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Work Commitment, Family Finance and Paternal Involvement in Maternity Care: A Cross-Sectional Analysis of Socio-Economic Barriers in Calabar Metropolis, Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Background: Paternal involvement in maternity care is a critical but underutilised determinant of maternal health outcomes in Nigeria. Socio-economic factors — principally work commitment and the absence of statutory paternity leave — are the most commonly cited yet least studied barriers in Nigerian community settings. This study examined socio-economic challenges constraining paternal involvement in maternity care in Calabar Metropolis, Cross River State, Nigeria, and tested their association with male engagement. **Method:** A descriptive cross-sectional survey was conducted among 400 respondents selected from 22 electoral wards across two Local Government Areas using stratified random sampling and the Taro Yamane formula. A structured, self-administered questionnaire assessed socio-economic barriers, opinions on paternity leave policy, and financial constraints on paternal ANC attendance. Pearson's correlation coefficient tested three hypotheses at $\alpha = 0.05$. **Results:** Work commitment was the single most commonly cited barrier (35%), surpassing all other barriers. An overwhelming 80% of respondents endorsed universal paternity leave legislation and employer-granted paid leave for ANC attendance, while 82.5% supported community emergency maternity transport funds. Pearson's correlation confirmed significant positive associations: H01 ($r = 0.650, p = 0.002$), H02 ($r = 0.710, p = 0.002$), and H03 ($r = 0.650, p = 0.002$). **Conclusions:** Socio-economic barriers were significantly associated with paternal involvement in Calabar Metropolis. As this was cross-sectional, the findings indicate association rather than causation. Policy-level measures — paternity leave legislation, employer sensitisation, and community transport schemes — may complement individual-level approaches, although further longitudinal research is needed.

Keywords: Family finance, Maternity care, Paternal involvement, Paternity leave, Socio-economic barriers, Work commitment

Introduction

The practical reality facing a Nigerian man who wants to accompany his wife to an antenatal care (ANC) appointment is a financial calculation: the cost of a missed day's wages, the risk of employment sanctions, the price of transport, and the knock-on effect on household food security. For millions of men in Nigeria's informal economy — market traders, artisans, day labourers, and commercial motorcyclists — this calculation consistently favours work over paternal engagement.

Nigeria accounts for approximately 23% of global maternal deaths annually.¹ Cross River State records a maternal mortality ratio (MMR) of 831 per 100,000 live births, which exceeds the Sustainable Development Goal target by more than eleven times.² Paternal involvement is a well-established determinant of maternal health outcomes; yet Nigeria's formal labour market lacks a universal statutory paternity leave policy, which prevents most working men from participating in

maternity care because they must choose between work and family needs.

The research studied the effect of socio-economic obstacles on fathers who wanted to participate in maternity care in Calabar Metropolis while the researchers assessed the impact of these obstacles on male involvement and found solutions that the community approved to fix these problems. The results aim to deliver precise community-based evidence to support policy development on paternity leave laws, employer responsibilities, and emergency maternity transport systems in Cross River State.

Study Objectives

This study was guided by the following specific objectives:

- To determine the prevalence and rank the relative importance of barriers to paternal involvement during maternity care among fathers in the target population.
- To assess fathers' opinions on paternity leave and perceptions of employer obligations toward supporting paternal

involvement during the maternity period.

- To evaluate the financial constraints that limit paternal involvement during maternity and quantify their association with levels of father participation.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- What are the prevalent socio-economic barriers to paternal involvement in maternity care, and how are they ranked in terms of relative importance among fathers in Calabar Metropolis?
- What are the opinions of fathers on paternity leave policy and employer obligations toward supporting paternal involvement during the maternity period?
- To what extent do financial constraints limit paternal involvement in maternity care in Calabar Metropolis?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested:

- H01: There is no significant relationship between the prevalence of socio-economic barriers and levels of paternal involvement in maternity care in Calabar Metropolis.
- H02: There is no significant relationship between fathers' opinions on paternity leave policy and employer obligations and levels of paternal involvement in maternity care.
- H03: There is no significant relationship between financial constraints on paternal ANC attendance and levels of paternal involvement in maternity care in Calabar Metropolis.

Literature Review

Work commitment as a barrier

The most common reason fathers do not participate in their children's lives presents across all sub-Saharan African regions. Greenspan et al.³ conducted a qualitative study

involving 27 Tanzanian men who reported work obligations as their primary reason for missing ANC sessions, sessions they wanted to attend with their wives. Mbadugha et al.⁴ conducted research in Enugu, Nigeria, and found that conflicting work schedules ranked second among major obstacles, preventing men from participating in activities (mean = 3.58 out of 4.0). The research shows that work commitment functions as a permanent structural barrier which exists throughout Nigerian geopolitical zones and East African regions.

Paternity leave policy

There is a strong connection between the availability of paternity leave and the extent of fathers' participation in maternity care. O'Brien and Wall⁵ conducted a study that examined 21 OECD countries and discovered that nations with extended paternity leave which offered better pay, had higher rates of fathers who attended antenatal care and delivery events. The Federal Civil Service in Nigeria permits eligible employees to take 14 working days of paternity leave, granted not

more than once in two years for a maximum of four children, which applies only to the period immediately following delivery and does not cover any antenatal or other postnatal periods.¹¹ Private-sector and informal-sector workers receive no legal benefits or entitlements. The ILO⁶ has identified Nigeria as one of the countries where paternity leave provisions are most inadequate relative to its maternal mortality burden.

Financial barriers and household income

The financial expenses of maintaining paternal involvement in low-income Nigerian households operate as an enduring constraint. In Cross River State, where a significant proportion of the population lives below the poverty line, transport costs to health facilities represent a recurring barrier to male ANC accompaniment.⁷ The study conducted by Zakaria⁸ in Bangladesh discovered a positive link between household wealth and husband support throughout all maternity stages, while the poorest households showed the least paternal involvement, which follows a pattern

that exists between urban and rural areas of Nigeria.

Theoretical framework

The research study uses the Social Determinants of Health Framework, which the World Health Organisation established in 2008 through its Commission on Social Determinants of Health,⁹ to demonstrate how structural economic conditions — which include income, employment security, and workplace policies — serve as primary health behaviour determinants. Individual-level interventions that do not address these structural determinants will achieve only limited and unsustained impact on paternal involvement.

Materials and Methods

Study design

The researchers conducted their study through a descriptive cross-sectional survey design. This design was considered appropriate for the study because it enables the simultaneous collection of data on socio-economic barriers, opinions on paternity leave,

and financial constraints on paternal involvement from a representative community sample at a single point in time, without manipulating variables.

Study setting

The study was conducted in Calabar Metropolis, Cross River State, Nigeria. The study area comprised two Local Government Areas: Calabar Municipality, with 10 electoral wards, and Calabar South, with 12 electoral wards, giving a total of 22 electoral wards. The World Bank estimated the metropolis population at 529,362 residents as of 2016. Calabar Metropolis was selected as the study setting because it is the state capital of Cross River State and hosts the full complement of public health infrastructure in the state, including the University of Calabar Teaching Hospital (UCTH), general hospitals, and primary health care centres.

Sample size and sampling

The minimum sample size was determined using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula: $n = N / [1$

+ $N(e)^2$], where n = required sample size, N = 529,362 (the projected population), and e = 0.05

(margin of error at 95% confidence level), yielding $n \approx 400$. A stratified random sampling technique was employed proportionally across all 22 electoral wards. The target population comprised adult residents of Calabar Metropolis aged 18 years and above, including fathers, mothers of reproductive age, and community members with direct experience of maternity care.

Data collection

Researchers used a structured self-administered questionnaire to collect data on: (i) sociodemographic characteristics including employment status and household income; (ii) prevalence and ranking of socio-economic barriers to paternal involvement; (iii) opinions on paternity leave policy and employer obligations; and (iv) financial constraints on paternal ANC attendance. Data were gathered by trained research assistants following a standardised protocol. Content validity was confirmed through expert review, and

reliability was established through a pilot study.

Data analysis

Data were coded, entered, and analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 25.0. Descriptive statistics — frequencies and percentages — were used to determine the prevalence and ranking of barriers (Objective 1) and to summarise opinions on paternity leave policy (Objective 2). Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient (r) was used to test all three null hypotheses at $\alpha = 0.05$. Results are presented in Tables I through VII.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Calabar Teaching Hospital (UCTH). Written informed consent was secured from all participants prior to data collection. Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained throughout the study.

Results

Socio-demographic characteristics

All 400 questionnaires administered were retrieved, yielding a 100% response rate. Table I presents the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents.

Table I: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 400)

Variable / Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	170	42.5
Female	230	57.5
Age Group (years)		
< 18	100	25.0
29–39	160	40.0
40–50	80	20.0
51 and above	60	15.0
Employment Status		
Formally employed	160	40.0
Self-employed / Informal sector	180	45.0
Unemployed	60	15.0
Household Monthly Income		
Below ₦30,000	100	25.0
₦30,001 – ₦60,000	140	35.0
₦60,001 – ₦100,000	90	22.5
Above ₦100,000	70	17.5

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, 2022

Notably, 45% of respondents were self-employed or informally employed — a group for whom no statutory paternity leave provisions exist in Nigeria. A further 25% reported household monthly incomes below ₦30,000, below the national minimum wage.

Prevalence and ranking of barriers

Table II presents the distribution of identified barriers to paternal involvement, ranked by frequency.

Table II: Prevalence of Barriers to Paternal Involvement (n = 400)

Identified Barrier	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Work commitment / inability to leave work	140	35.0
Customs and tradition	100	25.0
Lack of marital discipline/responsibility	70	17.5
Male ego	50	12.5
Poor level of awareness	40	10.0
Total	400	100.0

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, 2022

Work commitment was the most commonly cited barrier (35%), surpassing all socio-cultural, attitudinal, and knowledge-related barriers.

Opinions on paternity leave and employer obligations

Table III presents respondents' views on paternity leave policy and employer obligations.

Table III: Opinions on Paternity Leave and Employer Obligations (n = 400)

Item	SA % (n)	Agree % (n)	Disagree % (n)
Employers should grant paid leave for men during wives' ANC visits	45.0 (180)	35.0 (140)	5.0 (20)
Nigerian government should legislate universal paternity leave	50.0 (200)	30.0 (120)	5.0 (20)
Transport cost is a significant barrier to paternal ANC attendance	30.0 (120)	37.5 (150)	15.0 (60)
Informal sector workers face greater barriers than formal sector	35.0 (140)	40.0 (160)	5.0 (20)
Community transport schemes would increase paternal ANC attendance	40.0 (160)	37.5 (150)	7.5 (30)

SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; D = Disagree/Strongly Disagree. Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, 2022.

An overwhelming 80% endorsed employer-granted paid leave for ANC visits, 80% supported universal paternity leave legislation, and 77.5% believed that community transport schemes would increase paternal ANC attendance.

Financial constraints on paternal involvement

Table IV presents respondents' assessments of specific financial constraints.

Table IV: Financial Constraints on Paternal Involvement During Maternity (n = 400)

Item	SA % (n)	Agree % (n)	Disagree % (n)
Cost of maternity care limits men's capacity to also attend ANC	35.0 (140)	37.5 (150)	10.0 (40)
Low income prevents men from taking unpaid time off for ANC	40.0 (160)	35.0 (140)	7.5 (30)
Men risk losing income or jobs by missing work for ANC	30.0 (120)	40.0 (160)	15.0 (60)
Emergency maternity transport funds would reduce maternal death delays	45.0 (180)	37.5 (150)	5.0 (20)

SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; D = Disagree. Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, 2022.

A combined 72.5% agreed that the cost of maternity care limits men's capacity to also attend ANC. The strongest endorsement came for emergency maternity transport funds (82.5%).

Hypothesis testing

H01: There is no significant relationship between the prevalence of socio-economic barriers and levels of paternal involvement.

Table V: Pearson's Correlation — Socio-Economic Barriers and Paternal Involvement (n = 400)

Variable	Prevalence of Barriers	Paternal Involvement
Prevalence of Barriers (r)	1.000	.650**
Sig. (2-tailed)	—	.002
Paternal Involvement (r)	.650**	1.000
Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	—
N	400	400

**** Correlation significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Source: Researcher's Analysis, 2022.**

$r = 0.650$, $p = 0.002$ ($p < 0.05$). H01 rejected. Socio-economic barriers are significantly associated with reduced paternal involvement.

H02: There is no significant relationship between fathers' opinions on paternity leave and employer obligations and levels of paternal involvement.

Table VI: Pearson's Correlation — Paternity Leave Opinions and Paternal Involvement (n = 400)

Variable	Paternity Leave Opinions	Paternal Involvement
Paternity Leave Opinions (r)	1.000	.710**
Sig. (2-tailed)	—	.002
Paternal Involvement (r)	.710**	1.000
Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	—
N	400	400

**** Correlation significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Source: Researcher's Analysis, 2022.** $r = 0.710$, $p = 0.002$ ($p < 0.05$). H02 rejected. Men who hold positive views on paternity leave and employer support are significantly more likely to engage in maternity care.

H03: There is no significant relationship between financial constraints on paternal ANC attendance and levels of paternal involvement.

Table VII: Pearson's Correlation — Financial Constraints and Paternal Involvement (n = 400)

Variable	Financial Constraints	Paternal Involvement
Financial Constraints (r)	1.000	.650**
Sig. (2-tailed)	—	.002
Paternal Involvement (r)	.650**	1.000
Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	—
N	400	400

**** Correlation significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Source: Researcher's Analysis, 2022.**

$r = 0.650$, $p = 0.002$ ($p < 0.05$). H03 rejected. Financial constraints are significantly associated with paternal involvement.

Discussion

The finding that work commitment (35%) is the single most commonly cited barrier to paternal involvement — surpassing all cultural, attitudinal, and knowledge-related barriers — positions economic and occupational factors as the primary upstream determinant of male nonengagement in maternity care in Calabar Metropolis. This is consistent with Greenspan et al.³ in Tanzania, Mbadugha et al.⁴ in Enugu, and Adeniran et

al.¹⁰ in Ilorin. The rejection of H01 ($r = 0.650$, $p = 0.002$) statistically confirms that socio-economic barriers are significantly associated with reduced paternal involvement, reinforcing the case for upstream structural interventions.

The rejection of H02 ($r = 0.710$, $p = 0.002$) — demonstrating a strong association between fathers' opinions on paternity leave and employer obligations and their level of maternity involvement — is among the most

policy-relevant findings of this study. The community mandate for universal paternity leave legislation (80%) and employer-granted paid leave (80%) provides a community-endorsed evidence base for policy advocacy. Nigeria's current paternity leave framework is structurally incompatible with meaningful paternal involvement across the full maternity continuum. The ILO⁶ framework recommends a minimum of ten working days covering the antenatal, delivery, and postnatal periods — the international standard against which Nigeria's legislative gap must be measured.

The correlation between socio-economic challenges and male involvement (H03: $r = 0.650$, $p = 0.002$) indicates a statistically significant association between financial constraints and paternal involvement. A hierarchy of determinants exists: knowledge and awareness ($r = 0.840$) and sociocultural norms ($r = 0.790$) are stronger predictors than socio-economic barriers ($r = 0.650$). However, this hierarchy establishes order, not priority — structural economic enabling conditions must

be addressed in parallel with knowledge and attitude interventions.

The most actionable finding is the 82.5% community endorsement of emergency maternity transport funds. Community-managed transport schemes address the second delay in Thaddeus and Maine's Three Delays framework — reaching a facility — which is directly exacerbated by transport cost barriers and the absence of male partners who would facilitate emergency transport. Taken together, the findings are consistent with a pattern in which socio-economic barriers are associated with lower paternal involvement, positive policy attitudes are associated with greater engagement, and financial constraints are associated with reduced participation; however, the cross-sectional design does not permit causal inference. A multi-level intervention strategy addressing legislative reform, employer obligations, and community transport infrastructure simultaneously is required.

Conclusion

This study found that socio-economic barriers, including work commitment and the lack of statutory paternity leave arrangements, were significantly associated with the level of paternal involvement in maternity care in Calabar Metropolis. Because a cross-sectional design was used, these findings should be interpreted as indicating association rather than establishing that socioeconomic barriers cause low paternal involvement. The observed associations nonetheless suggest that structural factors may warrant attention alongside individual knowledge and attitude interventions.

The community showed strong support for paternity leave legislation (80%), employer policy change (80%), and community emergency transport services (82.5%). Addressing the socioeconomic barriers associated with limited paternal involvement, particularly among men working in the

informal economy, may support Nigeria's progress toward its Sustainable Development Goals for maternal mortality reduction. Given the cross-sectional nature of this study, further longitudinal and interventional research is recommended to confirm these associations, clarify the direction of the relationships observed, and evaluate the effectiveness of the policy measures endorsed by the community in Cross River State.

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Conflict of Interest : The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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