conception, and in some communities in southern part of the country, the newborn babies are taken to the river for a ritual to determine their paternity.

In Nigeria, paternity fraud gained national prominence during the introduction of visa lottery programmes, when paternity testing became a prerequisite for travel documentation. Many men learned of misattributed paternity at foreign embassies, occasionally resulting in public confrontations that prompted increased security measures. Public awareness of the phenomenon has since expanded, amplified by Nollywood films that depict marital infidelity as relatively commonplace (Orhe et al., 2025). Claims that Nigeria ranks second globally after Jamaica in paternity discrepancy rates, with estimates as high as 30 percent, have further intensified public concern. The rising prevalence has also stimulated increased demand for paternity testing nationwide and if unreported cases were publicly documented, Nigeria might surpass existing global estimates.

Although paternity tests are conducted for various reasons including immigration, which accounts for 13.1 percent, suspected paternity discrepancy remains the most dominant motivation, driven by growing public awareness (Okechukwu & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2025). Approximately 83.7 percent of tests are initiated by private individuals rather than courts. The report that men account for 88.2 percent of all test requests, while women make up only 11.8 percent, indicates that men initiate nine out of ten tests. The highest proportion of test seekers falls within the 41–50 age group (41 percent), followed by men aged 31–40 (38 percent). Firstborn children exhibit the highest rates of misattributed paternity compared to subsequent siblings (Okoro, 2025). Lagos State records 69 percent of all tests conducted, reflecting high levels of awareness, while Delta, Ogun, and Oyo states also show significant testing activity. Notably, paternity tests conducted between July 2024 and June 2025 recorded a 25 percent non-paternity rate, meaning that one in every four presumed fathers tested was not biologically related to the child in question (Okoye, 2025).

It has been observed that the existing research, such as works by Efut and Chiagoziem (2021), Akingboye et al. (2024), Metuonu (2025), and Orhe et al. (2025), concentrate on and examine paternity fraud from a national perspective. Limited research specifically focuses on southwestern Nigeria, which available data suggest may likely be the epicentre of the social problem. This article therefore seeks to address this gap by offering a comprehensive analysis of paternity fraud within the southwest geo-political zone. Against this backdrop, the present study aims to critically investigate the causes and implications of the prevalence of paternity fraud in southwestern Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification

Paternity fraud refers to the deliberate misrepresentation of a child's biological father. It occurs when a woman intentionally attributes a child's paternity to a man who is not the biological parent, a practice that often results in significant emotional, financial, ethical and legal implications (Jidefor, 2024; Metuonu, 2025). In this context, paternity fraud entails intentional deception and the concealment of vital information, leading the “social father” to mistakenly regard himself as the genetic father of a child (Akingboye et al., 2024; Orhe, 2025). A closely related notion is misattributed paternity, which describes situations in which a man is incorrectly presumed to be a child's biological father. This presumption may arise from deliberate concealment by the mother or from circumstances unrelated to marital dynamics (Draper, 2007). Misattributed paternity occurs when an individual is mistakenly identified as the genetic parent or when a child assumes that their social father is also their biological father, while the actual biological parent remains unidentified (Cerfontyne et al., 2024). Such cases are often uncovered during medical assessments or DNA testing, prompted by concerns regarding physical dissimilarities or suspicions of infidelity (Draper, 2007). Additionally, misattributed paternity may occur without the mother's knowledge, particularly in instances involving clinical or laboratory errors. It ultimately reflects a breakdown in the alignment between genetic and social kinship, shaped by misinformation, mistaken beliefs, and professional negligence (Akingboye et al., 2024). In contemporary contexts, the most reliable and widely used method for determining biological paternity is Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA) testing.

Literature Review

Paternity fraud has been widely examined across ethical, legal, and socio-cultural dimensions, with scholars highlighting its profound implications globally. Although its prevalence appears to be increasing, Nigeria still lacks explicit legislation criminalizing the act, creating a significant gap in legal and policy responses (Metuonu, 2025). Several studies have explored the motivations behind paternity fraud. Bourne et al. (2023), in their investigation of Jamaica, found that financial security is a major determinant, with women more likely to misattribute paternity when the presumed father is financially stable. Their study revealed that 12.1% of women aged 18 and above admitted to knowingly assigning paternity incorrectly, while 30.1% expressed unwillingness to undertake DNA testing for their children. They also noted that paternity inconsistencies may be intentional or may arise from maternal uncertainty about the biological father, suggesting both deliberate and inadvertent forms of misattribution.

Within the Nigerian context, Adegbite (2024) analyses the judicial application of DNA testing, arguing that although DNA evidence has become increasingly common, it lacks coherent institutional regulation within the legal system. Meanwhile, Okechukwu and Isiugo-Abanihe (2025) emphasize the central role of women's agency, contending that paternity discrepancy often results from women's actions or inactions. They identify children as the primary victims and further argue that women typically display greater tolerance for paternity discrepancies compared to men. Trust in DNA testing as a verification tool has also featured prominently in scholarly discussions. Adum and Efoby (2025), studying married Igbo individuals in southeastern Nigeria, report a strong level of confidence in DNA testing for establishing biological paternity despite concerns about potential human error or fraud. Bellis et al. (2005) add a public health perspective, underscoring the complexities surrounding disclosure. They caution that exposing paternity discrepancies can lead to family instability and violence, while nondisclosure perpetuates misinformation about genetic lineage and sustains paternal uncertainty. They further argue that the increasing use of DNA technologies in medical and judicial processes will inevitably lead to the identification of more cases.

From a broader socio-cultural perspective, Ikalume (2025) conceptualizes paternity fraud as a societal rather than a purely individual crisis. He asserts that its consequences, such as erosion of trust and breakdown of family structures, constitute a serious moral and cultural threat. The absence of targeted legislation, in his view, has allowed the issue to escalate, compounding existing social challenges.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Rational Choice Theory, Constructivist Theory, and Pragmatism. Rational Choice Theory is predicated on the assumption that individuals make decisions based on calculated choices intended to maximize personal benefits and minimize potential losses. It posits that human beings act according to their preferences in a deliberate and utility-driven manner, consistently seeking outcomes that advance their self-interest (Akhilesh, 2025). Applied to the context of paternity fraud, the theory suggests that some women may deliberately assign paternity in ways that serve their strategic interests, for example, securing financial stability for themselves and their children. In situations involving multiple concurrent sexual partnerships, the decision to attribute paternity to a particular partner may therefore be rational and purposive. When such attribution is inaccurate, paternal discrepancy emerges as a consequence of this decision-making process.

Constructivist theory provides a complementary lens by framing paternity fraud as a socially constructed phenomenon. It emphasizes that societal norms, cultural expectations, and collective meanings inform how individuals understand paternity, kinship, and family roles. From this perspective, the interpretation and practice of paternity and the conditions under which discrepancies occur, are shaped by social contexts rather than purely biological determinants. Pragmatism, on the other hand, directs attention to the practical implications of paternity fraud. A pragmatic stance prioritizes the concrete consequences of the issue, focusing on strategies to manage, resolve, or mitigate the harms associated with paternal discrepancy. This approach underscores the need for practical solutions that address both immediate and long-term effects on families and society.

Overview of Paternity Fraud Disputes in Southwestern Nigeria

Concerns about paternity fraud have intensified in Southwestern Nigeria, particularly as an increasing number of men discover that they are not the biological fathers of their presumed children. The issue has gained prominence in states such as Lagos, Oyo, and Osun, where several high profile and publicly reported cases have surfaced. In Lagos State, the phenomenon has become especially visible: in 2024, 27 percent of paternity tests conducted returned negative results. A recent data from a Lagos-based DNA testing centre, covering July 2024 to June 2025, showed that 25 percent of all tests conducted during this period were negative; indicating that more than one in every four men tested was not the child's biological father. Lagos continues to serve as the principal hub for DNA testing, accounting for 69 percent of all cases recorded. A spatial shift was also noted, with testing activity moving from the Mainland (59.4 percent) toward the Island (40.6 percent), and Lekki emerging as the leading single location with 20.3 percent of all cases. Ethnic distribution revealed that Yoruba clients constituted 53 percent of those tested, followed by Igbo at 31.3 percent, while Hausa accounted for only 1.2 percent.

In the Southwestern region, DNA testing is typically pursued not only for immigration-related purposes but more commonly due to suspicions arising within domestic settings, particularly concerning the paternity of firstborns and male children. The report further indicated that 83.7 percent of DNA tests were initiated for personal reassurance rather than legal requirements, with court-ordered tests constituting only 1.4 percent of cases (Obinna, 2025). A number of widely publicized cases, including those involving celebrities, have further drawn attention to the issue of paternity fraud in the region.

Table 1: Prominent Cases of Paternity Fraud in Southwest Nigeria

S/N	Year	State	Initiator	Child involved	DNA result	Source
1.	September, 2023	Lagos	Joseph Aloba (father of the late singer-Ileri Oluwa Aloba popularly known as Mohbad)	Liam (Mohbad's son)		Ige, T., Egodo-Michael, O. and Ayantoye, D. (2025). Concerns Mount over 25% Paternity Fraud Report. Punch Newspapers. https://punchng.com/concerns-mount-over-25-paternity-fraud-report/
2	2014	Oyo	Nigerian Singer David Adedeji Adeleke (Davido) and his family arising from the allegation by Ayotomide Labinjo that she had a daughter for the singer in 2013	Anuoluwa po Michelle Adeleke (Daughter)	Negative	Ige, T., Egodo-Michael, O. and Ayantoye, D. (2025). Concerns Mount over 25% Paternity Fraud Report. Punch Newspapers. https://punchng.com/concerns-mount-over-25-paternity-fraud-report/
3.	2006	Lagos	Femi Kuti (Afro beat Master)	Two of his children	Negative	Ige, et. al (2025, August 23). Concerns Mount over 25% Paternity Fraud Report. Healthwise. https://healthwise.punchng.com/concerns-mount-over-25-paternity-fraud-report/
4	2021	Lagos	Chinedu Emmanuel Ani (Media personality and Comedian popularly known as Nedu)	First son	Negative	Banjo, N. (2021, September 5). Constant Infidelity Made Me conduct Paternity Tests on Kids-Nedu. Punch Newspapers. https://punchng.com/constant-infidelity-made-me-conduct-paternity-tests-on-kids-nedu/?amp

5.	2023	Osun	Olanrewaju Kolawole	Four children	Negative	Ayeni, V. (2024, September 8). Heartbreaking Stories of Men Damaged by Paternity Fraud. Punch Newspapers. https://punchng.com/heartbreaking-stories-of-men-damaged-by-paternity-fraud/
6.	March, 2024	Oyo	Stephen Moses	First child (son)	Negative	News Express (2024, September 8).Heartbreaking of Men Damaged by Paternity Fraud. https://newsexpressngr.com/news/237043
7.	2021	Lagos	Tunde Thomas	Second child	Negative	Adebayo, M. (2023, November 17). Nigerians Hold Divergent Views As Paternity Fraud Allegations Rock many Families. Daily Post. https://dailypost.ng/2023/11/17/nigerians-hold-divergent-views-as-paternity-fraud-allegations-rock-many-families/
8.	2023	Lagos	Mosh (Lagos Big Boy) accused Yomi Alore also known as Yomi Gold (Nollywood Actor) of being the	Second child		Ifunaaya (2023, February 3). Paternity Scandal: My Life is in Danger-Yomi Gold Cries Out. MediaTalk Africa. https://mediatalkafrica.com/15383/paternity-scandal-my-life-is-in-danger-yomgold-cries-out/
9.	June,2025	Oyo	Oluwatoyin Alao-Aderinto (first daughter of the late Oyo State Governor Adebayo Alao Akala	Seven individuals	Requesting court order for DNA tests to verify the paternity of seven individuals claiming to be the biological children of the deceased	Ajisebi Oyo Radio (2025, June 21). Daughter of Late Oyo Governor Seeks Court Order for DNA Test and Exhumation to Verify Siblings' Paternity. https://ajisebioyoradio.com/2025/06/21/daughter-of-late-oyo-governor-seeks-court-order-for-dna-test-and-exhumation-to-verify-siblings-paternity/

10.	January, 2025	Oyo	Adeyemi Adebisi Aminat (the late Alaafin Oyo's daughter)	Once child	Accusation of late Alaafin's ex- wife, Queen Dami, of paternity fraud	Adelani, K. (2025, January 17). Late Alaafin of Oyo's Daughter Accuses Queen Dami of Paternity Fraud. Newsclick NG. https://newsclickingng.com/amp/entertainment/late-alaafin-of-oyos-daughter-accuses-queen-dami-of-paternity-fraud/
11.	September, 2023	Okun Owa, Odogbolu LGA of Ogun State	Arinze Igbonakwu (24 years) allegedly set Esther, his ex-girlfriend (18 years), the new born baby and	One newborn baby who died on the spot while Esther died later in the hospital	There was no test. Arinze bore all financial responsibilities during her pregnancy	Oke, T. (2023, September 7). Paternity Fraud: Man Sets Ex-Girlfriend, Newborn Baby and 3 Others Alaze in Ogun State. (Photos) The Eagle. https://theeagle.com.ng/paternity-fraud-man-sets-ex-girlfriend-newborn-baby-3-others-ablaze-in-ogun-state-photos/

Causes of Paternity Fraud in South Western Nigeria

Paternity fraud reflects a profound breakdown of trust between spouses and is shaped by a complex interplay of cultural and socio-economic factors. Contemporary societal transformations such as increasing rates of infidelity, financial instability (which drives some women into multiple sexual partnerships), premarital sexual activity, male impotence, moral decline, social media influences, spousal separation owing to migration or employment, fear of relationship dissolution, and workplace interactions contribute significantly to the phenomenon. In the Nigerian context, paternity fraud is rooted more strongly in patriarchal structures and cultural expectations surrounding fertility and lineage than in deliberate acts of adultery (Okechukwu & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2025).

Traditional Nigerian society places considerable value on childbearing, particularly the birth of male children who are viewed as carriers of family lineage. Within such a patriarchal environment, women often face immense pressure to produce offspring, and this pressure is heightened when husbands experience infertility or impotence. Given that women are typically blamed and subjected to social ridicule for childlessness, many resort to extreme measures to preserve their marriages and protect their husbands' reputations (Akingboye et al., 2024). Consequently, some women may deliberately misattribute paternity to avoid stigma, safeguard marital stability, uphold perceptions of male virility, or shield themselves and their children from societal condemnation.

Additional contributing factors include the high cost of paternity testing in Nigeria, which often delays verification until suspicions escalate. Although contemporary genetic and medical testing methods are highly accurate, they are not entirely infallible. In environments with limited regulation, laboratory errors, sample contamination, or mistakes in reproductive procedures such as incorrect semen use during artificial insemination or in vitro fertilization may result in unintentional paternity misattribution (Akingboye et al., 2024). Beyond the pursuit of emotional or physical gratification, Nigeria's current economic hardships have also driven some married women to engage in sexual relationships outside marriage for financial benefits, further contributing to the

growing occurrence of paternity fraud (Orhe, 2025).

Implications of Paternity Fraud in Southwestern Nigeria

Paternity fraud constitutes a significant social problem with far-reaching emotional, economic, and relational repercussions for all parties involved. Its implications are particularly profound in a society that strongly identifies with religious and moral ideals. Beyond tarnishing the country's reputation by reinforcing narratives of infidelity and mistrust, the phenomenon heightens the likelihood of family instability, including marital dissolution, domestic dislocation, and divorce. In Southwestern Nigeria, revelations of misattributed paternity have been linked to severe outcomes for men, including sudden death, cardiac complications, stigmatization, and the collapse of marital unions. Paternity fraud therefore transcends numerical prevalence; it disrupts interpersonal trust, destabilizes personal identity, and often leaves enduring psychological wounds.

For presumed fathers, the disclosure of false paternity frequently generates feelings of betrayal, loss of dignity, and financial depletion, particularly where they have provided child support based on inaccurate assumptions of biological kinship. Children similarly face identity confusion, emotional distress, and potential legal challenges, especially in contexts involving immigration documentation. Mothers, on the other hand, are often entangled in pressures to safeguard familial reputation, conform to societal expectations, or preserve relationships, sometimes at irreversible personal or relational costs. The psychological distress that accompanies such disclosures can be devastating, potentially aggravating Nigeria's already high incidence of suicide, homicide, mental health disorders, and contributing more broadly to diminished life expectancy. The emotional volatility associated with paternity revelations may also trigger domestic violence and ultimately precipitate marital breakdown (Okechukwu & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2025).

More broadly, paternity fraud and misattributed paternity fundamentally threaten the integrity of the family institution, which ideally rests on trust, affection, harmony, and mutual care. When a man is led to believe he is the biological father of a child or when paternity is erroneously attributed, the resultant emotional and social trauma can fracture the household and destabilize family functioning. The eventual disclosure of biological truth often damages the relational bond between the presumed father and the child, provokes intense emotional turmoil, distorts financial responsibilities, and may permit the biological father to evade his parental obligations. The consequences for both presumed father and child can therefore be profound. Although marriage is not a commercial contract that ordinarily attracts financial penalties, the element of deception inherent in paternity fraud aligns with civil law notions of fraud, misrepresentation, or inducement, suggesting that aggrieved spouses could legitimately seek compensation. Nonetheless, financial redress rarely remedies the deep psychological harm experienced by the "social father," nor does it compensate for the emotional investments, time, and care committed to the child as investments that may be perceived as irretrievably lost, particularly when the marriage collapses in the long run (Akingboye et al., 2024). For children, the discovery that the man who raised them is not their biological father can generate significant identity crises. Importantly, the social father may have offered emotional security and caregiving that the biological father could not provide, and disrupting such a relationship may have detrimental consequences for the child's psychological well-being (Akingboye et al., 2024).

Epistemological and Ethical Perspectives on Paternity Fraud

The dichotomy between belief (doxa) and knowledge (episteme) is a longstanding philosophical debate (Peterson, 1996; Kim, 2018). This classical distinction acquires renewed significance because it provides a crucial lens through which to examine the phenomenon of paternity fraud. This social problem exposes the fragile boundary between appearance and reality, between what one

takes to be true, and what *is* true. Knowledge, by definition, entails truth and verifiable justification; whereas belief may be held with conviction yet remain unsubstantiated or false. In this sense, belief represents subjective conviction, while knowledge aspires to objective certainty. Importantly, knowledge necessarily includes belief, as one cannot know without believing, but belief does not inherently or necessarily constitute or amount to knowledge (Omoregbe, 2000).

Paternity fraud vividly illustrates the epistemic tensions between belief and knowledge. A presumed father's conviction regarding his biological connection to a child may be deeply held and socially reinforced, yet this belief can be disrupted by incontrovertible evidence such as DNA testing. Such scenarios underscore the fragility and contingency of human knowledge, highlighting the limits of personal conviction when confronted with empirical verification. From the perspective of epistemology, this challenges the classical Justified True Belief (JTB) account. This is because a belief may be justified and true, yet fail to qualify as knowledge if the justification is flawed or contingent, as demonstrated in Gettier's (1963) seminal critique. In paternity fraud, a man may hold a justified belief about paternity based on relational cues or circumstantial evidence, which may coincidentally align with biological truth, yet the epistemic basis of his belief is contingent, exposing the probabilistic nature of knowledge.

Beyond epistemology, paternity fraud engages profound ontological and ethical considerations. The revelation of misattributed paternity can destabilize an individual's sense of self and relational identity, particularly when fatherhood constitutes a core aspect of personal and social identity. Trust, honesty, and relational integrity are thrown into crisis, and the emotional consequences underscore the inseparability of ethical and epistemic dimensions. Philosophical reflection reveals that paternity fraud is not merely a legal or biological problem, but a profound interrogation of what it means to know, to trust, and to be certain within the intersubjective realm of human relationships. Ethically, the phenomenon invites analysis through diverse moral frameworks. From an utilitarian perspective, the consequences of paternity fraud (emotional distress, familial disruption, financial burden) may be weighed against potential benefits (that is, possibly justifying paternity fraud if it leads to greater happiness), though such calculations are morally fraught. Deontological ethics emphasizes duty, honesty, and the impermissibility of deception, while virtue ethics foregrounds the character traits of integrity, empathy, and respect that are violated in acts of misattribution. Care ethics, by contrast, emphasizes relational obligations and the cultivation of empathy and understanding, thereby focusing on the lived realities of individuals navigating complex moral and social constraints (Akingboye et al., 2024). Across these frameworks, paternity fraud appears as a profound moral rupture that destabilizes trust and inflicts emotional, social, and existential harm (Jideofor, 2024).

Furthermore, the gendered dimensions of paternity fraud highlight the intersection of moral, social, and epistemic vulnerability. Women, often constrained by domestic violence, societal stigma, or structural inequality, may face profound moral and existential dilemmas regarding disclosure of biological truth. These circumstances complicate straightforward moral judgments. From a philosophical standpoint, such situations illustrate the tension between moral duty and lived reality, between abstract ethical principles and the concrete conditions that shape human choice. Non-disclosure, while ethically and socially fraught, may be a rational response to the threats posed by patriarchal social structures. A care-driven ethical approach recognizes these complexities and encourages empathy and nuanced moral understanding rather than simplified condemnation. Thus, this perspective encourages supportive and non-judgmental consideration of the individuals affected, recognizing the need for compassion and care in addressing the situation. Philosophically, this underscores the contingent, context-sensitive nature of ethical responsibility, revealing the

limits of abstract moral prescriptions in addressing real-world relational complexities. Overall, paternity fraud exemplifies the intricate interplay between belief and knowledge, ethics and epistemology, as well as identity and relational trust. It challenges conventional assumptions about certainty, responsibility, and moral obligation, and signifies a reflective philosophical engagement with the tensions between subjective conviction, objective verification, and the ethical imperatives of human relationships.

Conclusion

Unlike many nations, Nigeria currently has no law specifically criminalizing paternity fraud. The legal framework is weak and the absence of legislation leaves affected fathers with limited legal recourse. The reality and current level of paternity fraud in southwest Nigeria demands societal attention as the issue reflects serious and complex public health, cultural, and legal challenges. However, paternity fraud seems to be an inevitable social ill that the legal provisions may not be able to curb completely. It is envisaged that through better technology like Next Generation Sequencing (NGS), stronger legal safeguards, public awareness, ethical education, and counselling services, Nigeria can address the paternity fraud crisis responsibly by restoring trust, securing identities, and empowering families. It is also necessary that DNA testing be made accessible, affordable, and compulsory at birth in order to prevent future paternity disputes.

However, while DNA testing has come to be accepted, even by the courts, as a potent means of determining biological paternity, it is not absurd to question the validity or accuracy of the DNA test results owing to the possibility of laboratory negligence or malpractices. Thus, both physical scientific and investigation needs to be exhaustively carried out to credibly prove paternity (Akingboye et al, 2024). There is an urgent need to enact a specific legislation that would punish false declarations of paternity and hold perpetrators criminally accountable. It is also imperative to uphold professional ethics in medical practices in order to prevent infant misidentification, safeguard sample integrity, and enforce laboratory accreditation standards.

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