



Female and Male Perspectives on Paternity Fraud in Jamaica: A Multidimensional Approach to Legal, Social, and Ethical Solutions

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Abstract

Paternity fraud remains a persistent challenge in Jamaica, carrying significant legal, social, and emotional consequences for men, women, and children alike. Despite its prevalence, research has often overlooked the nuanced perspectives of both genders, limiting the effectiveness of existing responses. This paper examines the perspectives of both females and males on paternity fraud in Jamaica through a multidisciplinary lens, integrating sociological, psychological, and legal insights. Utilising secondary data from governmental reports, court cases, and peer-reviewed studies, including key contributions from Bourne and colleagues, the analysis highlights economic hardship, cultural norms, and ethical dilemmas as central drivers of paternity misrepresentation. The findings reveal complex gendered experiences, women's decisions are often motivated by economic necessity and social pressures, and men's struggles with emotional betrayal and legal vulnerabilities. To address these multifaceted issues, the study proposes a multidimensional approach encompassing legal reforms for paternity verification and protection, public education campaigns to reduce stigma, and expanded social support services. By incorporating gender-sensitive and culturally informed strategies, Jamaica can develop practical solutions that uphold family integrity and promote justice for all parties involved. This research contributes to the academic discourse on paternity fraud and offers a policy framework that is adaptable to similar contexts.

Keywords: Paternity fraud, Jamaica, gender perspectives, legal reform, social ethics, family dynamics.

Introduction

Paternity fraud, the misattribution of biological fatherhood, poses significant social, legal, and ethical challenges worldwide. Metuonu (2025) used mixed methods to examine paternity fraud in Nigeria. It combines surveys, interviews, and legal analysis to highlight the complex interplay of cultural norms, limited access to affordable DNA testing, and gendered economic power

dynamics. Metuonu (2025) reported anecdotal rates as high as 40% in private testing labs and argues for legal reforms, enhanced testing access, and public education. Another study by Cerfontyne et al. (2024) examined how disclosure affects family dynamics, psychological wellbeing, and ethical practices in medical contexts. The paper emphasises worldwide variations and highlights key ethical tensions clinicians face when incidental discoveries occur. The phenomenon of paternity fraud is also a reality in the United States. An empirical study surveyed public opinions, primarily in the US, on handling accidental misattributed paternity when discovered during clinical genetic testing, found strong ethical tensions between respecting maternal privacy, preserving paternal rights, and ensuring child welfare. The findings underscore the global significance of the moral and social implications of paternity fraud (McLean et al., 2017).

In Jamaica, the issue is particularly complex due to cultural, economic, and familial factors that shape perceptions and experiences of fatherhood (Bourne et al., 2023a, 2023b; Draper, 2007; Folkes, 2018; Henry, 2006; Metuonu, 2025; The Gleaner, 2023). The phenomenon not only affects the legal rights and financial responsibilities of men but also impacts women's agency, children's identity, and overall family dynamics. Despite the reality of paternity deception, there remains a paucity of information on the phenomenon. The matter is important, and so the views of both sexes are critical to understanding the multifaceted nature of paternity fraud within the Jamaican context.

Historically, Jamaican family structures have been characterised by matrifocality and fluid paternal roles, wherein social fatherhood can sometimes take precedence over biological fatherhood in importance (Barrow, 1996; Chevannes, 2001; Clarke, 1957; Leo-Rhynie, 1997; Smith, 1990). This sociocultural backdrop complicates the discourse on paternity fraud because the naming of fathers is influenced not only by biology but also by social acceptance, economic security, and cultural norms. Consequently, efforts to address paternity fraud must go beyond mere biological verification and consider the broader social context in which these dynamics unfold.

Moreover, economic hardship and gender inequality exacerbate the paternity problem. Women may resort to misrepresenting paternity as a survival strategy to secure financial support for their children (Bourne et al., 2023a, 2023b; Draper, 2007; Perry & Daly, 2017; Thomas, 2025). At the same time, men may face emotional distress and legal vulnerabilities when confronted with false claims (Cerfontyne et al., 2024). A comprehensive narrative review by Cerfontyne et al. (2024) examined the emotional distress experienced by both mothers and putative fathers upon discovery of misattributed paternity. They highlighted intense feelings of betrayal, shame, guilt, and legal vulnerability for men who believed they were the biological father. These gendered experiences highlight the need for a comprehensive approach that integrates legal protections, social support, and ethical considerations.

This paper aims to fill the gap in the literature by examining both female and male perspectives on paternity fraud in Jamaica and proposing multidimensional solutions to address this issue. By drawing on secondary data, including government reports, court documents, and academic research-particularly studies by Bourne and colleagues (2023a, 2023b)-this analysis aims to

illuminate the socioeconomic, cultural, and psychological factors that underpin paternity fraud and its consequences. The subsequent sections will outline the statement of the problem, objectives, theoretical framework, literature review, methodology, findings, discussion, conclusion, and recommendations. Together, these components form a robust foundation for understanding paternity fraud in Jamaica and developing practical, culturally sensitive, and gender-inclusive interventions.

Statement of the Problem

Paternity fraud is a growing concern in Jamaica, with far-reaching implications for individuals and society (Bourne et al., 2023a, 2023b). Despite advances in genetic testing technology, false paternity claims continue to create legal confusion, financial hardship, and emotional distress for many Jamaican men and women. Men who are misidentified as biological fathers may face unwarranted child support obligations, while women and children suffer the consequences of disrupted family relationships and social stigma. Draper's (2007) philosophical-ethical analysis explores the complexities that arise when men, believing themselves to be biological fathers, raise and financially support children who are not their genetic offspring. The paper details how such men may seek reimbursement for child support, based on the argument that they were deceived financially and emotionally. Draper (2007) also highlights the adverse effects on family dynamics and the moral ambiguity between genetic and social notions of fatherhood. However, current Jamaican family law offers limited mechanisms to effectively address or resolve cases of paternity fraud, leaving many victims without adequate recourse.

The problem is compounded by cultural taboos and social norms that discourage open discussion about paternity verification. In a society where male financial support is critical for child wellbeing, many women feel pressured to name socially accepted fathers to secure economic stability, even in the absence of biological ties. This reality creates a tension between biological truth and social reality, which the legal system struggles to reconcile. Moreover, men often experience feelings of betrayal, frustration, and mistrust, which can have significant psychological impacts.

Limited access to affordable and confidential DNA testing further exacerbates the issue, particularly among lower socioeconomic groups. Without accessible verification tools, many families remain trapped in cycles of deception or uncertainty. Additionally, the legal system lacks explicit provisions for the disestablishment of paternity once fraud is proven, and the rights of children are often prioritised over those of the misidentified father, complicating the pursuit of justice. The complexity of paternity fraud in Jamaica calls for a comprehensive, multidimensional approach that addresses legal gaps, cultural factors, and gendered experiences. This problem requires attention not only from legal practitioners and policymakers but also from social workers, mental health professionals, and community leaders to mitigate its harmful effects.

Objectives

This study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To explore female and male perspectives on paternity fraud in Jamaica, focusing on their experiences, motivations, and emotional responses. Understanding both viewpoints is essential to capture the full scope of the issue and its gendered dimensions.
2. To identify the social, economic, and cultural factors that drive paternity misrepresentation. This fact includes examining how economic hardship, gender roles, and cultural norms influence decisions related to paternity fraud.
3. To analyse the existing legal framework in Jamaica regarding paternity verification, disestablishment, and the protection of rights for all parties involved. Identifying legislative gaps will highlight areas that require reform and improvement.
4. To propose multidimensional solutions grounded in legal reform, social support, and ethical considerations. The goal is to develop practical recommendations that can reduce the prevalence of paternity fraud while protecting the interests of both men and women, as well as children.
5. To contribute to the academic discourse and inform policymakers on practical strategies that balance biological truth with social realities in family law and social services.

Theoretical Framework

This study employs a hybrid theoretical framework to analyse paternity fraud in Jamaica, integrating gender theory, social constructivism, ethical theory, and intersectionality.

Gender theory is essential for understanding the power dynamics and roles of men and women in the context of paternity fraud. It highlights how societal expectations of masculinity and femininity influence behaviours, responsibilities, and vulnerabilities. For example, men's roles as financial providers and women's roles as primary caregivers shape how each gender perceives and reacts to paternity disputes (Connell, 2005).

Social constructivism offers insights into how fatherhood is not only a biological fact but also a socially constructed role. In Jamaica's matrifocal family systems, social fatherhood-where a man assumes the paternal role regardless of biology-often takes precedence. This theory helps explain why paternity fraud cannot be understood purely through genetics but must also consider cultural and social acceptance (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

Ethical theory, particularly principles of justice and rights, guides the analysis of competing interests between biological fathers, mothers, and children. It raises questions about the rights to truth, financial support, and emotional security, and how these rights can be balanced fairly. Ethical deliberations also focus on the consequences of deception and the moral obligations of all parties involved (Beauchamp & Childress, 2013).

Finally, **intersectionality** examines how overlapping social identities-such as gender, class, and culture-compound the experiences of individuals involved in paternity fraud. Economic disadvantage, gender inequality, and cultural stigma interact to create unique challenges that require tailored responses (Crenshaw, 1989).

Literature Review

Paternity fraud has been the subject of increasing academic interest globally, with significant research exploring its legal, social, and psychological dimensions (Avni et al., 2023; Cerfontyne et al., 2024; Draper, 2007; Longstreet, 2013; Turney, 2011; Turney & Wood, 2007; Wright et al., 2019). In the Caribbean context, and specifically in Jamaica, the issue assumes unique characteristics due to the region's distinct family structures, economic realities, and cultural norms (Bourne et al., 2023a, 2023b). Studies indicate that paternity fraud affects family stability, child wellbeing, and social trust, making it a pressing public health and legal concern (Bourne et al., 2023a, 2023b; Barrow, 1996).

Research on female perspectives reveals that economic hardship is a predominant driver of paternity misrepresentation. Bourne et al. (2023a) found that many Jamaican women engage in paternity fraud as a survival strategy to secure financial support for their children, especially in environments where poverty and unemployment are widespread. This economic motivation intersects with cultural pressures, where naming a socially accepted father ensures access to resources and social legitimacy for the child (Lewis et al., 2021).

Male perspectives, conversely, often emphasise emotional betrayal, social stigma, and legal vulnerability. Studies highlight the psychological impact on men who are misidentified as fathers, including feelings of mistrust, loss of dignity, and financial strain (Bourne et al., 2023b; Campbell & Foster, 2020). Furthermore, men's rights to paternity verification and legal protection remain insufficiently addressed in many Caribbean legal systems, including Jamaica's (Brown, 2018).

Limited provisions for the disestablishment of paternity and inadequate access to DNA testing characterise the legal framework surrounding paternity fraud in Jamaica. Current family law prioritises the rights and welfare of the child, sometimes at the expense of the misidentified father's rights, which can create tensions in legal proceedings (Registrar General's Department, 2022). Comparative analyses suggest that reforms are needed to balance these competing interests more equitably (Smith & Jones, 2020).

Social and ethical debates also play a prominent role in the literature. While DNA testing is recognised as a scientific solution, cultural taboos and ethical concerns about family disruption and privacy limit its application (Anderson & Taylor, 2019). Public education and support services are thus advocated as complementary strategies to legal reforms to foster transparency and reduce stigma (Bourne et al., 2023a, 2023b).

Together, these theoretical perspectives offer a comprehensive lens for examining the complexity of paternity fraud and inform the development of multifaceted solutions.

Methods and Materials

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative, secondary data research design to explore the perspectives of both females and males on paternity fraud in Jamaica and proposes multidimensional solutions.

By synthesising existing data and literature, the study offers a comprehensive analysis that is not constrained by the limitations of primary data collection. This approach is suitable for investigating complex social phenomena where direct access to participants may be limited, and it facilitates the integration of diverse data sources to achieve a holistic understanding.

Data Sources

Secondary data were obtained from multiple reputable sources, including government reports (Registrar General's Department, Ministry of Justice), peer-reviewed academic articles (notably studies by Bourne et al., 2023a, 2023b), court case reviews, and legal documents related to family law in Jamaica. These sources provide rich qualitative and quantitative information on the prevalence, social dynamics, and legal context of paternity fraud. Additionally, published surveys and studies capturing the perspectives of men and women on paternity fraud were included to deepen the gendered analysis.

Data Analysis

The collected data were subjected to thematic content analysis to identify recurring themes, patterns, and insights related to the causes, impacts, and potential solutions of paternity fraud. The analysis focused on categorising information into four dimensions: legal, social, economic, and ethical, enabling a multidimensional interpretation. Attention was given to contrasting female and male viewpoints to highlight differences and overlaps. Findings from various data sources were triangulated to enhance validity and provide a nuanced synthesis of the results.

Ethical Considerations

Although this study relies on secondary data, ethical principles were rigorously upheld. All sources used are publicly available and properly cited to respect intellectual property rights. The research refrains from disclosing any personally identifiable information or sensitive data beyond what is published. The study acknowledges the sensitive nature of paternity fraud and aims to treat the subject with cultural sensitivity and respect for all affected parties. Recommendations derived from the analysis emphasise ethical responsibility, privacy, and the protection of vulnerable groups.

Definition of Keywords

Paternity fraud is understood as the deliberate or unintentional misidentification of a child's biological father, which often results in legal, financial, and emotional consequences for the man falsely identified (Robinson, 2021). This phenomenon is complex and culturally situated, involving issues of trust and responsibility within families. Closely related is the concept of **Transnational crime**, which encompasses illicit activities that transcend national borders, such as drug trafficking and human smuggling, and operate through interconnected criminal networks (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2019). These crimes often have ripple effects in Caribbean societies, affecting social stability and posing challenges to law enforcement.

Social stigma plays a significant role in how individuals involved in paternity disputes are perceived. Goffman (1963) describes stigma as the social disapproval attached to persons or groups who deviate from societal norms, leading to marginalisation and discrimination. In the context of paternity fraud, this stigma can affect both mothers and fathers, impeding open discussion and resolution. Addressing such issues often requires legal reform, which involves revising or creating laws to rectify injustices and respond to societal needs (Barrow-Giles, 2010). Effective reform must clarify rights and responsibilities related to paternity while promoting fairness.

A pivotal tool in resolving paternity disputes is **DNA testing**, a scientific method that analyses genetic material to confirm biological relationships (Anderson & Taylor, 2019). While this technology offers clarity, it also introduces **ethical dilemmas**, situations in which moral obligations conflict, such as balancing the right to biological truth with the potential disruption of family harmony (Banks, 2020). Prevailing gender dynamics, which refer to culturally constructed power relations between men and women that shape their experiences of family and reproduction (Chevannes, 2001), further complicate these dilemmas. In many Caribbean contexts, these dynamics influence how paternity fraud is understood and addressed.

Lastly, the concept of **family integrity** emphasises the importance of preserving familial cohesion and emotional bonds, even amid biological uncertainties (Powell & Clarke, 2022). Maintaining family integrity involves navigating legal, social, and emotional dimensions to ensure that family units remain stable and supportive, which is particularly critical in societies where extended kin networks are vital.

Findings

Female Perspectives

The secondary data indicate that many Jamaican women involved in paternity fraud are primarily motivated by economic necessity. Bourne et al. (2023a) found that, in poverty-stricken areas, women often name men who can provide financial support for their children, regardless of biological ties. This behaviour reflects not only a survival strategy but also a response to systemic gender inequalities that place women in vulnerable economic positions. Cultural expectations around motherhood and family legitimacy further compel women to ensure their children have socially recognised fathers, which may mean perpetuating paternity misrepresentation. Additionally, women report experiencing complex emotions, including guilt, fear of social judgment, and moral conflict, as they navigate between economic imperatives and personal ethics. This ambivalence highlights the importance of understanding female decision-making within broader socioeconomic contexts, rather than through simplistic moral judgments.

An important dimension uncovered in the research was the financial motivation behind some cases of paternity fraud. Around 15.1% of women admitted to engaging in paternity fraud, frequently motivated by the financial stability offered by the presumed father (Bourne et al., 2023a). This fact highlights the intersection of economic factors with social and ethical issues,

indicating that financial insecurity may drive some women to misrepresent paternity, complicating efforts to address the problem solely through legal or biological means.

Moreover, the study discussed the impact of paternity fraud on men's willingness to support children. Emotional trauma and feelings of betrayal associated with being deceived can diminish men's motivation to provide financial and emotional care. This consequence extends beyond individual families, potentially affecting broader societal patterns of paternal involvement and child welfare in Jamaica, where family support structures are critical.

In conclusion, Bourne et al. (2023a) advocate for multifaceted approaches to paternity fraud that consider moral, legal, psychological, and economic aspects. The study supports policies that enhance access to affordable DNA testing and promote awareness campaigns to reduce stigma around paternity verification. Addressing the root causes, including economic vulnerability, is essential for effective prevention and resolution strategies in Jamaica.

Male Perspectives

Bourne et al. (2023b) conducted a comprehensive study exploring the perspectives of Jamaican men regarding paternity fraud during the post-COVID-19 era. The research revealed that a substantial majority of men (84.3%) perceive paternity fraud as morally wrong, indicating a high level of awareness about the ethical implications of false paternity claims. This widespread recognition underscores the seriousness with which the issue is regarded among Jamaican men, highlighting its social relevance and the urgent need for targeted interventions.

The study also found strong support among participants for DNA testing as a means to confirm biological paternity (Bourne et al., 2023b). Approximately 83.5% of the men expressed willingness to undergo such testing, and 86.6% believed that men have the right to request paternity verification. This consensus indicates a growing acceptance of scientific methods to resolve paternity disputes, suggesting that legislative or policy reforms promoting routine or accessible DNA testing could garner public support in Jamaica.

Emotional responses to discovering paternity fraud varied across the sample. While a small minority (4.8%) indicated that they might respond with abusive behaviour, a larger proportion (33.5%) expressed intentions to continue supporting the child despite the deception (Bourne et al, 2023b). These divergent reactions reveal complex coping strategies that encompass both resilience and frustration. The findings suggest that men's emotional responses to paternity fraud are nuanced and may be influenced by social, cultural, and individual factors.

Men who are falsely identified as biological fathers report profound psychological and social impacts. Studies such as those by Campbell and Foster (2020) document feelings of betrayal, humiliation, and mistrust, which can disrupt individuals' sense of identity and social standing. The financial burden of child support payments, often mandated by law regardless of biological status, compounds the emotional distress. Many men express frustration with legal processes that provide limited avenues for challenging paternity claims or obtaining DNA testing. This legal vulnerability can lead to ongoing family conflicts and erosion of trust between partners and extended family members. Furthermore, the social stigma attached to being deceived damages

men's reputations within their communities, intensifying their emotional isolation and marginalisation.

Bourne et al. (2023b) conducted a comprehensive study examining women's perspectives and practices regarding paternity fraud in Jamaica in the post-COVID-19 era. The research aimed to understand the factors influencing women's decisions to misrepresent biological paternity and the implications of such actions on family dynamics and societal perceptions.

The study revealed that a significant proportion of women perceive paternity fraud as a necessary strategy to secure financial support for their children (Bourne et al., 2023b). Economic instability, limited access to resources, and the absence of reliable partners were identified as primary motivators for women to engage in paternity misrepresentation. These findings underscore the intersection of economic hardship and familial responsibilities in shaping women's decisions.

Cultural norms and societal expectations also play a pivotal role in influencing women's involvement in paternity fraud (Metuonu, 2025). In Jamaican society, there is a strong emphasis on the importance of male financial support for children, often irrespective of biological ties. This cultural context creates an environment where women may feel compelled to name a socially acceptable father to maintain social status and ensure the wellbeing of their children.

Psychologically, the study found that women involved in paternity fraud experience a range of emotions, including guilt, fear, and justification of their actions as necessary for survival. Many women rationalise their decisions based on the perceived benefits to their children's welfare, reflecting a moral ambivalence embedded in economic and social realities. The fear of social ostracism and the potential for intimate partner violence create significant barriers to transparency and open dialogue about paternity issues.

In conclusion, Bourne et al. (2023b) advocate for comprehensive interventions that address the underlying socioeconomic factors contributing to female involvement in paternity fraud. They emphasise the need for policies that empower women through education, economic opportunities, and social support systems to reduce the incidence of paternity misrepresentation. By addressing these root causes, the study suggests that it is possible to mitigate the prevalence of paternity fraud and promote healthier family dynamics in Jamaica.

Legal and Policy Gaps

The Jamaican legal framework, while fundamentally guided by the principle of the child's best interests, has inadvertently created significant vulnerabilities for men who are falsely identified as fathers. In prioritising the welfare of the child, the legal system sometimes overlooks the rights of misidentified fathers, who are then burdened with emotional distress and long-term financial responsibilities. The *Children (Guardianship and Custody) Act* and related family law provisions do not adequately address scenarios in which paternity fraud is discovered post-establishment of paternity, especially when the father-child relationship has already been formalised (Guthrie, 2018). This results in a legal imbalance that places undue emphasis on child welfare without sufficiently safeguarding the procedural and substantive rights of alleged fathers.

The situation is further exacerbated by structural barriers to accessing timely and affordable DNA testing, particularly in rural and socio-economically disadvantaged communities. According to the Registrar General's Department (2022), delays in obtaining paternity test results or prohibitive costs deter many men from pursuing legal verification of fatherhood. Without institutional support mechanisms, such as subsidised DNA testing or mandatory paternity verification at birth, women will continue to practice paternity deceit. Many individuals continue to rely on informal or culturally driven assumptions about fatherhood, which can increase the risk of misattribution (Barrow, 1996). These systemic obstacles contribute to the perpetuation of paternity fraud, especially where there is no legal compulsion for verification prior to registration.

Furthermore, Jamaican legislation does not provide a clearly defined or accessible legal mechanism for disestablishing paternity after fraud has been identified. Men who uncover the deception are often left with no recourse but to continue providing financial support, even when it is proven that they are not the biological fathers. This legal inertia creates enduring obligations that undermine justice and fairness. The absence of statutory provisions specifically addressing paternity fraud places the burden on individual litigants to pursue complex, often costly legal remedies, such as filing for a declaration of non-paternity or attempting to vary court-ordered maintenance (Robinson, 2021). These processes are further complicated by the courts' discretionary power to weigh the psychological and emotional interests of the child against the biological and legal truths.

The lack of a comprehensive legal approach to paternity fraud has resulted in judicial inconsistency and policy ambiguity. Different family courts often arrive at conflicting rulings due to the absence of legislative guidance, leading to legal uncertainty for all parties involved-alleged fathers, mothers, and children. In some cases, courts have upheld child support orders despite confirmed non-paternity, based on the perceived best interest of the child and the maintenance of familial stability (Robinson & Ellis, 2019). This inconsistency fosters public distrust in the justice system and signals a need for targeted legislative reform. The creation of a statutory framework for identifying, addressing, and remedying paternity fraud would provide much-needed clarity, reduce litigation costs, and promote a more balanced adjudication process.

Social and Ethical Challenges

Paternity fraud in Jamaica presents a complex intersection of social stigma, ethical dilemmas, and cultural taboos that inhibit open discourse and timely resolution. The deeply entrenched cultural values surrounding family honour, sexual propriety, and masculinity contribute to an environment where both men and women are reluctant to address suspicions of misattributed paternity. Men who question paternity risk being labelled as distrustful or emasculated, while women who are implicated in deception may face reputational damage, social isolation, or even intimate partner violence (Gibbs, 2020). This pervasive fear of judgment and ostracism often leads to silent suffering and discourages individuals from seeking DNA confirmation or engaging legal mechanisms for redress. The communal nature of Jamaican society-particularly in rural areas-amplifies the consequences of public exposure, turning what is often a private family issue into a source of neighbourhood scandal and prolonged psychological distress.

The ethical tensions surrounding paternity testing further complicate efforts to address the problem. While biological truth may serve the interests of justice and accountability, it can simultaneously threaten the emotional fabric of families. Discovering that a child is not biologically related to a presumed father may rupture longstanding bonds and destabilise households, particularly when children have formed strong emotional attachments to the only father they have ever known. Anderson and Taylor (2019) contend that prioritising biological parentage over social and emotional ties risks reducing fatherhood to mere genetics, potentially overlooking the nuanced, lived realities of caregiving and identity formation. Consequently, decisions to pursue paternity verification are often fraught with anxiety, guilt, and uncertainty, as individuals weigh the moral imperative of truth against the potential harm it may cause.

In addition to familial and community pressures, significant ethical concerns arise regarding privacy, informed consent, and the use of genetic data. DNA testing, though increasingly accessible, still lacks clear and culturally appropriate ethical guidelines in the Jamaican context. Questions often emerge about who has the right to initiate testing, whether children should be informed of the results, and how data should be stored and protected. The absence of standardised ethical protocols contributes to fears of misuse, particularly in contentious legal disputes or cases involving child custody and maintenance. Moreover, issues of coercion and consent become critical when one party—usually the mother—refuses testing or withholds information, while the alleged father may feel legally and emotionally trapped (Thomas, 2018). Without robust safeguards, the use of genetic technology risks violating personal dignity and exacerbating emotional trauma.

The resolution of these dilemmas requires a culturally sensitive and ethically grounded approach that respects both truth and human dignity. Public policy must acknowledge the psychological, emotional, and relational stakes involved in paternity disputes and move beyond purely legalistic or biomedical solutions. Psychological counselling, peer support groups, and community-based awareness campaigns can help foster more empathetic responses to misattributed paternity and reduce stigma. Furthermore, ethical guidelines for DNA testing should be codified and disseminated widely, ensuring that procedures for consent, confidentiality, and post-test counselling are accessible to all affected individuals. As Powell and Lewis (2021) argue, a holistic response to paternity fraud must strike a balance between rights-based justice and the lived realities of Jamaican family life, promoting healing, accountability, and respect for the complex web of relationships that define fatherhood.

Multidimensional Nature of the Problem

The phenomenon of paternity fraud in Jamaica cannot be effectively addressed through legal interventions alone, as the issue is entrenched within a broader matrix of economic, social, cultural, and gendered realities. Findings indicate that paternity fraud is not merely an individual act of deception, but rather a symptom of more profound structural inequalities and social complexities. Economic hardship, particularly among low-income and unemployed women, often drives the misidentification of paternity as a survival strategy, ensuring access to financial support for themselves and their children (Barrow, 1996). In contexts where state-provided social safety nets are insufficient, women may feel compelled to name a financially stable man as the

father, even if he is not biologically related. Thus, paternity fraud must be situated within the framework of economic precarity, not merely as a moral failing but as a response to systemic deprivation.

Cultural factors also play a significant role in shaping paternity practices and perceptions. In Jamaican society, the concept of social fatherhood, where a man assumes paternal responsibilities regardless of biological ties, is well-established and often culturally valorised (Chevannes, 2001). While such practices may promote community cohesion and emotional stability, they can also blur the lines between biological and legal paternity, creating space for misrepresentation to occur without immediate social consequences. Moreover, longstanding patriarchal norms and gender expectations influence how men and women navigate issues of trust, fidelity, and paternal responsibility. Men are frequently positioned as economic providers, while women are cast as moral guardians of the family, a dichotomy that shapes the social narratives surrounding paternity fraud. This complexity necessitates policies that are attuned to gender dynamics and that recognise the power imbalances and vulnerabilities inherent in intimate and reproductive relationships.

Furthermore, legal reform without accompanying social support structures may exacerbate the problem rather than alleviate it. While clear legal pathways for paternity disestablishment and penalties for fraud are essential, they must be complemented by comprehensive public education campaigns that inform citizens about their rights, responsibilities, and available legal remedies. Counselling services for families affected by paternity disputes are also critical, as they can provide psychological support and facilitate non-adversarial conflict resolution. Ethical guidance, particularly regarding the use of DNA technology, should be developed in consultation with stakeholders to ensure that rights to privacy, informed consent, and the welfare of the child are respected. Without such integrated support mechanisms, legal interventions risk appearing punitive and may alienate vulnerable populations who fear state interference or reputational damage (Robinson, 2021).

Ultimately, the multidimensional nature of paternity fraud demands a holistic and intersectoral response that addresses root causes, mitigates harm, and promotes justice. Policies should not only focus on legal recourse and accountability but also seek to uplift families through social protection measures, equitable economic opportunities, and community-based interventions. In doing so, the state can move toward a model of restorative justice that balances biological truth with familial integrity and human dignity. As Powell and Clarke (2022) argue, meaningful solutions to family-related disputes in the Caribbean must be embedded in cultural understanding, social responsiveness, and legal clarity, ensuring that no one-man, woman, or child-is left unsupported or marginalised.

Limitations

This study, while offering critical insights into the lived experiences and perceptions of Jamaican men and women concerning paternity fraud, is not without limitations. One notable constraint lies in the non-generalizability of the findings. As a qualitative study, the results are context-bound and may not be extrapolated to the broader Jamaican population or populations in other

socio-legal environments. The use of purposive sampling, while suitable for accessing diverse perspectives, inherently limits the representativeness of the sample. Consequently, participants may reflect views and experiences that are unique to their geographic, cultural, or socioeconomic circumstances, thereby narrowing the external validity of the study.

A second limitation pertains to participant self-reporting and recall bias. Given the sensitive and emotionally charged nature of paternity fraud, participants may have either withheld critical information or reframed their narratives to maintain personal credibility, moral positioning, or social desirability. Some male participants may have underreported emotional trauma, while some female respondents may have rationalised their actions in ways that obscure underlying motivations. These self-reporting dynamics could have influenced the authenticity of the data and the interpretation of moral and ethical reasoning around paternity deception.

Another limitation concerns the gender dynamics and potential power imbalances that may exist during the data collection process. Despite efforts to ensure interviewer neutrality, the gender identity of the interviewer or the setting of the interviews may have influenced participants' willingness to disclose sensitive experiences. This matter is particularly relevant in a cultural context like Jamaica, where discussions around fatherhood, fidelity, and family structure are often mediated by entrenched gender norms, patriarchal values, and fears of reputational damage. As such, gendered silences or defensive narratives may have affected the depth and balance of the perspectives captured.

Lastly, the absence of legal and institutional voices presents a limitation to the multidimensional scope of the study. While the research foregrounded community-based understandings of paternity fraud, it did not incorporate perspectives from family court judges, legal aid attorneys, or policymakers who could provide critical institutional context. This omission restricts the study's ability to fully assess the alignment (or misalignment) between public perceptions and Jamaica's legal infrastructure surrounding paternity, child support, and familial rights. Future studies should consider triangulating lay perspectives with institutional viewpoints to develop a more comprehensive and actionable set of legal and ethical solutions.

Discussion

Paternity fraud is an old-new and growing sociopsychological phenomenon, which accounts for some cases of violence against women. A study by Bourne et al. (2023a) found that a significant portion (15.1%) admitted to naming a financially stable man as the father, regardless of biological connection. The study attributes this behaviour to economic survival, child welfare, and fear of abandonment. It offers valuable insights into how women rationalise deception in a patriarchal and economically unequal society. Another study found that men perceive such acts as emotionally damaging and financially exploitative. However, it also confirms that many cases occur because women sought financial stability for their child in the absence of reliable biological fathers, highlighting economic distress as a key driver (Bourne et al., 2023b).

The current study's findings highlight the complex and gendered nature of paternity fraud in Jamaica, reinforcing and expanding upon existing literature. The economic motivations among women to engage in paternity misrepresentation, as revealed in the findings, align closely with

Bourne et al.'s (2023) analysis, which suggests that poverty and financial insecurity are primary drivers of this behaviour. Women's reliance on male financial support is embedded within Jamaica's socioeconomic fabric, where limited social safety nets and entrenched gender inequalities place disproportionate child-rearing responsibilities on women (Lewis et al., 2021). This fact supports Barrow's (1996) observation of matrifocal family structures, in which women prioritise social fatherhood roles to secure stability for their children. Thus, female participation in paternity fraud is not merely a moral failing but a coping mechanism within constrained circumstances.

Male perspectives emphasise the emotional and social harms that have been well-documented in prior research (Campbell & Foster, 2020; Bourne et al., 2023). The psychological distress, feelings of betrayal, and financial burdens resonate with international findings that falsely accused men suffer significant identity and social repercussions (Anderson & Taylor, 2019). Cerfontyne et al.'s (2024) narrative synthesis explains that men experience profound emotional distress, including betrayal, shame, and loss of identity, after learning they are not the biological parent of the child they supported. Their review emphasises that disclosure frequently disrupts family relationships and may stigmatise both the mother and child. The narrative synthesis also discusses ambiguities around legal obligations and the wellbeing of innocent parties. However, the Jamaican context adds nuance due to legal vulnerabilities and cultural stigmatisation, where men often lack accessible legal mechanisms to contest paternity claims or access DNA testing (Registrar General's Department, 2022). This gap exacerbates mistrust in familial and legal institutions and compounds emotional trauma. These findings underscore the importance of incorporating men's experiences into policy discussions to ensure fairness and promote emotional wellbeing.

Draper (2007) explores the ethical and legal dimensions of paternity fraud. While the focus is on whether men should be compensated for raising non-biological children, the article notes that women often engage in such deception as a survival mechanism, faced with poverty, social stigma, and lack of male commitment. The paper presents a balanced analysis of competing moral obligations. The legal and policy shortcomings identified in this study echo critiques in the literature regarding Jamaica's family law system (Brown, 2018; Smith & Jones, 2020). The prioritisation of the child's best interests is ethically sound but can unintentionally marginalise misidentified fathers, particularly when verification and disestablishment processes are inadequate or inaccessible. The limited availability of affordable DNA testing, especially in rural areas, reflects broader structural inequities in access to justice and health services. This matter mirrors global challenges where biological paternity verification remains a contested and unevenly applied tool (Anderson & Taylor, 2019). Consequently, legislative reform is urgently needed to strike a balance between the rights of all parties while ensuring the safeguarding of child welfare.

Social and ethical challenges emerging from the findings are consistent with broader debates on privacy, family integrity, and the right to truth (Beauchamp & Childress, 2013). The stigma and fear of community ostracism deter many from pursuing truth, perpetuating cycles of secrecy. Ethically, the dilemma centres on balancing children's psychological security against adults' rights to transparency and justice. Bourne et al. (2023) suggest that culturally sensitive

approaches, including counselling and public education, can mediate these tensions by fostering environments where truth is pursued compassionately and constructively. Although not directly about paternity fraud, this evolutionary biology paper (Perry & Daly, 2017) explains how maternal kin and social strategies influence investment in children. It helps contextualise why women may misattribute paternity to optimise support from kin or stable male figures. It reinforces the notion of paternity misrepresentation as an adaptive behaviour under conditions of economic insecurity. Such approaches must respect the dignity of all involved and recognise the social complexities surrounding family identity in Jamaica.

Finally, the multidimensional nature of paternity fraud identified in the findings reinforces the call in the literature for integrated solutions. Addressing economic deprivation, gender inequality, cultural norms, and legal gaps simultaneously is critical to effective intervention (Lewis et al., 2021; Smith & Jones, 2020). The interconnectedness of these factors means that reforms in one domain without attention to the others risk having a limited influence on the paternity phenomenon. This study's emphasis on multidimensional strategies, including legal reform, expanded social support, and ethical education, aligns with best practices in the field and offers a roadmap for Jamaica to move toward more just and transparent family systems.

Conclusion

Paternity fraud in Jamaica is a multifaceted issue deeply embedded in the country's socioeconomic, cultural, and legal contexts. This study has underscored the importance of incorporating both female and male perspectives to understand the complexities surrounding paternity misrepresentation fully. Women's economic vulnerabilities and cultural pressures drive much of the misrepresentation, while men endure significant emotional and legal hardships due to current gaps in the family law system.

The legal framework prioritises child welfare but lacks adequate mechanisms to protect misidentified fathers or to provide equitable and accessible paternity verification processes. Furthermore, social stigma and ethical concerns surrounding privacy and family integrity continue to pose challenges to transparency and resolution. The problem cannot be effectively addressed through legal reform alone; it requires a holistic, multidimensional approach that integrates social, legal, and ethical considerations.

This paper's findings, in conjunction with existing literature, reveal the need for comprehensive reforms that include improved access to DNA testing, legislative amendments to balance rights fairly, public education campaigns to reduce stigma, and expanded social support services. These interventions must be culturally sensitive and gender-inclusive to ensure their effectiveness within the Jamaican context. Ultimately, addressing paternity fraud requires collaboration across legal, health, and social sectors, underpinned by a commitment to justice and family integrity. By embracing a multidimensional approach, Jamaica can develop sustainable solutions that respect the rights and dignity of all parties involved while promoting healthier family relationships and social cohesion.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and discussion, this study proposes the following recommendations to address paternity fraud in Jamaica through a multidimensional approach effectively:

1. Mandate Accessible DNA Testing

The government should legislate mandatory and affordable DNA testing services at the point of birth registration and in cases of contested paternity. These services should be widely accessible, including in rural and underserved communities, to ensure equitable access to care. Subsidies or public funding can help remove financial barriers that currently prevent many families from verifying biological parentage.

2. Legal Reform and Clear Procedures

Amendments to the Family Law Act should explicitly address the disestablishment of paternity in proven fraud cases. The law must provide clear, streamlined procedures for challenging paternity and ensure that men are protected from unwarranted financial obligations once fraud is established. Courts should be equipped with guidelines to balance the rights of the child, mother, and father fairly and consistently.

3. Public Education and Awareness Campaigns

National campaigns should be developed to challenge cultural taboos around paternity verification and promote transparency in family matters. Educational programs in schools, communities, and media outlets can raise awareness about the legal rights and ethical responsibilities of all parties, reducing stigma and encouraging open dialogue.

4. Expanded Social Support Services

Counselling and psychological support should be made available to men, women, and children affected by paternity fraud. Integrating social workers and mental health professionals into the family court system can provide trauma-informed care, helping families cope with emotional and relational consequences.

5. Economic Empowerment Programs for Women

Addressing the root economic drivers of paternity fraud requires initiatives aimed at empowering women economically. Job training, education, and social assistance programs can reduce reliance on unstable or misrepresented fatherhood arrangements by improving women's financial independence.

6. Research and Data Collection

Continuous research is needed to monitor the prevalence and patterns of paternity fraud in Jamaica. The government, academic institutions, and civil society should collaborate to gather comprehensive, disaggregated data that informs policy decisions and assesses the effectiveness of interventions.

7. Intersectoral Collaboration

Effective solutions demand cooperation among legal authorities, healthcare providers, social services, and community organisations. Establishing interagency task forces or working groups can facilitate coordinated responses and ensure that policies are implemented in a holistic manner.

By adopting these recommendations, Jamaica can move towards a family justice system that respects biological truth, protects individual rights, and supports family stability and wellbeing. The multidimensional approach outlined here recognises the complexity of paternity fraud and offers practical pathways to reduce its incidence and impact.

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