

Effectiveness of Cultural Practices in Reducing Marital Infidelity and Divorce in Nigeria: A Study of Ogugu Community of Olamaboro Local Government Area of Kogi State

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Abstract

This study explores the cultural practices that contribute to reducing marital infidelity and divorce in Ogugu community, Kogi, State, Nigeria, through a qualitative research approach. The research involves a sample size of eighteen (18) participants, aged 40-70 years. Using a semi-structured interview guide and purposive sampling, in-depth interviews were conducted to gather rich, contextual data. A thematic approach was adopted to analyze the data, guided by the Functionalist Theory. The study revealed that traditional ceremonies (breaking of kola nut), respect for elders, ancestral spirits (Ibegwu), and community disapproval are significant cultural practices that promote marital stability. However, the effectiveness of these practices is challenged by globalization and Westernization, which are eroding traditional values and practices. The study highlights the importance of understanding the cultural context in which marital relationships exist and the need to preserve cultural heritage while promoting marital stability. The findings have implications for marital counseling, community development, and cultural preservation initiatives in Ogugu community and beyond. This study contributes to the growing body of research on the role of cultural practices in shaping marital relationships in African communities.

Keywords: *Cultural Practices, Marital Infidelity, Divorce, Ogugu, Community*

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Background to the Study

Human society have units which are very peculiar to it. One of such is the institution called marriage. Every race and culture have her marriage customs and practices, some are closely similar while others are different, though the essence of this union tends to be similar in all cultures. This union which in the beginning often have an expectation of a life-long relationship sometimes have a contrary ending with its attendant effects on the human society. The institution of marriage characterises all the behaviours, roles, norms, prospects and values that are related to legal union of a man and woman. Marriage was instituted by God to be union of a man and a woman, who are meant to be united as one flesh. Marriage is the union of a man and his wife in body and soul (Ayodele, 2001). marriage is a designed institution created by God to create an unending relationship between a man and a woman for pleasure, companionship and procreation (Animasahun, 2011). Men and women are joined in a special kind of legal agreement for the purpose of starting and maintaining a family (Akubue & Okolo, 2008). In traditional African society, specifically the Igala people of North-Central Nigeria, marriage is also seen as an integral act of societal life. The Igala value marriage so much and they count somebody who is due for marriage and does not marry as somebody who is not responsible. The Igalas view on marriage is that, marriage brings about children, and sincerely they look at marriage as something very important. In Igala culture, women are to remain with their husbands throughout their lives, she is to venerate her husband as much as possible and remain in her husband's house until death do them part. It is forbidden for a wife to have a male friend outside her marriage.

Modern culture is plagued with marital infidelity, which goes against the established standards, conventions, and values of traditional society. Since its inception, every civilization has possessed its own set of traditional beliefs and values, including the importance of spousal love and the exclusivity of sexual relationships. These vows are spoken during wedding ceremonies and are intended to be honoured by spouses in order to maintain the sacredness of the institution of marriage. Nevertheless, certain couples diverge from these societal conventions and engage in marital infidelity by pursuing relationships outside of their matrimonial residences. The diverse implications of this situation can have significant impacts on the psychological and sociological aspects of children's lives, perhaps resulting in marital instability and its associated repercussions.

Marital infidelity refers to the breach of established standards or societal expectations inside a marriage, leading to emotions of sexual jealousy and competition. The violation may involve sexual acts such as kissing, fondling, or engaging in sexual intercourse with someone other than one's spouse (Leeker & Carlozz, 2012). According to Schneider (2003), marital infidelity refers to a situation where a person engages in a relationship with someone other than their spouse, which affects the amount of intimacy, emotions, and overall balance in the marriage.

Marital infidelity as a prominent factor in divorce, weakens the fundamental basis of a partnership and has severe consequences. The cause of relationship crises worldwide is the reason (Rastogi, 2013; Whisman, 2007). Marital infidelity results in excruciating emotional anguish and suffering, a devastating blow to one's self-worth, and the shattering of trust. It

impacts individual social lives and alters victims' view of reality and various aspects of existence. Amato & Previti (2003), discovered that marital infidelity is the primary reported cause of marital instability and divorce, as well as the most influential factor leading to divorce.

Supporting the aforementioned statement, Barr (2013) provide evidence that marital infidelity has an impact on both the immediate and extended families. Divorce resulting from marital infidelity often leads to the divorced spouse being held responsible for the downfall of the other spouse and the harm caused to the children. Divorced individuals, compared to their married counterparts, have higher levels of psychological distress, substance abuse, and depression, as well as lower levels of overall health (Amato, 2000; Hughes & Waite, 2009). divorce is a legal dissolution of the marriage relation; any formal separation of a man and his wife according to established custom; a complete separation of any kind (Edet, 2014). when there is a marriage breakdown resulting in divorce, all strata of the society normally have their share of what may seem to be positive effects, though the negative effects are often more. One of the worst hit in the saga of divorce are children who may suffer physically, psychologically, economically and otherwise. They may become objects of abuse, hatred towards one of the parents (if not both), unbalance upbringing and training among other negative effects, even though it may have a positive effect of freeing the children from hostile and quarrelsome environment, causing them to start a new life with seeming better prospects. The negative effects of divorce on children far outweigh the positive effects. Marital infidelity and divorce have shown to be associated with negative child outcomes including lower academic success (Frisco et al, 2007). Given these negative outcomes of marital infidelity and divorce, different cultural practices were established to promote marital fidelity and stability (Shelby et al, 2013). Therefore, this study seeks to assess the effectiveness of cultural practices in reducing marital infidelity and divorce in Igalaland in particular and Nigeria in general, by exploring the intersection of culture, marriage and relationships, thereby contributing to the existing body of knowledge on the role of cultural practices in promoting marital fidelity and stability, using Ogugu community of Olamaboro local government area of Kogi state as a case study.

Objectives of the Study

This paper is determining the effectiveness of cultural practices in reducing marital infidelity and divorce in Ogugu community of Olamaboro Local Government Area of Kogi State, Nigeria. However, the specific objectives of the paper were:

- i. To identify the cultural practices that are perceived to reduce marital infidelity and divorce in the study area.
- ii. To determine the extent to which cultural practices influence marital conflict resolution and divorce in the study area.
- iii. To investigate factors influencing the effectiveness of cultural practices in reducing marital infidelity in the study area.
- iv. To measure the difference between marital fidelity and stability of people who practice these traditions and those who do not in the study area.

Theoretical Anchorage

Functionalism is a theoretical perspective that focuses on the functions performed in society by social structures such as institutions, hierarchies, and norms. Within this theory, functions refer to the extent to which a given activity promotes or interferes with the maintenance of a system. This theoretical perspective was developed as a response to the societal changes brought about by industrialization and modernization during the 19th and 20th centuries. This perspective was founded on the work of early sociologists such as Emile Durkheim (1993), Herbert Spencer (1874-1875), and Talcott Parsons (1951). Durkheim believed that a properly integrated society depends on strong bonds between its members and the presence of shared values. His work emphasizes the necessity of understanding social facts and the role that social institutions play in maintaining social order.

Basic Assumptions of the Functionalist Theory

Some of the basic assumptions of the functionalist theory include the following:

- i. Functional unity:** Functionalists believe that social institutions work together harmoniously to fulfill societal needs by sharing common values, norms, and goals.
- ii. Stability and order:** Functionalists contend that societies strive for stability and equilibrium. In order to keep social order and prevent widespread conflict, social institutions and norms are necessary.
- iii. Consensus and cooperation:** Functionalism assume that society agrees on fundamental values and norms. This consensus leads to cooperative efforts to reach common goals.
- iv. Macro-level analysis:** Functionalism focuses primarily on micro-level analysis of societal structures and their influence on individual behavior and group dynamics, often overlooking micro-level interactions.

Relevance of the Functionalist Theory to the Study

- i. Understanding marriage as a social institution:** Functionalism views marriage and family as key social institutions that maintain order and stability in society. Cultural practices can be seen as mechanisms that sustain the stability of marriage and reduce threats like infidelity and divorce.
- ii. Explains the role of cultural practices in social stability:** Functionalism argues that cultural norms, values, and traditions perform essential functions in maintaining harmony.
- iii. Prevention of social dysfunction:** Divorce and infidelity are seen as dysfunctions that threaten the stability of the family and society.
- iv. Promotes social integration and cohesion:** Functionalism emphasizes that shared norms and values hold society together. Cultural practices in marriage foster cooperation, respect, and collective responsibility, ensuring couples remain committed and integrated into the community.

Functionalism is highly relevant to this study because it explains how cultural practices act as social functions that maintain family stability, regulate marital behavior, prevent divorce, and promote community cohesion. It frames infidelity and divorce as social problems (dysfunctions), while cultural practices are seen as corrective mechanisms that restore order.

Concept of Marriage

In the creation account of Genesis (Genesis 2: 18), God acknowledged that man was not complete without a mate like himself, one who is equal to his status, and so God decided to make woman out of man (Genesis 2:21-25). Marriage was therefore instituted by God to be a union of a man and a woman, who are meant to be united as one flesh. Eve was made from the rib of Adam, when she was brought to him, he recognized her as the bone from his bone and flesh of his flesh. The creation of the first couple as man and woman according to divine wisdom was companionship because God saw that it was not good for Adam to be all by himself without a helper or companion as was recorded by the second chapter of Genesis (Peschke, 1994). The two are one and do not need any addition to be complete. The union of marriage is indissoluble and inviolable. God blessed Adam and Eve after creation and gave them the injunction to multiply and fill the earth; this is another dimension of marriage in the Old Testament. The context within which this command of procreation is to be fulfilled is marriage. Marriage is a major institution in the society; it is the foundation of family. It plays a vital role in the continuity, expansion and formation of the society.

Marital stability is a key factor in marriage. Marital stability is interpreted as whether a couple in a marriage remains together instead of separating or divorcing. The features of marital stability involve sensation of love, trust, admiration by the partner, respect and faithfulness by the partner, social support, dedication, equality of the task, gender roles and sexual relations. Wikipedia (2010) define marriage as a social union or legal contract between individuals that create kinship. It is an institution in which, interpersonal relationship, usually intimate and sexual are acknowledged in a variety of ways depending on the culture or sub-culture in which it is found. Such a union may also be called matrimony, which the ceremony that marked its beginning is usually called a wedding.

Mba (2015) pointed that marriage is a sacred institution. This sacredness comes into greater focus where people live closer to nature. All events, all societies set great value on marriage, and individuals too. This can explain why people still marry and desire to marry despite the many headaches and heartaches that are connected with marriage and family life in the modern world, and despite the efforts by some secularists to strip marriage of all sacred connotations. Marriage is by its very nature ordered to the procreation and education of offspring, and therefore the connection of marriage with the deep human mysteries of the life and birth has always set it apart in man's mind as something uniquely sacred and of divine origin.

Onwuli (2014) stated that marriage is an institution of nature and it must have its own inner principles and laws of existence and operation. These principles, man and society must discover and apply both in general and in particular case for their unfailing attainment of the ends and purposes of marriage. Gruga (2010) described marriage as a covenant of love. A covenant signifies a partnership communion and love. Indeed, marriage is a covenant of love, an invitation of love. It is a privilege from which flows many sided blessings and far-reaching responsibilities. Hence it requires faithfulness, generosity, and undivided heart, and can be very demanding at times like all species of true love. Burke (2016) pointed again that there is

an element of contract in marriage, and it is a very important one, for specifying the nature of the marital relationship before the society, so that apart from the deep commitment of love and self-giving, human dignity may be safeguarded in case of the failure of trusting and committed love. Rights, duties and obligations are never evaded where true love is not eroded. However, where love and faith fail, law and custom should be evoked to provide justice and security.

Marriage occupied an important position in the affairs of Africans, especially in the past. Without marriage, there is no family, and without a family, one could not bear children. The connection between marriage and family can hardly be separated among the traditional Africans. According to Mbiti (1969), for African peoples, marriage is the focus of existence. It is the point where all the members of a given community meet: the departed, the living and those yet unborn. All the dimensions of time meet here, and the whole drama of history is repeated, renewed and revitalized. Marriage is a drama in which everyone becomes an actor or actress and not just a spectator. The family is not just a component of the man, the wife and their children. The departed souls, relatives and the unborn generations are regarded as members of the family. That is why marriage is not the union, or the joining of a man and a woman for the purpose of becoming husband and wife, but a family. Marriage is basically a family or even a community affair. The involvement of the departed souls in African traditional marriage makes it a sacred affair. According to Abraham (1987), marriage in African tradition is the joining of two families through the union of one man and one woman and their children, always to the exclusion of all other men as regards the woman, and in monogamous societies, to the exclusion of all other women as regards the man. African traditional conception of marriage is teleological. It is primarily for procreation. Marriage can be dissolved on the ground of childlessness. The importance attached to children is however without basis. One major reason for that attachment is summed up in what Mbiti (1969) calls 'personal immortality.' When a man dies, he needs somebody to bear his name, so that his name does not die.

In Nigeria, marriage is regarded as one of the most important social customs which gives an individual respect and status, thereby putting pressure on many single people to marry. Besides, marriage is also viewed as a way of making one big family out of two families, hence the pressure on the bride and bridegroom to make the marriage work, as any problem will usually "affect both families and strain the otherwise cordial relationship between them. Traditional Marriage is marriage conducted in a setting that is accepted in a given community. Marriage in Igala traditional setting is viewed as a conduct between two persons, a man and a woman and their families. Negotiations are undertaken by the parents involved.

Concept of Infidelity

Infidelity is defined as a partner's violation of norms governing the level of emotional or physical intimacy in a committed relationship; extra-dyadic sex within the context of a monogamous relationship; a sexual, romantic, or emotional involvement that violates a commitment to an exclusive relationship; and a partnership violation of norms regulating the level of emotional or physical intimacy in a committed relationship (Drigotas & Barta 2001;

Glass, 2002; Zare, 2011; Mark, Janssen & Milhausen, 2009). Most frequently, infidelity (also known as cheating) refers to a breakdown of the expectation of sexual exclusivity. "Having an affair," "extramarital relationship," "cheating," "sexual intercourse," "oral sex," "kissing," "fondling," "emotional connections beyond friendships," "friendships," "online interactions," "pornography use," and other terms are used to describe infidelity (Blow & Hartnett 2005). Infidelity, according to Hertlein, Wetchler, & Piercy (2005), is defined as "engaging in sexual intercourse with someone other than one's spouse," "looking at pornography on the internet," "physical closeness," or "emotional intimacy" with someone other than one's spouse. Cheating, adultery, unfaithfulness, extramarital affairs, or stepping out are all terms used to describe infidelity (Okunola, 2019).

Concept of Marital Infidelity

Marital infidelity refers to the breach of established standards or societal expectations inside a marriage, leading to emotions of sexual jealousy and competition. The violation may involve sexual acts such as kissing, fondling, or engaging in sexual intercourse with someone other than one's spouse (Leeker & Carlozz, 2012). According to Schneider (2003), marital infidelity refers to a situation where a person engages in a relationship with someone other than their spouse, which affects the amount of intimacy, emotions, and overall balance in the marriage. Marital infidelity refers to engaging in an affair or a sexual relationship outside of marriage, which may involve sexual intercourse, oral sex, kissing, fondling, and emotional relationships that go beyond mere friendships (Blow & Hartnett, 2007). According to Lee (2013), an extramarital affair is seen as a breach of rules and conventions within a partnership by one partner, leading to feelings of envy and competition, which might manifest as either sexual or emotional actions.

However, some behaviours can be used to detect marital infidelity. According to Hertlein, Wetchler, & Piercy (2005), cheated partners may change their appearance, experience financial problems, change work habits, decrease intimacy, become secretive, buy a new phone secretly, have a lot of doubtful messages, and take phone calls late at night or in the middle of the night during the time they were involved in marital infidelity. Marriage infidelity, according to Fife, Weeks, & Gambescia (2008), is "a betrayal "implying or stating a commitment to intimate selectivity." Infidelity occurs when one partner shares emotional and physical closeness with someone outside of the main partnership without the agreement of the other.

Concept of Cultural Practices

Culture characterizes us as human-beings and members of a community. A country rich, strong and powerful country as Nigeria is made up of diverse cultural practices, ethnic groups and knowledge systems that help in shaping her day-to-day live and activities. As a blessed nation, Nigeria has rich culture embedded in belief, folklore, medicine, religion, age grading, marriage and education. Culture is essential for the existence of a society because it binds people together. Culture determines what people eat, how they prepare their food and how they treat themselves (Akomolafe, 2018). Also, it determines how a people relate to their environment and shape how they commune with their ancestors and their gods. Culture is not

only a means of communication between people, but it helps, through shared identities, to create a feeling of belonging and togetherness among people in the society (Akomolafe, 2018). Taylor (1871), saw culture as that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, arts, morals, law, customs or any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.

Cultural practices refer to the activities, ritual, and traditions that are specific to a particular community or group, shaping its identity and way of life. These practices encompass a wide range of social behaviors, food preparation, language, and marriage customs. Cultural practices are passed down through generations and play a crucial role in maintaining the continuity of a community's heritage. They also serve as a way to connect individuals with their cultural roots and foster a sense of belonging. Cultural practices refer to the demonstration of a culture of people particularly in regard to traditional and habitual patterns of social interactions, behaviors and activities undertaken by an ethnic group (Kiriro, 2011). However, cultural practices can evolve overtime, influenced by globalization, technology, and interactions with other cultures. While some practices are preserved as symbols of cultural pride, others may be adapted or abandoned in response to changing social norms.

Cultural Practices and Marriage Infidelity

Cultural practices, as a vital component of societal norms and values, plays a significant role in shaping attitude and relationships (Hofstede, 2011). It is the customary behaviors, rituals, and traditions that define a community's identity and social structure. They are passed down through generations. In many African cultures, including those in Nigeria, traditional practices and customs have been employed to promote marital stability, fidelity, and cohesion (Mbiti, 1969). These practices include the following:

(i). Ibegwu tradition and marital infidelity: In Ogugu traditional marriage, there is what is called 'Agarama Ata Oma' meaning the kola-nut of the girl's father. This portion of Ogugu marriage is very crucial and can be dangerous, because it is the oath taking where by the girl's parents, especially the girl's father goes into an oath and place his daughter on oath of covenant that the girl would not have any sexual intercourse (extra-marital affair) with any man except her husband and report any sexual misbehavior(s) of any man with her to her husband. And any case of failure of the girl to honour this covenant could result into the spirit of the ancestor (Ibegwu) to arrest her with mysterious ailment until she confesses and performs the sacrifices. This rules of "Agarama Ata Oma" goes further to state that, the wife would not give or receive any property without telling her husband, even if the person is her relatives, she must tell her husband without keeping secret from her husband (Abah, 2016). Ibegwu is mostly practiced in Ogugu community, to ensure that a bride remains faithful to her husband. It is a traditional insurance against all forms of infidelity and unfaithfulness in marriage. Ibegwu means the group or collection of ancestors. By literal definition, Ibegwu means "land of the dead where spirit dwell in". Thus, the Ibegwu is believed to be a kind of spirit that haunts a spouse who commits infidelity. The Ibegwu serves as a way through which the ancestors of the Ogugu people watch over their progeny to prevent them from committing adultery and mischief. The potency of this practice is highly believed in by Ogugu people.

This, therefore, increases the rate of fidelity amongst married women in Ogugu community and igala extraction as a whole. It is believed that Ibegwu, will visit a household where there is a cheating spouse, basically a woman. Since the tradition of the igala people permits polygyny, men are not seen as cheating because of the assumption of him trying to get another wife. When Ibegwu visits a household, it will inflict upon them an uncommon sickness that will be very difficult to cure. For the women, her stomach begins to swell causing her to groan in pain. For her to be cured, she first must confess. When there is no confession, the situation gets aggravated and leads to death (Mathias, 2024).

(ii). Magun and Marital infidelity: Magun is otherwise known as “thunderbolt” among the Yoruba people of South-West, Nigeria, and even across some countries in Africa, literally means “do not climb”. Marital Infidelity is a serious and punishable offence, and it is one of the leading reasons for magun convenience involvement. Yoruba community, particularly in rural areas of the states, has a long-standing practice of punishing anyone caught in the act of having illegal sexual relations with other people. Due to the power, efficiency, and catastrophic consequence of the magnificent device, Yoruba people employ it to checkmate adultery. According to “Cheating in Relationship” (2018), both the Hebrew law and the Christian religion across the world condemn adultery. Magun is a magical force that is laced on a promiscuous and adulterous woman to reveal her and the adulterous male. It is infused on a string of thread or a single broom and then placed on the door of a house or room for a promiscuous lady to cross over and be enchanted with magun there and then. It should be emphasized; however, that magun is linked with many types of taboo (eewo). These taboos have the potential to summon the power of this charm, which will murder the victim. Magun, according to Awolalu & Dopamu (1977), may be divided into two types: hot magun and cold magun. Unlike the hot *mágùn*, which kills instantaneously, the cold *mágùn* kills over time. The Hot magun include (i) *olókìtì* (somersaulting), (ii) *alákùko* (crowing like a cock), (iii) *elébùrúùké* (disguised), (iv) *olómi* (water) and (v) *àsopò* (gluing). By *olókìtì*, a man somersaults after having intercourse with a woman infected with it. After the third somersault, the man gives up the ghost. As for *alákùko*, the man stretches his neck like a cock and crows loudly three times and dies. The *elébùrúùké* type makes the genitals burst and so he becomes impotent for life. While the *olómi* is the type where the victim begins to drink water after the illicit act till he dies. The *àsopò* type exposes both involved in the act into shame and ridicule, as they become glued in the act until they are both caught in the very act and where no one comes to their aid on time, they may both give up the ghost. The cold *mágùn* are those that do not kill instantly. The victim may go about unnoticed until he breaks the taboo attached to such *mágùn*. For instance, if it is “*mágùnónílá*” (Don't eat okro), the victim may not notice anything until he takes okro soup and once he takes it, he starts off triggers the death string (Awolalu & Dopamine, 1977).

(iii). Arochukwu tradition and marital infidelity: In Arochukwu of Abia state, Nigeria, when a woman commits marital infidelity, it is considered an abomination which has grievous consequences. The sacredness of her marriage has been desecrated, and it is believed that the ancestors leashes out punishments on the perpetrator, until some rituals are performed to appease them (Therese, 2022). In Arochukwu, tradition has it that once a married woman

indulges in extramarital affair, she brings calamity to her home. The repercussion falls not only on her, but on her husband and entire household. According to this belief, if the woman in question continues to cook and have sexual intercourse with her husband, or make him eat anything from the man with whom she is having the affair, he will begin to experience setbacks in his business and health. The man may get warning signs from the ancestors; he may for no just cause fall while walking or experience other strange ordeals. These bizarre experiences will make the man question his wife. But if he ignores the warnings, he may lose his speech and be stricken with a very strange and grave illness. At this point, the relatives of the man will step in, and question the woman too, and subsequently hand her over to the womenfolk to further examine and penalize her. When a woman confesses to have committed adultery, the womenfolk will give her a list of items to be provided for her cleansing. Her husband must not contribute in providing the items, she must provide them from her resources or by the man with whom she committed the act. She will be taken to the village square, where the women will shave her hair and perform some other rituals for cleansing. Whether she confesses to the crime or not, her husband will stop eating food prepared by her and having sexual relations with her. After the cleansing if she can no longer keep to her husband alone, another ritual called “iwupummirina-ezi” (pouring out water) will be performed by her husband. They will separate room and board, and will not have anything to do with each other, though she can still remain in the husband's house if she so desires (Therese, 2022).

(iv). Ndi-ishi tradition and marital infidelity: Ndi-ishi is an ancient traditional practice in Enugu-Ezike which is aimed at preventing men and women from engaging in extra-marital affairs. Enugu-ezike is located in the Northern most part of Enugu state, Nigeria. In the Enugu-Ezike traditional setting, the most common punishment meted out to women who commit infidelity is madness, which is locally known as Igba-ishi or Iru-ala. For the women, once the bride price is paid, the woman is expected to cook for the husband's family (nri nna di), and from then on, the woman is automatically initiated into the Ndi-ishi tradition and can no longer engage in any sexual relationship with another man apart from the man who paid the bride price. For men, a man may run mad only when he sleeps with a married woman, but a woman stands the chance of running mad when she engages in any sexual activity with any man (married or unmarried) other than her husband. In the event that a woman cheats on her husband, it is expected that her husband would stop eating the food made by her and report the matter to the woman's family for a solution. When the man is aware of the wife's misdemeanour and continues to partake in the food prepared by the guilty wife, the deity known as "Ala" will kill the man and may also kill the male children in the family, after which the wife will become a lunatic (Onyeka, Emeafor & Mamah, 2024).

Factors Influencing the Effectiveness of Cultural Practices.

The effectiveness of cultural practices in Nigeria, is influenced by a complex interplay of factors that include the following:

(i). Community Engagement: The involvement of community members in cultural practices plays a crucial role in sustainability. Active participation from community members enhances the authenticity and sustainability of preservation efforts. Communities that are deeply involved in preservation activities tend to have higher success rates in maintaining and

restoring cultural heritage sites. Their involvement often brings local knowledge and skills, which are crucial for modern times have seen a departure from these traditions. Now, people who are unfamiliar with each other's families or homes may engage in intimate relationships without formalizing their union. Some even practice "trial marriage." African tradition strongly discourages childbirth outside of wedlock. Yet, contemporary society has adopted terms like "baby mama" to describe women who have children with men they are not legally married to. Some individuals identify as "single fathers" or "single mothers," while others opt for surrogate mothers to avoid the physical effects of pregnancy and breastfeeding. These practices are not rooted in African culture but rather reflect Western influences. Alarming, divorce rates are rising as once-celebrated traditions become increasingly rejected (Emmanuel, 2024).

(ii). Westernization: Westernization is the process by which a society adopts or integrates elements of Western culture, values, and practices. A number of studies have highlighted the impact of Western ideals and values on traditional marriage practices in Nigeria and the resulting shift in societal expectations of marriage. Rooted in Western culture and prevalent in Nigeria, gender equality is recognized as one of the means of influencing traditional institutions of marriage. Olaniyi (2015) found that increasing female empowerment in Nigeria has led to an increase in divorce rates as traditional gender roles are challenged and renegotiated. His findings show that changes in gender dynamics have transformative effects on marital relationships. In Nigeria, as in many other African societies, traditional gender roles have long determined marital expectations and responsibilities. However, as women's empowerment progresses, these traditional roles are being challenged and renegotiated, leading to major changes within the marriage community. Moreover, changing gender dynamics are challenging societal norms and expectations around marriage, challenging and rejecting traditional beliefs that emphasize male dominance and control in relationships (Chumburidze, 2016). This shift has led to an increase in marital conflict as couples grapple with the complex issue of balancing traditional values with modern notions of gender equality (Sibani, 2018).

(iii). Migration: Migration inherently involves the movement of people, but it also entails the transfer and transformation of cultural practices and identities. In Nigeria, where cultural identity is closely linked to ethnicity and religion, migration can challenge traditional norms and lead to the emergence of new cultural identities. This is particularly evident in urban areas, where diverse ethnic groups interact daily; creating a cultural mosaic that blends different traditions. However, this blending can also lead to the dilution or even loss of certain cultural practices, as migrants adapt to the dominant culture of their new environment (Anuonye, 2024). The Nigerian Diaspora has a significant impact on cultural trends both within Nigeria and abroad. Remittances sent by Nigerians living abroad have not only supported families but also financed cultural initiatives such as festivals and the preservation of traditional practices. However, it was noted that while older generations of the Diaspora maintain strong ties with their cultural roots, younger Nigerians abroad are more prone to cultural assimilation, adopting the customs and values of their host countries. This has led to a gradual shift in cultural practices, particularly among return migrants who bring back new ideas and practices to Nigeria. (Anuonye, 2024).

Marital Fidelity and Practice of Traditions

In modern Nigeria, marital fidelity is often taken to mean abstaining from sex with anyone other than one's spouse. However, this involves not only an oversimplification, but a hyper-focus on the sexual aspect of marriage. If marriage is what natural law teaches it is, namely, the union of a man and a woman who: (1) give their whole selves to each other: minds, wills, hearts, and bodies; (2) are open to begetting children; (3) agree to a lifelong union; and (4) are exclusive (no side-partners allowed), then it's not merely about keeping our hands off others, but primarily about being faithful to the whole gift of self being given and received in marriage. Marital fidelity is an acquired quality that is developed intentionally. It means a choice of complete commitment, trust, and respect between husband and wife (Matheson, 2009). More than that, fidelity denotes unflinching fulfillment of one's responsibilities and the keeping of one's word or vows (Paulukonis, 2014) expressed through a love of complete devotion by couples (Benson, 2002).

This commitment to fidelity is rooted in the deep belief that loyalty in marriage preserves family honour and community stability. Therefore, marital fidelity is not solely a private commitment but a public expectation, with society placing immense value on trust and integrity within the marital bond. Some of the essential Nigeria traditional values includes, Ibegwu, Magun, Ndi-ishi and so on. These practices have long governed the nature of relationship. In Nigeria culture, traditions significantly shape marriages. They define courtship, bride price, and ceremonies, showcasing community involvement. The process often involves families negotiating and uniting through shared customs. Traditional practices instill a sense of identity and belonging, fundamental to Nigerian society. Traditionally, Nigerian marriages focused on communal participation. Families played a crucial role, emphasizing the importance of lineage and heritage. Bride price, often paid in cash or kind, symbolized the groom's commitment. Ceremonies showcase colorful attire, music, and dance, celebrating the couple's union. Fidelity in marriage is seen as an integral part of societal life as what affects the family affect the community and the society as a whole. Men and women are joined in a special kind of legal agreement for the purpose of starting and maintaining a family (Akubue & Okolo 2008).

Area of Study and Research Method

Ogugu Community is located in Olamaboro Local Government Area of Kogi State, Nigeria within the middle-belt of Nigeria, comprises of Igala speaking people, with an Igala version tagged as Akporto due to the phonetic/tone of the people inhabiting that part of Igala land. It consists of lineages like Okwatobida (Okwa) lineage, Odu-Ogidiga (Emodu) lineage and Ayegba Oma-ofo (Ofante) lineage with over twenty (20) subclasses, and over fifty (50) villages including Ogugu centre (OG Town) around Ogugu Community. Its geographical coordinates are 7° 06' North and 7° 29' East. The population of the Ogugu community, within the Olamaboro Local Government Area of Kogi State, Nigeria, was 180,000 according to the 2006 census. Originally, the tradition of community came into existence in late 16th century at Unyi-Ogugu erogwu when the progenitor of the people came and settled in the tick forest of the owls (Unyi-Ogugu) on the eastern land boundary between Kogi, Benue and Enugu states. The religion of Ogugu people was paganism before the coming of Christianity and Islamic

religions in 20th century. The community, have historically been an agrarian community, with agriculture being their primary occupation, cultivating crops like yams, cassava, and groundnuts, alongside other products common in the state.

A descriptive survey research design was adopted using qualitative data collection methods, specifically through the use of in-depth interviews in the elicitation of data for the study. In the study, a total of 20 participants were interviewed, including married men and women, and traditional elders, who have relevant experience with marital practices and cultural norms, and have experienced, witnessed, or possessed substantial knowledge about marital infidelity in the study area; using purposive sampling technique. This technique guided this research in the selection of participants by ensuring that the data collected are relevant and meaningful in the study. In the analysis of data, in-depth interview was based on the targeted participants and their response analyzed and interpreted as reported and it was subjected to the responses from the in-depth interview based on the objectives of the study.

Results/Discussion of Findings

This section of the paper examines data presentation, analysis and interpretation. This section of the paper is based on the objectives of the study. This paper adopted a thematic analysis approach to analyze the qualitative data collected as it allows the researcher to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns and themes that emerge from participants' narratives about cultural practices, marital infidelity, and divorce in the study area. After the interviews were conducted and audio-recorded (with participants' consent), the recordings were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy. For the interviews were conducted in the Igala language, the transcripts were translated into English language, while maintaining the original meanings and cultural expressions.

Table 1: Age Distribution of Participants

Age (in years)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
40	3	15
45	4	20
48	3	15
53	5	25
67	3	15
70	2	10
Total	20	100

Source: Field Interview, 2026

Table 1 above indicate that three (3) participants (15%) fall within the ages of forty years (40 years), forty-eight years (48 years) and sixty-seven years (67 years) respectively, those at the age of forty-five years (45 years) are four (4) participants, those ta the age of fifty-three years (53 years) are five (5) participants while the remaining two (2) participants falls within seventy years (70 years) old.

Table 2: Sex Distribution of the Participants

Sex	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	8	40
Female	12	60
Total	20	100

Source: Field Interview, 2026

In table 2 above, eight (8) of the participants (40%) are make-up of males while the remaining twelve (12) participants that make are make-up of sixty percent (60%) are females by gender. this shows that females participate more in the study

Table 3: Religion Distribution of the Participants

Religion	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Christianity	10	50
Islam	6	30
African Traditional Religion	4	20
Total	20	100

Source: Field Interview, 2026

In table 3 above, ten (10) participants are into Christianity making up the fifty percent (50%) of the total participants, thirty percent (30%) of the participants are of Islam religion while the remaining twenty percent (20%) are of African Traditional Religion making up just four (4) participants of the study.

Table 4: Occupation Distribution of Participants

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Farmer	4	20
Artisans	7	35
Business/Trading	6	30
Civil Servant	3	15
Total	20	100

Source: Field Interview, 2026

Table 4 above indicates that four (4) of the participants are farmers by profession, seven (7) of them are Artisans, six (6) participants are into business/trading while the remaining three (3) participants are civil servants.

Table 5: Distribution of Participants by Years in Marriage

Years in marriage	Frequency	Percentage (%)
13	3	15
15	4	20
20	3	15
32	4	20
37	4	20
40	2	10
Total	20	100

Source: Field Interview, 2026

In the distribution of participants based on the duration of their marriages, three (3) participants had been married between 13 years and 20 years respectively, also four (4) participants had been together as couples within 15 years, 32 years and 37 years respectively while only two (2) participants are married for 40 years.

Section A: Respondents knowledge on the cultural practices that are perceived to reduce marital infidelity and divorce in Ogugu community.

In the key informant interview conducted (KII), the interviewee stated that family members play an important role during traditional marriage rites, especially the elderly ones. The elders and traditional worshipers perform sacrifice for cleansing from mysterious ailments of Ibegwu when it is violated.

Response from the participants

An old woman from Ogbofe community, confirmed that:

"Ogugu have strong cultural practices that help to promote faithfulness and stable marriage such as Ibegwu tradition, breaking of kola nut during marriage ceremonies and the collection of kola nut in case of divorce. She stated that this practice is still in existence and are still respected by both older and younger couples in the community, stating that she lost someone close to her recently as a result of mysterious ailment from Ibegwu for committing adultery. Collecting of kola nut is also a traditional practice in Ogugu which aimed at preventing rampant divorce because of its long and stressful process, in most cases during the process the couples reconcile see the need to be together again after the elders and family members mediate.....(KII participant, married, female, 68years, farming, Ogbofe).

Also, an old man from Ikemu-Ogugu community provided detailed account of how men, women and children who died for not keeping the Ibegwu tradition by stating that:

" A man died with his first son because the wife committed adultery and the man was aware but he did nothing about it. A woman who happened to be his uncle's wife also died for committing adultery and she was not able to confess and do the sacrifice.....(KII participant, married, male, 45years, an artisan, Ogbofe).

Similarly, an indigenous daughter of Ogugu community also narrated how strong and effective these cultural practices are, stating that:

"Ibegwu goes beyond prohibiting adultery, that one young man was brought home dead from another state for giving his girlfriend money to carry out an abortion which is against Ibegwu tradition. She also explained that any person that violates these Ibegwu tradition has to perform some sacrifice which is usually done by elders and traditional worshipers and failure to do that leads to death.... (KII participant, married, female, 50years, trading, Ofante).

In addition, an indigenous elderly man in the Ogugu community observed as follows:

"In Ogugu community, the cultural practice of 'Agarama' (kola-nut of the girl's father) serves as a deterrent to marital infidelity. The oath-taking ceremony during traditional marriage rites places a spiritual consequence on women who engage in extra-marital affairs, thereby reducing instances of infidelity.....(KII participant, married, male, 70years, farming, Okwa).

Furthermore, a middle-aged man added his voice to the cultural practices in Ogugu community by stating that:

"Our tradition emphasizes the importance of submission and respect for husbands. Ogugu women are taught from a young age to be submissive and supportive to their husbands, which helps prevent marital conflicts that could lead to divorce. "Agarama" meaning kola nut of the girl's father, is the oath of covenant that commit a woman fully to Ibegwu practices which goes beyond prohibiting adultery or cheating in marriage to include not to give or receive any property without telling her husband....(KII participant, married, male, 45years, civil servant, Emodu).

Section B: Respondents knowledge on the extent at which the cultural practices have been effective in reducing marital infidelity and divorce in Ogugu community?

Responses from Participants

A lady participant observed as follows:

"The cultural practices have been quite effective in reducing marital infidelity and divorce. The fear of spiritual consequences and community disapproval helps to keep couples committed to their marriages.....(KII participant, married, female, 40years, trading, Ogugu 1).

Another male participant who is an indigene in the course of the interview stated as follows:

"The practices are effective to a large extent, but there are cases where couples still engage in infidelity or divorce. However, these cases are often handled swiftly by the community elders to prevent further escalation....(KII participant, married, male, 38years, farming, Ogugu 1).

One of the participants make her observation in the following way:

"While the 'Ibegwu' tradition has been effective in maintaining marital fidelity, its effectiveness is waning among younger generations who are increasingly influenced by Western values, some couples no longer perform the 'Agarama' breaking of kola nut during traditional marriage...(KII participant, married, female, 53years, civil servant, Ogugu 3).

Section C: Respondents knowledge on effect of Globalization and Westernization on the effectiveness of cultural practices in reducing marital infidelity and divorce in the study area.

Responses from Participants A lady participant stated that:

"The influence of Westernization has resulted in more women questioning traditional practices that they perceive as oppressive. This has led to a shift away from traditional values that previously helped maintain marital stability.....(KII participant, married, female, 40years, civil servant, Ogbofe).

A male participant in the community clarified that: *"While globalization has brought many benefits, it has also eroded some of the traditional values that were effective in maintaining marital fidelity. Couples are now more exposed to Western ideas of marriage and relationships. Couples no longer perform all the traditional marriage rites that fully commit women to Ibegwu practice....(KII participant, married, male, 40years, farming, Ikemu-Ogugu).*

Discussion of Findings

From the data presentation, the study revealed the following key findings analyzed through the lens of Functionalism. Functionalism emphasizes the role of cultural norms, values, and institutions in maintaining social stability and order. Within the Ogugu community, cultural practices surrounding marriage function as mechanisms of social control, integration, and conflict resolution that contribute to marital stability and community cohesion.

Ancestral Spirits and Spiritual Consequences: The fear of spiritual consequences for violating traditional laws is consistent with studies on the role of religiosity and spirituality in promoting relationship quality. For instance, Lambert & Dollahite (2008) found that joint religiosity and marital sanctification can foster spiritual intimacy and better relationship outcomes.

Traditional Ceremonies and Oath-Taking: The "Agarama" ceremony serves as a deterrent to marital infidelity, echoing findings by Fincham, Lambert, & Beach (2010) that praying for one's partner can reduce infidelity. Similarly, sanctification of marriage has been linked to better relationship quality and lower risk of divorce.

Respect for Elders and Tradition: The community's emphasis on respect for elders aligns with studies on the importance of social support and community involvement in maintaining marital stability. Research by Wilcox & Wolfinger (2016) suggests that religious attendance and belief can uphold the institutional power and stability of marriage. The findings revealed

that Ibegwu (ancestral sanctions against adultery), marriage rituals (such as eating and presenting kola nut), and the active role of elders in counselling and mediating disputes are central practices that regulate marital conduct. These practices are deeply rooted in the community's cultural system, providing both symbolic and practical frameworks that promote fidelity.

From a functionalism perspective, these traditions serve as social control mechanisms. For instance, the fear of ancestral punishment under Ibegwu deters spouses from engaging in infidelity, while kola nut rituals symbolize communal consent and reinforce shared values about marital responsibilities. Elders' mediation embodies Durkheim's idea of collective conscience, ensuring that individual conflicts do not destabilize the wider community. Thus, these practices contribute to equilibrium within the social system by promoting responsibility, accountability, and adherence to communal norms.

Participants indicated that these cultural mechanisms have historically been very effective in sustaining marriages, citing real-life examples where disputes were reconciled after rituals or elder interventions. However, the effectiveness is reportedly declining among younger couples, who are less committed to traditional authority. This aligns with existing literature on: Through the lens of Functionalism, effectiveness is tied to the degree of social consensus. The practices work best when community members collectively believe in their legitimacy. As long as people share the value of Ibegwu sanctions or respect elder authority, these institutions perform their stabilizing role. Once belief weakens—due to modernization or generational shifts—the stabilizing function weakens too. Thus, functionalism helps explain why these practices still work among older generations but are becoming less binding for youths who are influenced by new value systems.

The findings indicate that globalization and Westernization have significantly impacted the effectiveness of traditional cultural practices in reducing marital infidelity and divorce in Ogugu community. These findings align with existing literature on the impact of globalization on cultural heritage and traditional practices. Globalization has led to the erosion of traditional cultural practices and values, replacing them with Western ideals. This is consistent with studies by Folorunso (2021), Owamoyo & Tabibi (2023), which highlight the negative impacts of globalization on cultural heritage conservation and traditional architecture in Nigeria. The adoption of Western architectural styles and materials has contributed to the decline of traditional architecture in urban areas, as noted by Agboola & Zango (2014). Westernization has influenced Nigerian marital systems, introducing concepts like monogamy, romantic love, and individual choice in partner selection. This is in line with research by Ugbam (2014), which explores the impact of globalization on African culture, including Nigerian marital systems. The shift from traditional to Westernized marital practices has brought about changes in gender roles and dynamics within marriages, with some studies suggesting that this shift has empowered women and promoted gender equality (The Impact of Westernization on Nigerian Marital Systems, 2024).

Conclusion

This study concludes that cultural practices in Ogugu community—particularly Ibegwu sanctions, kola nut rituals, and elder mediation—play a vital role in reducing marital infidelity and divorce. These practices serve as deterrents against misconduct, frameworks for conflict resolution, and instruments for preserving communal harmony. However, the growing influence of globalization and westernization has weakened these practices, especially among the youth. While modernization provides alternative systems such as legal and religious institutions, these do not always carry the same communal authority or cultural weight as indigenous traditions. Therefore, the sustainability of marriages in Ogugu depends on the integration of cultural values with modern systems. Preserving and adapting cultural practices can ensure they remain relevant tools for safeguarding marital stability in the face of evolving social dynamics.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from the study above, the following recommendations are made:

- i. **Community Action:** Traditional leaders and elders should actively promote cultural values during marriage ceremonies, festivals, and community forums. This will help transmit indigenous knowledge to younger generations.
- ii. **Integration of Systems:** Religious institutions and marriage counsellors should incorporate positive cultural practices—such as elder mediation and kola nut rituals—into counselling programmes to strengthen conflict resolution.
- iii. **Youth Sensitization:** Awareness programmes should be designed for young couples, highlighting the relevance of cultural practices in promoting fidelity and sustaining marriages. This could be done through schools, youth associations, and cultural events.
- iv. **Policy Support:** Government and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) should document and preserve indigenous marital practices as part of Nigeria's intangible cultural heritage. This can be supported through cultural centers, museums, and research grants.
- v. **Conflict Resolution Training:** Elders and traditional leaders should receive capacity-building training on modern counselling methods, so they can combine traditional wisdom with contemporary approaches to better serve couples.

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