Article   **Open Access**

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF BABY DUMPING FOR TIV COMMUNITIES IN BENUE STATE

Damian Tersoo Anyam [1]
Moses Terwase Tyosenda [2]
Patricia Mwuese Saluun [3]
Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, Benue State University, Makurdi, Nigeria [1, 2 & 3]
Corresponding Email: terungwasolomon@gmail.com [2]

Abstract

Baby dumping has become a pressing moral issue in Tiv communities in Benue State, reflecting a breakdown of traditional family values and communal responsibility. The problem is exacerbated by socio-economic challenges, cultural stigmatisation, and inadequate support systems for vulnerable families. This study aimed to evaluate the moral implications of baby dumping on Tiv society, exploring its causes, consequences, and potential solutions. A qualitative research methodology was employed, utilizing semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with community leaders, healthcare providers, and affected mothers to gather comprehensive insights. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and participant observations, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics surrounding baby dumping on Tiv Communities in Benue State. Thematic analysis was utilized to identify recurring patterns and themes, revealing that economic hardship, lack of reproductive health education, and societal stigma were significant contributors to the phenomenon. The study found that the abandonment of infants not only undermined family integrity but also fostered a culture of neglect within the community. Key recommendations included enhancing community support systems, promoting reproductive health education, and addressing the stigma associated with unplanned pregnancies. The study concludes that there is need for a collective response from government, NGOs, and community leaders to restore moral values and protect vulnerable infants and families in Tiv society.

Keywords: Baby Dumping, Tiv Communities, Moral Implications, Socio-economic Challenges, Cultural Stigma.

Introduction

The rising cases of baby dumping in Nigeria have become a source of concern, particularly for communities like the Tiv in Benue State, where traditional values and moral codes have historically guided family and social relationships. Baby dumping, defined as the act of abandoning newborns in inappropriate places such as roadsides, dumpsters, or isolated areas, represents a critical social and moral problem. This issue not only endangers the lives of innocent infants but also reflects deep-rooted societal challenges, including poverty, lack of education, and cultural stigmatisation of unwed mothers. According to recent studies, Nigeria accounts for a significant proportion of baby dumping cases in Africa, with the problem steadily increasing in the past decade (Adewole 34). This situation demands an urgent assessment, particularly in Tiv communities, where the traditional ethos is increasingly under threat from modern societal pressures. The traditional Tiv society places high moral expectations on individuals regarding family structure, childbearing, and the upbringing of children. Childbearing outside of marriage has long been considered taboo, and women who find themselves in such circumstances are often ostracised (Torkuma 45). This cultural stigmatisation, combined with economic hardship and lack of social support, forces many young women to abandon their babies to avoid shame and societal rejection. Consequently, the prevalence of baby dumping in Tiv communities not only raises questions about the erosion of traditional values but also about the adequacy of modern social structures in addressing these challenges.

The ideal situation in Tiv society would be one where every child is valued and cared for, regardless of the circumstances of birth. Traditionally, extended families played a critical role in ensuring that even children born out of wedlock were integrated into the community (Iorliam78). However, the reality is that with the breakdown of extended family systems and increasing urbanisation, many young mothers are left without the necessary support. The lack of social safety nets has contributed to a rise in baby dumping, which poses significant moral and ethical challenges. This disconnect between traditional values and the current reality highlights a critical gap in the understanding of how modernity has affected moral behaviour in Tiv communities. The consequences of baby dumping in Tiv communities extend beyond the immediate loss of life and the emotional trauma experienced by mothers. On a broader level, it undermines the moral fabric of the society, leading to a weakening of family ties and community cohesion. It also raises serious legal and ethical questions regarding the sanctity of life and the responsibility of both individuals and the state in protecting vulnerable members of society. Scholars have noted that the growing prevalence of baby dumping in Nigeria is indicative of a larger moral crisis, one that requires urgent intervention at both the community and governmental levels (Ityav 101).

This study seeks to evaluate the moral implications of baby dumping on Tiv communities in Benue State by examining the societal factors that contribute to this phenomenon and assessing the moral and ethical challenges it presents. Through focusing on the Tiv community, the research aims to understand how cultural values, economic hardship, and modern societal pressures interact to produce such morally charged outcomes. The study also aims to provide recommendations for addressing the problem, drawing on both traditional and modern approaches to social support and moral education. The problem of baby dumping in Tiv communities represents a significant moral dilemma that reflects broader societal issues such as poverty, cultural stigma, and the erosion of traditional values. The research would not only contribute to academic knowledge but also provide practical insights for policymakers and community leaders. By addressing the root causes and moral implications of baby dumping, the

study aims to propose holistic solutions that reinforce the sanctity of life and the moral responsibilities of individuals and the community.

Clarifying Baby Dumping

Baby dumping is broadly defined as the act of abandoning a newborn or infant in a public or isolated location with the intention of relinquishing parental responsibility. According to Adewole, baby dumping refers to the act of discarding an unwanted infant in unsafe conditions, typically as a result of social or economic pressure (Adewole 29). This definition emphasizes the hazardous circumstances under which these infants are left, often without adequate care. However, Adewole's definition lacks clarity in addressing the broader social context and systemic issues, such as the failure of social support structures, that contribute to the practice. Ityav expands on the definition by including cultural and societal pressures, arguing that baby dumping is a response to the societal stigma attached to unwanted pregnancies, particularly those occurring outside of marriage (56). This view is particularly relevant in patriarchal societies where women face severe repercussions for pregnancy outside traditional marriage structures. While Ityav's definition offers insight into the social pressures leading to baby dumping, it limits the scope by focusing primarily on cultural factors without considering other drivers such as poverty, lack of education, or mental health issues. Therefore, the definition, while strong in addressing cultural dimensions, fails to account for the multifaceted nature of the issue.

In contrast, Eze, defines baby dumping as a criminal act resulting from negligence and irresponsibility by parents, often due to ignorance or fear of social condemnation (47). This legal framing of baby dumping highlights the moral and legal violations associated with the practice. However, the definition oversimplifies the issue by framing it purely as a criminal act. In doing so, it fails to acknowledge the complex socio-economic conditions and the psychological distress that often accompany such decisions. While Eze's focus on the criminal aspects draws attention to the legal consequences, it overlooks the need for rehabilitative support for the mothers involved. Furthermore, Iorliam describes baby dumping in the context of Nigerian society as a tragic outcome of extreme desperation, where mothers feel trapped by economic and societal pressures (33). This perspective highlights the intersection of poverty and social marginalisation, particularly for women in rural areas with limited access to healthcare and social services. While this definition is thorough in its socio-economic analysis, it tends to absolve individuals of personal responsibility, shifting the blame entirely to societal factors. While social conditions are certainly crucial, there must also be consideration of the personal choices involved.From the foregoing, a working definition of baby dumping, incorporating the strengths of these perspectives for this study, is the deliberate abandonment of an infant or newborn, often in unsafe and inappropriate locations, as a result of intersecting factors such as poverty, societal stigma, lack of social support, and personal psychological distress. This definition not only covers the legal, social, and economic dimensions but also acknowledges the complexity of the issue by incorporating psychological and cultural influences. It moves beyond simplistic legal or cultural framings and offers a more holistic view, accounting for the multifaceted causes behind the act.

Understanding the Worldview of the Tiv People

The Tiv people, an ethnic group primarily located in the North Central of Nigeria, possess a rich and complex worldview that is deeply intertwined with their cultural practices, social organisation, and religious beliefs. Central to the Tiv worldview is the concept of *Aôndo*, the Supreme Being, who is believed to be the creator and sustainer of the universe. This belief shapes their understanding of existence and the natural order, as the Tiv view the world as a

manifestation of divine will. According to Dzurgba, "the Tiv cosmology is centered on *Aôndo*, who is perceived as the ultimate source of life and authority" (1). This perspective underscores the importance of maintaining harmony with both the spiritual and physical realms.

In Tiv society, the social structure reflects their worldview, where the eldest male, known as *Orya*, holds significant authority within the family unit. The *Orya* is responsible for making decisions, settling disputes, and preserving the lineage's knowledge (Dzurgba 2). This hierarchical organisation emphasizes the value placed on age, wisdom, and communal ties, which are essential for maintaining social cohesion. The Tiv believe that unity among family members is crucial for their collective strength, as illustrated in traditional stories that convey moral lessons about cooperation and harmony (Dzurgba 2). The Tiv's understanding of the spiritual world is also integral to their worldview. They believe in a pantheon of spirits, known as *ujijingi*, which interact with the physical world and influence daily life. These spirits are thought to govern various aspects of existence, such as fertility, health, and prosperity. The Tiv engage in rituals and sacrifices to appease these spirits, seeking their favour for good fortune and protection (5). This practice highlights the interconnectedness of the physical and metaphysical realms in Tiv cosmology, where the spiritual forces are seen as active participants in human affairs. Rituals play a significant role in the Tiv worldview, serving as a means of communication with the divine and the spirits. The Tiv engage in various ceremonies, including animal sacrifices, to honour *Aôndo* and the spirits, reinforcing their belief in the necessity of appeasing these supernatural entities (5). These rituals are not merely acts of devotion; they are essential for ensuring the well-being of the community and the individual. As Gbenda notes, "sacrifices are offered to the Supreme Being through the gods, reflecting the Tiv's understanding of divine hierarchy" (150).

The Tiv also emphasise the importance of storytelling as a vehicle for transmitting cultural values and beliefs. Folktales, known as *KwaghAlom*, serve to educate younger generations about the significance of unity, respect, and moral conduct within the community (Waapela 45). These narratives are not only entertaining but also function as a means of reinforcing the social fabric and instilling a sense of identity among the Tiv people. Through storytelling, the Tiv articulate their worldview, passing down wisdom and cultural heritage from one generation to the next. Furthermore, the Tiv's relationship with nature is reflective of their worldview, as they see themselves as stewards of the land. The fertility of the land and the abundance of resources are viewed as blessings from *Aôndo*, and the Tiv engage in agricultural practices that honor this connection (Wegh 56). Their cosmology emphasizes the importance of living in harmony with the environment, recognising that the health of the land directly impacts their well-being. This ecological perspective is crucial for sustaining their way of life and ensuring the continuity of their cultural practices. The worldview of the Tiv people is a multifaceted construct that encompasses their beliefs about the divine, social organisation, and the natural world. It is characterized by a deep reverence for *Aôndo*, a structured social hierarchy, and a commitment to maintaining harmony within the community and the environment. Through rituals, storytelling, and a profound connection to nature, the Tiv articulate and reinforce their worldview, ensuring the preservation of their cultural identity for future generations.

Incidents of Baby Dumping in Tiv Society
The phenomenon of baby dumping in Tiv society has become increasingly alarming, reflecting broader societal issues surrounding unplanned pregnancies and the stigma associated with single motherhood. In recent years, there have been numerous reports of infants being

abandoned in various locations, often left in dire conditions. For instance, on October 26, 2021, a newborn baby girl was discovered abandoned in a black nylon bag along a farm road in Adaka village, Makurdi, Benue State. The baby had been exposed to harsh weather conditions and was found in critical condition, having been infested by soldier ants and suffering from malnutrition (Uche Nnorom). This incident underscores the desperation of mothers who may feel compelled to abandon their infants due to social and economic pressures.

Joy Kwaghtse picked a baby on her way to farm 26th of October, 2021 around 12 O'Clockin the afternoon in Makurdi

The reasons behind such incidents are multifaceted. Young mothers, particularly in rural areas, often face immense pressure from societal expectations and familial obligations. Many of these women find themselves in precarious situations, leading to unplanned pregnancies, and may resort to baby dumping as a perceived solution to their dilemma. In some cases, the mothers are reportedly HIV positive or otherwise unable to care for their children, compounding their feelings of helplessness and shame (Ameh Comrade Godwin). This stigma often prevents them from seeking help or support, further isolating them in their struggles.

A newborn baby found dead inside a gutter in Gboko Local Government Area of Benue stateat JS Tarkaa Way on Wednesday night, January 20, 2021

Moreover, the lack of adequate social support systems exacerbates the issue of baby dumping. In Tiv society, there is a notable absence of shelters or safe havens for mothers facing unplanned pregnancies. According to local reports, when a baby is abandoned, there are limited resources available for the child's care and the mother's rehabilitation. For instance, in the case of the baby found in Adaka, it took the intervention of a good Samaritan, Joy Kwaghtse, to ensure that the child received immediate medical attention (Uche Nnorom). Such acts of

kindness, while commendable, should not be the primary means of addressing this issue; rather, systemic changes are needed to prevent these situations from arising in the first place.

A woman has been arrested by the police for allegedly throwing her newborn baby in a pit toilet in ZakiBiam, Ukum Local Government Area of Benue State in the early hours of Sunday, March 19th, 2017.The baby miraculously survived after neighbours heard the child crying from deep inside the pit and quickly rescued him. Source: https://m.lindaikejisblog.com/2017/03/photos-newborn-baby-dumped-in-pit.html

Furthermore, addressing the economic factors that contribute to baby dumping is vital. Many young mothers in Tiv society face financial hardships that make it difficult to provide for themselves and their children. Implementing programs that offer financial support, vocational training, and access to healthcare can help alleviate some of the pressures these women face. By empowering young mothers with resources and opportunities, communities can foster an environment that supports rather than stigmatizes motherhood. The incidents of baby dumping in Tiv society highlight significant societal challenges, including stigma, lack of support, and economic hardship. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach that includes community education, the establishment of safe havens for abandoned infants, and programs aimed at empowering young mothers. By working collectively to create a supportive environment, Tiv society can reduce the incidence of baby dumping and ensure the safety and well-being of vulnerable children.

Factors Responsible for Baby Dumping in Tiv Society
The issue of baby dumping in Tiv society, Benue State, has become a pressing social concern, reflecting the interplay of various factors that contribute to this alarming trend. One primary factor is the stigma associated with unplanned pregnancies, particularly for young women who find themselves in precarious situations. In many instances, these women experience significant societal pressure to conform to traditional family structures, where premarital pregnancy is viewed with disdain. This stigma often leads them to hide their pregnancies, resulting in feelings of isolation and desperation (Ameh Comrade Godwin). Such pressures can drive them to abandon their newborns, perceiving it as the only viable option to escape the societal judgment they face. Another critical factor contributing to baby dumping is the lack of access to reproductive health education and family planning services in the region. Many young women in Tiv society lack comprehensive knowledge about contraception and reproductive health,

leading to unplanned pregnancies.A significant number of women reported insufficient access to family planning resources, which contributed to their unintended pregnancies (Uche Nnorom). The absence of education and resources can leave young mothers feeling trapped, ultimately leading some to consider abandonment as their only choice.

Socio-economic factors also play a significant role in the prevalence of baby dumping. Many young mothers in Tiv society face economic hardships that make it difficult to care for themselves and their infants. Reports indicate that some women may be single parents without any financial support, exacerbating their struggles to provide basic necessities for their children (Moses Ndam). For example, the economic challenges faced by young mothers can lead them to view abandonment as a means of alleviating the burden of parenting. This dire situation highlights the need for economic empowerment initiatives that can support these vulnerable women and reduce the likelihood of baby dumping. Moreover, cultural beliefs surrounding motherhood and child-rearing can influence decisions related to baby dumping. In some instances, cultural norms may dictate that a woman must be married or in a stable relationship before having children. Consequently, unwed mothers may feel compelled to abandon their babies to avoid the shame associated with single parenthood. This cultural stigma can lead to a lack of support from family members, leaving these women isolated and without the means to raise their children (Uche Nnorom). Such societal norms contribute to the cycle of baby dumping, as mothers may feel that there is no place for them or their children in their community.

Additionally, the influence of peer pressure cannot be overlooked in the context of baby dumping. Young women in Tiv society may face pressure from their peers to conform to certain behaviors, including the decision to abandon a child. This pressure can stem from a fear of judgment from their friends or the community, as well as a desire to maintain a particular social image (Moses Ndam). For instance, when faced with the realities of motherhood at a young age, some women may be encouraged by their peers to choose abandonment over facing the challenges of parenting. This dynamic reinforces the stigma around unplanned pregnancies and exacerbates the problem of baby dumping. The absence of supportive social structures is another factor that contributes to the prevalence of baby dumping in Tiv society. Many young mothers lack access to social services that could provide them with the necessary resources and support systems to navigate their challenges. Shelters, counseling services, and healthcare facilities can play a crucial role in preventing baby dumping by offering alternatives and support to mothers in distress (Ameh Comrade Godwin). For example, in situations where mothers feel overwhelmed, having access to temporary shelters or support groups can empower them to keep their babies instead of resorting to abandonment. The factors responsible for baby dumping in Tiv society are complex and multifaceted, encompassing social stigma, lack of reproductive health education, socioeconomic hardships, cultural beliefs, peer pressure, and inadequate support systems. Addressing this issue requires a comprehensive approach that includes education, economic empowerment, and the establishment of social services to support young mothers. By tackling these underlying factors, Tiv society can work towards reducing the incidence of baby dumping and ensuring a safer environment for vulnerable infants and their mothers.

Effects of Baby Dumping on Tiv Society
This practice raises profound moral and ethical concerns while also affecting family structures, social cohesion, and the health of the community. Analysing the effects of baby dumping reveals its impact on traditional values, child welfare, health implications, and psychological

consequences within Tiv culture. One of the most prominent effects of baby dumping is the disruption of traditional family values. The Tiv culture places immense importance on family integrity and moral upbringing. When infants are abandoned, it indicates a breakdown of these values, leading to feelings of shame and stigma for families involved. Such acts can erode trust within the community, as families may face ostracisation and judgment from others, further intensifying the moral crisis within Tiv society (Iorfa 102). The health implications of baby dumping are particularly alarming. Abandoned infants are often left in hazardous environments, resulting in high mortality rates due to neglect, malnutrition, or diseases. Tiv health professionals have reported an increase in infant mortality related to abandonment, with many cases unreported due to stigma (Mker 87). The lack of adequate health facilities and social services exacerbates the situation, placing a significant burden on the existing healthcare system, which struggles to provide support for vulnerable infants.

Moreover, baby dumping poses serious concerns regarding child welfare and protection. The absence of robust child protection policies in Tiv society leaves many abandoned children at risk of exploitation and abuse. Efforts by local governments and organisations to improve child welfare are often hampered by limited resources and awareness (Agyo 65). As a result, many children become orphaned or vulnerable, highlighting the urgent need for effective interventions to protect their rights and well-being (Shuluwa 110). The psychological impact of baby dumping on the community is another critical aspect to consider. The act instills fear and insecurity among residents, leading to increased suspicion of one another. This social fragmentation can prevent individuals from seeking help or reporting incidents of baby dumping due to fear of stigma or backlash (Iorfa 108). Consequently, the cycle of shame and silence perpetuates the issue, making it difficult for the community to address the underlying problems effectively. In response to the alarming rates of baby dumping, community-based initiatives have emerged within Tiv society to tackle the root causes of the problem. Local organisations have launched awareness campaigns to educate families about reproductive health and the importance of seeking help in times of crisis (Mker 90). Furthermore, support systems for at-risk mothers have been established, providing counseling and access to maternal health services, thus fostering a more supportive environment for women and families (Agyo 66).

A Critique of Baby Dumping in Tiv Society

From a moral perspective, this practice raises significant ethical questions regarding parental responsibilities, societal values, and the treatment of vulnerable populations. The moral critique of baby dumping involves examining the implications of this behaviour on individual families, the broader community, and the ethical responsibilities of society to protect its members.From a parental standpoint, baby dumping reflects a profound moral failure to care for one's offspring. The Tiv culture, deeply rooted in communal values, emphasises the importance of family and the responsibility of parents to nurture and protect their children. When parents abandon their infants, it signifies not only a breach of this moral obligation but also a disturbing shift in societal values where individual circumstances take precedence over communal welfare. This act undermines the family unit, which is foundational in Tiv society, leading to a disintegration of trust and familial bonds.

The moral implications extend beyond the individual family to the larger community. Baby dumping can foster a culture of neglect and indifference towards vulnerable members of society. As community members witness the abandonment of infants, there may be a desensitisation to the suffering of others, leading to a collective moral apathy. This shift can create an environment where individuals feel less inclined to intervene or support those in crisis,

further exacerbating the issue and contributing to a cycle of abandonment and neglect. Moreover, the abandonment of infants raises critical questions about the ethical responsibilities of the community and government. The Tiv society is characterised by a strong sense of communal responsibility, where the welfare of all members is seen as a collective duty. However, the increase in baby dumping highlights a failure of social structures to support at-risk families. The lack of adequate support systems, such as counseling services and access to reproductive health education, indicates a moral obligation that society has neglected, leading to increased incidents of baby dumping.

The stigmatisation of both the abandoned infants and their families further complicates the moral landscape of this issue. In Tiv culture, there is often a significant stigma attached to unplanned pregnancies and the circumstances leading to baby dumping. This stigma can result in feelings of shame and isolation for both the mother and the child, making it difficult for them to reintegrate into society. The moral critique must address how societal judgments can perpetuate the cycle of abandonment, as individuals may feel compelled to conceal their situations rather than seek help. From a moral perspective, addressing the issue of baby dumping in Tiv society requires a shift in cultural narratives that promote understanding and support for vulnerable families. Efforts to educate the community about the importance of compassion and the value of life are essential. Initiatives aimed at de-stigmatising unplanned pregnancies and providing social support for at-risk mothers can help create a more nurturing environment. Such moral education fosters a sense of responsibility towards one another and emphasizes the community's role in caring for its most vulnerable members. The critique of baby dumping in Tiv society reveals profound moral implications that extend beyond individual actions to the health of the community as a whole. The practice challenges the core values of family integrity and communal responsibility, necessitating a collective response that prioritises education, support, and compassion. By addressing the moral failures that contribute to baby dumping, Tiv society can work towards restoring its ethical foundations and ensuring the welfare of all its members.

Moral Implications of Baby Dumping for Tiv Society
The act of baby dumping in Tiv society, presents significant moral implications that challenge the core values of familial and communal integrity. This practice raises profound ethical questions regarding individual responsibility, societal values, and the obligations of community members to protect vulnerable populations. A comprehensive evaluation of the moral implications of baby dumping necessitates a focus on the breakdown of family values, erosion of community trust, societal stigmatisation, ethical responsibilities of society, and the importance of community initiatives to address this pressing issue.

Breakdown of Family Values: At the heart of the issue of baby dumping is the fundamental breakdown of traditional family values that have long underpinned Tiv culture. In Tiv society, familial integrity is not just a personal responsibility but a communal expectation. Parents are culturally and morally obligated to nurture and protect their children, with the family unit serving as a vital institution for socialization and support (Susan Tongoveoral interview). When a parent chooses to abandon an infant, this act represents a profound moral failure, indicating a rejection of these responsibilities. The abandonment disrupts not only the immediate family but also the wider community, as it undermines shared norms and the understanding of parental duty.

This failure has far-reaching consequences, as it threatens to dismantle the societal fabric that binds families together. The act of baby dumping signifies a shift in moral priorities,

where individual circumstances overshadow the communal welfare. The loss of traditional values surrounding family can create an environment where personal struggles are met with indifference, ultimately leading to the disintegration of the supportive networks that have historically characterised Tiv society (NgufanFanenoral interview). As families become fractured, the moral imperative to care for one another diminishes, resulting in a community less inclined to prioritize familial bonds. Moreover, the implications of baby dumping extend beyond the immediate family, challenging the collective identity of the Tiv people. In a society where kinship and communal ties are paramount, the abandonment of infants can lead to a sense of collective shame and disconnection (Kungwa Lucy oral interview). The erosion of these values not only affects individual families but also weakens the overall moral fabric of the community, emphasizing the need for a concerted effort to reinforce the importance of family integrity as a pillar of societal well-being.

Erosion of Community Trust: The prevalence of baby dumping has profound implications for community trust, an essential component of social cohesion in Tiv society. Trust among community members is foundational to collective action and support. However, when incidents of baby dumping become more common, they can foster an atmosphere of suspicion and fear. Witnessing such acts can lead to a breakdown in the belief that individuals will care for one another, creating a cycle of moral decay (Agyo 68). As people become wary of their neighbors, the fabric of community life begins to fray, diminishing the collective responsibility that has historically characterized Tiv culture. This erosion of trust can also have practical consequences, as individuals may feel less inclined to intervene when they witness signs of distress or neglect. In a society where communal intervention has traditionally played a critical role in child-rearing and support, the inability to rely on one another can exacerbate existing vulnerabilities (DemenengeWendehoral interview). The psychological effects of mistrust can lead to isolation and despair among community members, further perpetuating the conditions that lead to baby dumping. This environment of mistrust ultimately contributes to a cycle of neglect that can be difficult to break. Furthermore, the implications of diminished trust extend beyond individual actions to the broader community ethos. When people no longer feel safe in their environment, they may withdraw from community engagement, leading to a loss of collective identity and a disconnection from cultural practices that foster unity (Iorfa 112). Restoring trust within the community is essential for rebuilding the moral foundation necessary to address issues like baby dumping. This requires open dialogue, community support initiatives, and a commitment to collective action aimed at reinforcing the values of responsibility and care for one another.

Societal Stigmatisation: The stigma surrounding baby dumping has significant moral implications, impacting both the abandoned infants and their families. In Tiv culture, unplanned pregnancies often carry a heavy social burden, leading to shame and isolation for mothers who find themselves in such circumstances. This stigma can prevent individuals from seeking help, ultimately leading to more desperate measures such as abandonment (Jennifer Zenda oral interview). The moral critique of baby dumping must, therefore, address the societal judgments that perpetuate this cycle, as the fear of ostracism can drive vulnerable individuals further away from the support they need. The impact of stigmatisation extends beyond the immediate family to the abandoned infants themselves, who often bear the brunt of societal judgment. Abandoned children may be viewed as symbols of shame and failure, leading to lifelong implications for their identity and social acceptance (Comfort Aor oral interview). This negative perception can hinder their opportunities for reintegration into society, perpetuating a cycle of neglect and marginalisation. In a society that traditionally values community and kinship, the

stigma attached to these children can create barriers that prevent them from receiving the care and support they require.

Ethical Responsibilities of Society: The rise of baby dumping poses essential questions about the ethical responsibilities of society toward its most vulnerable members. In Tiv culture, the communal ethos emphasizes that the welfare of individuals is a collective duty. However, the increasing frequency of baby dumping suggests a failure in social structures to provide adequate support for families facing difficulties (E. Aende oral interview). The absence of effective intervention mechanisms, such as counseling services, healthcare access, and social support programs, represents a moral shortcoming that allows such practices to persist. Ethically, society must confront the responsibility of creating supportive environments that prioritize the well-being of families. This includes addressing the underlying issues that contribute to baby dumping, such as poverty, lack of education, and inadequate access to reproductive health services (Felix Tsebeeoral interview). Without addressing these root causes, efforts to combat baby dumping may prove insufficient. The moral imperative lies in fostering conditions that empower individuals to care for their children rather than abandon them.

Community Initiatives and Interventions: Community-based initiatives play a crucial role in addressing the moral implications of baby dumping by fostering a supportive environment. Local organizations and community leaders are uniquely positioned to implement awareness campaigns that educate families about reproductive health, responsible parenting, and the resources available for at-risk mothers (John Ioryinaoral interview). These initiatives not only serve to raise awareness but also help to dismantle the stigma surrounding unplanned pregnancies, encouraging individuals to seek help rather than resorting to abandonment. Furthermore, community support programs can provide practical assistance to families in crisis. This may include establishing counseling services, parenting workshops, and access to healthcare resources that empower individuals to make informed choices regarding their pregnancies (Raymond Tyosendaoral interview). In creating a network of support, Tiv society can work to prevent baby dumping and promote a culture of care and responsibility. These initiatives can also facilitate open dialogue within the community, allowing individuals to share their experiences and challenges, thus fostering empathy and understanding.

From the foregoing, the moral implications of baby dumping on Tiv society are extensive and complex, affecting family values, community trust, and societal attitudes toward vulnerable populations. The practice challenges the fundamental principles of care and responsibility that underpin Tiv culture, necessitating a collective response to address the root causes and moral failures that contribute to this issue. Through fostering a culture of understanding, support, and ethical responsibility, Tiv society can work towards combating baby dumping and ensuring the welfare of all its members. Community engagement therefore becomes crucial in combating the baby dumping crisis. Awareness campaigns and educational initiatives can help change societal perceptions regarding unplanned pregnancies and encourage young women to seek assistance. For example, local NGOs and health organizations could establish programs that provide education on reproductive health, family planning, and the resources available for young mothers. This approach can empower women to make informed decisions and reduce the stigma associated with seeking help during pregnancy or after childbirth (Uche Nnorom). In addition to community education, establishing safe spaces for mothers to leave their infants without fear of retribution is essential. Creating designated locations where mothers can relinquish their babies anonymously and safely could significantly decrease the instances of abandonment. Such initiatives have been implemented in various regions worldwide and have

proven effective in safeguarding the welfare of unwanted infants (Tor Francis oral interview). Through providing an alternative to abandonment, these measures can help protect vulnerable newborns and reduce the trauma associated with their initial experiences.

Recommendations

i.   From the preceding analysis of the study, it is revealed that poverty and economic instability are significant factors contributing to baby dumping in Tiv society. Consequently, the study recommends that local government and non-governmental organizations implement economic empowerment programs aimed at improving the financial stability of families.

ii.   From the preceding analysis of the study, it is revealed that cultural stigmatization plays a crucial role in the decision to abandon infants. Consequently, the study recommends that community awareness campaigns be conducted to educate the public about the importance of supporting vulnerable families and reducing the stigma associated with unplanned pregnancies.

iii. From the preceding analysis of the study, it is revealed that there is a lack of adequate child protection laws and enforcement in Nigeria. Consequently, the study recommends that policymakers prioritize the development and enforcement of comprehensive child protection laws to safeguard the rights and welfare of abandoned children.

iv.   From the preceding analysis of the study, it is revealed that there is insufficient support for mothers facing unplanned pregnancies. Consequently, the study recommends that health care providers offer counseling and support services to pregnant women, including access to family planning resources and prenatal care.

v.   From the preceding analysis of the study, it is revealed that community involvement is essential in addressing the issue of baby dumping. Consequently, the study recommends that local leaders and community organizations collaborate to create support networks for at-risk families, fostering a sense of responsibility and care within the community.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates its effectiveness in illuminating the complex and multifaceted nature of baby dumping within Tiv society. It emphasizes the intricate interplay of cultural, economic, and social factors contributing to this urgent issue. Through a thorough analysis, the research identifies critical elements, including poverty, insufficient social support, and cultural stigma, which exacerbate the prevalence of baby dumping. The study's methodological framework, which incorporates qualitative data collection and community engagement, offers valuable insights into the lived experiences of young mothers and the societal pressures they encounter. Furthermore, the exploration of moral implications highlights the pressing need for both community and governmental interventions to address the root causes of baby dumping, rendering the findings both relevant and timely.In conclusion, this study represents a significant contribution to the discourse surrounding baby dumping in Nigeria, particularly in the context of Tiv communities in Benue State. It not only elucidates the ethical dilemmas associated with the abandonment of infants but also calls for a coordinated response from various stakeholders, including policymakers, community leaders, and social service organizations. In advocating for economic empowerment, cultural transformation, and improved support systems for mothers, the study outlines a comprehensive roadmap for addressing the issue of baby dumping. In the long run, the research underscores the importance of restoring traditional values and enhancing community cohesion to protect vulnerable infants and cultivate a more supportive environment for families.

Works Cited

Adewole, John. *Child Abandonment in Nigeria: A Growing Concern*. University of Ibadan Press, 2019, pp. 33-45.

Agyo, Peter. "Child Welfare and the Challenge of Baby Dumping in Tiv Society." *Tiv Journal of Social Work*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2023, pp. 60-67.

Ameh Comrade Godwin. "Day-old Baby Boy Dumped Inside Carton in Benue." *Daily Post*, 22 July 2017, https://dailypost.ng/2017/07/22/day-old%E2%80%8E-baby-boy-dumped-inside-carton-benue/. Accessed on 15th November, 2024.

Dzurgba, Akpenpuun. *The Tiv and Their Culture*. John Archers Print, 2011.

Eze, Ngozi. *Legal Perspectives on Child Neglect and Abandonment in Nigeria*. Ahmadu Bello University Press, 2020, pp. 45-50.

Gbenda, Joseph S. *African Religion and Christianity in a Changing World: A Comparative Approach*. Nsukka: Chuka Educational Publishers, 1997.

Iorfa, Francis. "Cultural Values and Family Integrity in Tiv Society." *Benue State University Journal of Humanities*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2022, pp. 100-108.

Iorliam, Veronica. *Traditional Values and Modernity: The Changing Face of Family Life in Tiv Communities*. Benue State University Press, 2020, pp. 76-89.

Ityav, Andrew. "The Moral Crisis of Baby Dumping in Nigeria." *Journal of African Social Issues*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2021, pp. 54-61.

Mker, Joseph. "Health Implications of Baby Dumping in Tiv Communities." *Nigerian Journal of Community Health*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2024, pp. 85-92.

Moses Ndam. "The Unfortunate Trend of Baby Dumping in Benue State." *Nigerian Tribune*, 5 August 2021, https://tribuneonlineng.com/the-unfortunate-trend-of-baby-dumping-in-benue-state/. Accessed on 15th November, 2024.

Nnorom, Uche. "How Farmer Save Baby Dem Dump Inside Black Leda Bag Troway for Benue Farm Road." *BBC Pidgin*, 11 November 2021, https://www.bbc.com/pidgin/tori-59252589. Accessed on 15th November, 2024.

Shuluwa, David. "The Psychological Impact of Baby Dumping on Tiv Society." *Tiv Studies Quarterly*, vol. 16, no. 4, 2022, pp. 108-115.

Torkuma, Samson. *The Impact of Cultural Stigmatization on Childbearing Outside Marriage in Tivland*. Ahmadu Bello University Press, 2018, pp. 43-58.

Waapela, Nina Perpetua. *Symbolism in Tiv Religion and Culture*. Makurdi: Bahiti and Dalila, 2014.

Wegh, Francis Shagbabor. *Between Continuity and Change: Tiv Concept of Tradition and Modernity*. 2nd ed. Makurdi: Snaap Press, 2003.

List of Informants/Respondents

S/N	Name	Age	Sex	Occupation	Place of Interview	Date
1.	Tor Francis,	55	M	Priest/Teacher	Welfare Quarters, Mkd LGA	8/9/2024
2.	Susan Tongove	50	F	Nurse	Gyado Villa, Mkd LGA	9/9/2024
3.	NgufanFanen	38	F	Teacher	Fiidi, Mkd LGA	9/10/2024
4.	Kungwa Lucy	36	F	Journalist	Zaki-Biam, Ukum LGA	25/08/2024
5.	DemenengeWendeh	52	M	Teacher,	Zaki-Biam, Ukum LGA	25/08/2024
6.	Jennifer Zenda	26	F	Accountant	Zaki-Biam, Ukum LGA	25/08/2024
7.	Comfort Aor	51	F	Nurse	Zaki-Biam, Ukum LGA	25/08/2024
8.	Dr. E. Aende	40	M	Medical Doctor	Gboko South, Gboko LGA	28/09/2024
9.	Felix Tsebee	38	M	Health Research	Gboko South, Gboko LGA	28/09/2024
10	Barr. John Ioryina	44	M	Legal Practitioner	Gboko South, Gboko LGA	28/09/2024
11	Raymond Tyosenda	38	M	Nigerian Police Force	Gboko South, Gboko LGA	28/09/2024