

Paternity fraud in Nigeria and the distress of fathers: Multiple case studies

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Abstract

Can you even imagine the utmost horror of a supposedly loving father discovering accidentally that a child he nurtured from childhood as his own eventually turns out not to be his biological child? He never knew, never suspected nor did it ever cross his mind that his caring wife might have a dark secret! But when the need to prove the ownership of the child arose, the clear and true picture became obvious. The child is not the product of the present union, but the product of some other union. Who then are the child's true parents?

Keywords: Distress; Fraud; Laboratory Investigation; Paternity.

1. Introduction

Cases of paternity fraud have been increasingly reported in Nigeria and the need to prove one's ownership of children had risen dramatically. In the early 1980s, such challenges were relatively rare, maybe because of the fact that the morals of the society were relatively high then.

Mother getting pregnant out of wedlock was unheard of back then and again most of our grand-parents were traditionalists and these extra-marital activities were reportedly punished instantly by the deities that they serve.

These modern or jet-aged era where most people do not worship the ancient traditional beings anymore, are now free rangers and have escaped the long arms of the dreaded supernatural realms. Many people are fully emancipated and are free thinkers with new religion.

Therefore, no such issues of paternity challenges were reported way back in our lineages and as a result one can be sure, without any iota of doubts that one's child was truly his child. Presently, several de-humanizing reports of paternity frauds are coming out almost on a daily and weekly basis. Families that were once happy as a unit living together are now being shattered by laboratory proven evidence that a man who was once a father before, was now no longer a father to a child that was previously his.

2. Case histories

A happy family of six, with the first child being a young progressive young man of eighteen years of age, and three younger sisters of various ages was brought to a brutal sadness due to an unsuspected discovering. All had been great for the family until the young man gained admission into a higher institution for a certificate course and he had to carry out the mandatory health screening in the school's health centre. His proud and happy father took him to the health centre where the routine radiological investigation and laboratory tests which included blood genotype were done. All

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seemed well until the genotype result read "AS" as against the expected "AA" since both parents were "AA". The amused father was sure that a mistake had been made and requested the school's health centre to repeat the test and he was ready to pay the extra charges. It was repeated and the result was the same "AS". This denoted that the young man was a carrier of the sickle cell disease gene. "Where did this come from? the now really bothered father asked repeatedly. To clear out the fear developing in his head, he then re-tested the three daughters and happily they all returned as "AA" genotype. Only the first child was "AS" and why was this so? At this stage, both maternal and paternal relatives were informed and were well aware of the developing dilemma. All the adult family members subsequently requested for a paternity DNA testing and this was promptly performed.

Meanwhile, the frightened mother had been threatened by all family members to confess but she adamantly refused, pleading her innocence. She was forced to agree for the paternity test, which was eventually done and ALAS!!!, her husband, previously a father to a son, was not the biological father of the boy. The man was devastated, completely taken aback at this development.

The parents met as undergraduate in the university, courted for a period and had a church wedding that was well attended. Apparently, she reportedly had a last fling with a previous man-friend on the eve of her marriage, and this last parting romance probably resulted into the conception of the now young man in the middle of a family crisis

Another case was that a man, who who's son had a febrile illness and needed to be transfused. The father offered to donate his blood. After a grouping and cross matching, it was discovered that the father was not a match. The worried father had sleepless night and had to seek for solution. He questioned his wife to tell him if she had any secret that she was keeping. He had to resort to Paternity test. It was discovered that non of his three children were his. On further examination, it was discovered that he actually could not father children as he had azospermia.

His wife claimed that she did him a favour as the actual father of the children was the driver. The devastated father could not take an immediate decision on what to do. On further thought and examination, the man decided to keep the children as his and the driver was fired.

In another case where , a man came back from Canada to move his entire family abroad. His wife and children were resident in Nigeria while he was abroad. Apparently, he had obtained legal papers to enable him move his entire family to his country where he resides presently, but the embassy insisted on DNA proof that he was the true father of their three children. Unfortunately, the DNA test showed that none of the three children were his biological children. The emotionally depleted man thoroughly traumatised the woman but she lived.

In another case where the wife told her husband that she was pregnant after having four children with the last child about ten years. He was mostly out of town and could not remember the last time he slept with his wife. He outrightly denied the pregnancy and had to call for a family meeting. Her family and his were invited and it was agreed that a DNA test should be carried out after the birth of the child. He was a wealthy man while the wife was a house wife. Unfortunately he was murdered before the child was born. The family still insisted that a DNA test should still be carried out and it was discovered that the late husband was actually not the father of the child. The saga led to the early demise of this individual.

There are unfortunately many more cases which has been thrown under the drain and not reported. The men involved had either accepted thier fate or died in silence. Many of these issues had led to a lot of divorce, most men are even too poor to even afford a DNA test as it is expensive.

Such challenges of paternity fraud had put a lot of stress and great distrust among many previously stable and happy homes.

Lots of homes are gradually being broken and the innocent children are left unprotected and very vulnerable.

3. Discussion

In the more recent times, large and colourful billboards that are advertising the availability of facilities where paternity testing could be done are being mounted at several strategic positions in our cities and communities. And the public adverts are shown to be accessible locally and at affordable costs. This obviously strange development was new and seemed immoral at first but recent investigative reports involving high profile personalities have made them more visible and acceptable.

The awareness of its usefulness has grown exponentially, especially in the face of dramas and home-videos churned out by the popular Nollywood film industry that had dramatized the offences of marital infidelity as being relatively a common act.

Thus, more people are knowledgeable of their presence and their capability to investigate in the face of any suspicion.

Paternity fraud is on the increase, probably due to the present economic hardship where even married mothers may be tempted by richer men for sexual gratification and monetary favours subsequently.

A paternity fraud was said to have happened when a man or a woman knowingly but falsely said that a man is the biological father of a child. A lie had been told to be believed by a trusting father⁽¹⁾. Another name is called misattributed paternity which a circumstance where a man is incorrectly assumed to be the genetic father.^(2,3)

Paternity testing, also known as parentage testing has made paternity fraud more difficult.⁽⁴⁾ Paternity fraud is a charge made when a woman falsely accused a man of fathering child to get child support or some financial benefits.⁽⁴⁾

Luckily, paternity DNA testing is an accurate investigative tool of identifying if a man is truly the biological father of a child or not. The results can be trusted without doubt.

The world-wide reports say that Nigeria is the second ranked nation with the highest proven paternity fraud, only after Jamaica. Further report also displayed an undesired fact that three out of ten children of Nigerian men, were found not to be the biological children of the fathers who previously claimed to be theirs^(5,6).

The consequences of this fraud include a feeling of betrayal leading to total breakdown in communications, worsening mental health post discovery, domestic violence leading to murder or suicide.^(3,7 8)

Many men had unknowingly raised children that they did not father biologically. Paternity fraud is relatively common in Nigeria and because of the high cost of the DNA testing and its relative unavailability in most regions of the nation, most cases go undetected. It cost about One Hundred Thousand Naira or more to do and so it is very inaccessible to most people⁽⁹⁾.

The situation is most disheartening as a popular geneticist in Nigeria categorically revealed that six out of ten children investigated in Nigeria for DNA investigation were not the biological children of their supposed fathers. These children belong to other men, men probably known by their mothers.⁽¹⁰⁾

So, who can bail out the unsuspecting men from their wives? Women need to take responsibility for their actions. We need to have faithful wives and husbands as well. You may want to ask why these men were not fathers to their children, are they having health issues or living far from their families.

4. Conclusion

Children are at the receiving end of these frauds. You can imagine knowing someone as your father for years, only to be told otherwise in the future. The psychological effect on the family especially on the children may be enormous.

Compliance with ethical standards

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