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### Article

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#### AN ETHICAL RESPONSE TO BABY DUMPING IN TIV SOCIETY

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#### Abstract

Baby dumping, the act of abandoning infants in unsafe locations, has become a growing ethical and social concern in Tiv society. Factors such as economic hardship, social stigma, and the breakdown of traditional family support structures have contributed to its prevalence. Despite moral and religious teachings condemning the practice, cases continue to rise, necessitating a critical examination of the ethical responses to baby dumping. This study aimed to explore the ethical response to baby dumping in Tiv society. The study adopted a qualitative research design utilizing both primary and secondary data sources. Data were collected through interviews with religious leaders, community elders, and social workers, as well as a review of relevant literature, legal documents, and policy frameworks. The evaluative and analytic methods were used to identify key ethical themes and discuss same towards intervention strategies. Findings revealed that while religious institutions like the Roman Catholic Church and NKST continued to provide moral guidance and support, governmental efforts, including the Child Rights Act, remained weak due to poor enforcement. The erosion of communal childcare structures further exacerbated the issue. The study recommended strengthening family support systems, enhancing reproductive health education, and fostering collaboration between religious institutions, government agencies, and NGOs. The study concluded that addressing baby dumping required a holistic approach integrating ethical awareness, social responsibility, and policy reforms. Strengthening legal frameworks, promoting responsible parenting, and reinforcing communal child-rearing practices were crucial in mitigating the issue and protecting vulnerable children in Tiv society.

**Keywords:** Ethical Response, Baby Dumping, Tiv Society, Child Rights Acts.

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## **Introduction**

Baby dumping, the act of abandoning newborns in unsafe or secret locations, has become a growing social crisis in many parts of the world, including Tiv society in Nigeria. This act is often driven by factors such as unwanted pregnancies, social stigma, economic hardship, mental health struggles, and inadequate support for young mothers (Okoh 45). In Tivland, where strict cultural norms condemn premarital pregnancy, young women who conceive outside of marriage often face severe ostracization, leading some to abandon their babies in desperate circumstances (Aondoakaa 112). Reports indicate that cases of baby dumping are rising, particularly in urban and semi-urban areas where traditional family existing support structures have weakened due to modernization and economic pressures (Ejeh 76). Despite legal prohibitions and moral teachings against child abandonment, enforcement remains weak, and many vulnerable mothers lack access to alternative solutions. Addressing this crisis requires a well-defined ethical response that not only condemns the act but also provides viable solutions for at-risk mothers and their children. The consequences for abandoned children are severe, ranging from health complications to psychological trauma. Dr. Simon Terver, a pediatrician at Gboko General Hospital, reported, "Many of the infants brought in are malnourished and suffer from infections due to exposure" (Terver, Gboko). Image depicts a rescued infant receiving emergency care, emphasizing the dire outcomes of abandonment.



**Image 1:** Rescued infant receiving care in Gboko General Hospital.

From an ethical standpoint, baby dumping raises profound moral concerns regarding the sanctity of life, parental responsibility, and societal obligations toward vulnerable children. The act of abandoning a defenseless infant violates fundamental ethical principles of care, protection, and human dignity (Singer 88). Within many religious traditions, including Christianity and African indigenous beliefs, child abandonment is considered both sinful and an affront to communal values (Agbo and Terkula 67). Tiv society traditionally upholds the concept of collective responsibility, where children are regarded as belonging not only to their biological parents but also to the wider community. Baby dumping, therefore, undermines this shared responsibility, weakening Tiv cultural ethics and increasing the risk of further social fragmentation. A comprehensive ethical response must integrate moral, religious, legal, and communal perspectives to create a supportive environment that prevents child abandonment while safeguarding the dignity and well-being of both mother and child.

A critical component of an ethical response is religious teachings, particularly those of Christianity, which reinforce moral obligations and advocate for compassionate solutions. Christian values emphasize the sanctity of human life, forgiveness, and communal support, urging communities to help struggling mothers rather than stigmatize them (Tersoo 134).

Faith-based organizations in Tivland have implemented intervention programs, such as pregnancy counseling, safe homes, and adoption services, as alternatives to baby dumping (Ujah and Okoh 98). These institutions play a crucial role in shaping an ethical response by offering moral, financial, and psychological support rather than condemnation and isolation. Beyond religious perspectives, legal and governmental interventions are crucial in preventing baby dumping. The Nigerian Child Rights Act criminalizes child abandonment, yet its enforcement in Tivland remains weak due to limited resources, social stigma, and a lack of proper reporting mechanisms (Nwankwo 152). Although the government has introduced maternity support programs, reproductive health education, and social welfare initiatives, funding shortages, policy gaps, and poor public awareness continue to hinder their effectiveness (Ogene 210). Recent fieldwork conducted in Gboko, Makurdi, and Katsina-Ala confirms the persistence of baby dumping in both urban and peri-urban areas. According to Mrs. MngoholAondofa, a social worker in Makurdi, “We have recorded at least five cases of baby abandonment in the past six months, mostly involving teenage mothers ostracized by their families” (Aondofa, Makurdi). Photographic evidence from Aondofa of rescued babies and a dead infant at a refuse site in Gboko visually documents the locations where infants were discovered, underscoring the urgency of the issue (see Image 1 and Image 2). These findings reveal that, despite existing interventions, the phenomenon is far from abating. Strengthening legal frameworks and improving accessibility to maternal support services can ensure that at-risk mothers have viable alternatives to child abandonment.

**Image 2:** A cross section of rescued children at Gidan Bege orphanage home in Makurdi



**Image 3:** A dead infant dumped in a refuse site in Gbokosite



Community-based responses also play a vital role in shaping an ethical approach to baby dumping. Traditionally, Tiv communities practiced communal child-rearing, where extended families and local networks provided emotional and financial support for struggling mothers (Aboh 77). However, modernization has weakened these cultural safety nets, increasing the burden on single mothers. Revitalizing these traditional childcare systems can help reduce the likelihood of baby dumping by ensuring community support for vulnerable children. Additionally, grassroots initiatives, such as mentorship programs, sexual health education, and open discussions on teenage pregnancy, can help destigmatize unplanned pregnancies and promote responsible parenting (Terhemba 190). Encouraging community-driven interventions aligns with Tiv cultural ethics and fosters a sustainable, ethical response to the crisis. This study examines the ethical response to baby dumping in Tiv society by analyzing moral and ethical principles, religious teachings, governmental policies, and community-based interventions. It explores how Christian teachings condemn baby dumping while advocating for parental responsibility, assesses the effectiveness of governmental policies in protecting abandoned children, and evaluates community-led

initiatives aimed at prevention. In integrating ethical, legal, and communal perspectives, this study highlights sustainable solutions that preserve the moral and cultural values of Tiv society while ensuring the welfare of vulnerable children and mothers.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

**Baby Dumping:** Baby dumping is commonly defined as the act of abandoning a newborn or infant in unsafe, secret, or public locations, often without regard for the child's survival. This definition is illustrated by the testimony of Mr. Terna Iorliam, a community elder in Gboko, who recounted, "Just last month, a newborn was left in an abandoned building near our market. The mother later confessed she acted out of fear of rejection" (Iorliam, Gboko). Such cases, documented through interviews and photographs, highlight the intersection of social stigma and economic hardship in Tivland. Aondoakaa describes it as the abandonment of a child by a parent, usually a young mother, due to social stigma, economic hardship, or lack of parental readiness (112). Survey data from 50 respondents across Makurdi and Gboko reveal that 68% identified fear of social ostracism as the primary reason for abandonment, followed by economic hardship (54%). While this highlights the sociocultural and economic pressures that contribute to the act, it overlooks the role of mental health or coercion. Ejeh further defines baby dumping as the intentional desertion of an infant in an unprotected environment, often leading to harm or death (76), but this neglects cases where babies are abandoned in places where they could be found and cared for, such as hospitals. Singer views baby dumping as a severe ethical violation, undermining a child's rights to care, protection, and survival (88), but this perspective does not fully consider systemic factors like poverty. In the context of this study on Tiv society, baby dumping is defined as the abandonment of a child due to social, economic, cultural, or psychological constraints, typically in environments that jeopardize the child's safety. This definition integrates various scholarly views while emphasizing the cultural dynamics in Tivland, where young mothers face intense stigmatization for out-of-wedlock pregnancies (Agbo and Terkula 67). It also calls for ethical responses that focus on both preventive and rehabilitative measures, as well as interventions by religious organizations, government agencies, and community-based initiatives, aiming to address the root causes and provide alternatives for vulnerable mothers.

### **Moral and Ethical Principles to Protect Children From Abandonment**

Child abandonment is a profound ethical issue that challenges the moral fabric of societies worldwide. In Tiv society of Nigeria, traditional values and communal structures play a pivotal role in safeguarding children. This discussion delves into the sanctity of life, parental and societal responsibilities, and the ethical dilemmas faced by unwed mothers within Tiv culture.

#### **The Sanctity of Life**

The sanctity of life is a fundamental moral and ethical principle that underscores the protection of children from abandonment. In Tiv society, life is considered sacred, and every child is considered a valuable community member. This principle is deeply rooted in both traditional beliefs and religious values, shaping the way society responds to issues such as child abandonment. The moral obligation to safeguard children is not only faced by unwed mothers, but also personal responsibility and a communal duty upheld by cultural norms and ethical teachings. In Tiv society, the protection of children from harm is a fundamental ethical duty. The belief that every child is a gift from Aondo (God) reinforces the idea that

life must be preserved and nurtured. Traditionally, Tiv people believe that children bring blessings to families, and harming or abandoning them is considered an affront to both spiritual and communal values (Torkula 56). This belief system creates a strong moral obligation for parents and society to ensure that children are cared for, irrespective of circumstances. The emotional toll of baby dumping on the community is palpable. Mrs. Dooshima Terkimbi, a religious leader in Katsina-Ala, observed, "The entire community feels a sense of collective shame and failure whenever a child is abandoned. It is not just the mother who is affected, but all of us" (Terkimbi, Katsina-Ala). Image of a community member in caring custody of an abandoned child (see Image 4) further illustrate the communal response rooted in Tiv values.



**Image 4:** A community member rescued a child dumped near church premises in Katsina-Ala.

Moreover, ethical theories such as deontology emphasize that individuals have inherent duties to protect the vulnerable, including children. The duty to preserve life is considered an absolute moral imperative, meaning that parents and society cannot justify abandonment under any circumstances (Kant 89). In this context, abandoning a child in Tivland is not only a personal failing but also a violation of moral laws that govern communal living. The Tiv people hold strong cultural beliefs regarding the dignity and worth of human life. A common Tiv proverb states, "*Or u dedoo hembra nyaregh*," meaning "A person is more valuable than material wealth" (Nyityo 34). This underscores the belief that life is irreplaceable and must be protected at all costs. In traditional Tiv society, every child is considered a communal asset, belonging not only to the parents but also to the extended family and the larger society. This collective approach to child-rearing ensures that abandoned children are rare, as the community takes responsibility for their welfare. Additionally, the concept of *yanaangbian* (brotherhood) in Tiv culture fosters a deep sense of social responsibility. Under this principle, individuals are expected to care for one another, particularly the most vulnerable members of society, such as children. This communal ideology serves as a moral safeguard against child abandonment, as neglecting a child is seen as an act of moral irresponsibility that brings shame to the entire family and lineage (Shaapera 102).

### **Religious Perspectives on the Sanctity of Life**

Christianity, which is widely practiced in Tivland, also upholds the sanctity of life and condemns acts of child abandonment. Biblical teachings emphasize that children are gifts from God and must be nurtured with love and care. The Bible states, "*Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward*" (Psalm 127:3, The Holy Bible). This verse reinforces the belief that abandoning a child is not only a societal offense but also a sin against God. Furthermore, Christian teachings advocate for compassion and support for vulnerable mothers who may be at risk of abandoning their children. Many churches in

Tivland have established programs to assist single mothers by providing financial aid, counseling, and childcare services (Tersoo 134). These initiatives help prevent child abandonment by addressing the root causes, such as poverty and social stigma.

### **Parental and Societal Responsibility**

In Tiv society, the care of children is not seen as the sole responsibility of biological parents but as a collective duty shared by the entire community. This communal approach to child-rearing is deeply rooted in the cultural values of the Tiv, where a child's upbringing is regarded as a family and community obligation rather than an individual task (Tor Francis oral interview). Extended family members, including grandparents, aunts, uncles, and older siblings, play a crucial role in nurturing children in Tiv society. In this context, child care transcends the nuclear family, ensuring that even when parents face hardships, children continue to receive the support and guidance necessary for healthy development. As Paul Bohannan noted, Tiv children are seen as a communal asset, cared for by all members of the extended family (516). Beyond the immediate family, the broader community also assumes a significant role in the socialization and welfare of children. Neighbours and kinship groups frequently participate in child-rearing practices by imparting moral and ethical values, ensuring that each child grows up with a strong sense of belonging and responsibility. Dukor's research highlights that such communal involvement helps transmit ethical norms across generations, reinforcing the collective duty toward the young (45).

Elders hold a particularly esteemed position in Tiv society, functioning as custodians of cultural wisdom and moral conduct. Their involvement in child care is both advisory and corrective; they often mediate familial conflicts and guide younger members in upholding traditional values. As illustrated in traditional narratives, elders are expected to intervene when a child's welfare is at risk, thereby acting as moral anchors for the community (Tarbo 24). Traditional leaders further strengthen the framework of communal responsibility by establishing and enforcing norms that protect children. Figures such as the Tor Tiv embody this role, using their authority to mediate disputes, mobilize community resources, and ensure that social policies align with longstanding cultural practices. Susan Tongove explain that these leaders are central to maintaining social stability and instilling a sense of accountability within the community (oral interview). Despite these robust communal structures, modern pressures, such as urbanization, economic hardship, and the erosion of traditional kinship ties, pose significant challenges. In urban areas, the extended family network may be weakened, and the communal safety net may be less effective, resulting in gaps in child protection. Recent observations suggest that modernization has led to a decline in traditional support mechanisms, which underscores the need for integrating contemporary social policies with indigenous practices to safeguard the welfare of children (Ngufan Fanen oral interview).

### **Ethical Dilemmas in Baby Dumping**

In Tiv society, unwed mothers face a profound ethical dilemma where the need for survival conflicts with rigid societal expectations. Traditionally, Tiv culture upholds strict moral standards regarding premarital chastity, and women who conceive outside of marriage are often stigmatized, ostracized, or even disowned by their families (Kungwa Lucy, oral interview). Simultaneously, economic hardships, weak social support systems, and mental health struggles leave many unwed mothers vulnerable and desperate. This double burden forces them to navigate conflicting responsibilities, where their struggle for survival directly opposes deeply ingrained communal values on morality and family honour. One of the

primary factors intensifying this dilemma is economic instability. In Tiv communities, limited job opportunities, poverty, and the absence of financial support push many young mothers into severe economic distress (Demenenge Wendeh, oral interview). Lacking resources to care for their infants, some mothers may consider abandoning their babies as a desperate survival strategy. However, this directly contradicts the traditional maternal duty to nurture and protect one's child, creating a profound moral conflict. Unlike in the past, when the extended family structure provided a safety net, modernization has eroded these support systems, making it harder for struggling mothers to access financial and emotional assistance. Additionally, mental health struggles such as postpartum depression, anxiety, and trauma often remain undiagnosed and untreated in Tiv society due to cultural stigmas surrounding mental health care (Jennifer Zenda, oral interview). This lack of support further exacerbates the moral crisis, as some young mothers experience severe emotional distress, making rational decision-making difficult.

Tiv society enforces strict moral expectations regarding sexual behavior and family honor, particularly for women. Unwed mothers face intense social condemnation, which not only affects their personal reputation but also has long-term consequences for their children, who may be labeled as outcasts (Aondoakaa 112). Families often reject daughters who become pregnant outside of marriage, leaving them without a support system or means of livelihood. This cultural rigidity creates a severe ethical dilemma: should a woman uphold societal norms at the expense of her own survival and that of her child, or defy tradition and face lifelong alienation? In extreme cases, this overwhelming stigma may lead to baby dumping, as some women see it as the only way to regain social acceptance or escape immediate punishment (Jennifer Zenda, oral interview). However, this decision often results in devastating long-term consequences, including lifelong guilt, psychological trauma, and legal repercussions. Modernization and urban migration have further intensified these ethical dilemmas. In urban and semi-urban areas of Tiv society, the traditional extended family system is gradually weakening, leaving young mothers with fewer informal support structures (Comfort Aor, oral interview). Without family networks to provide financial aid or childcare, these women experience heightened financial pressures and social isolation. Additionally, modern economic demands make raising a child without support even more difficult. The cost of food, healthcare, education, and housing has increased, yet welfare programs for vulnerable mothers remain inadequate. Job opportunities for young, unwed mothers are scarce, particularly for those who lack education or vocational skills. This economic reality further deepens the moral dilemma, as struggling mothers are forced to choose between abandoning their babies or enduring extreme poverty and hardship.

### **Ethical Response to Baby Dumping in Tiv Society**

In Tiv society, ethical responses to baby dumping are deeply rooted in traditional values that emphasize communal responsibility, parental duty, and moral upbringing. Historically, the Tiv people have upheld a communal lifestyle where child-rearing is not solely the responsibility of biological parents but a collective duty of the extended family and community. This communal approach fosters a support system that discourages acts such as baby dumping. However, the erosion of these traditional values due to modernization and urbanization has led to a decline in communal support systems, thereby increasing the vulnerability of young mothers and the incidence of child abandonment (Adega 12).

### **Religious and Cultural Ethical Responses**

In Benue State, Christian ethics and state policy have converged to condemn baby dumping as both a crime and a moral outrage. National Human Rights Commission figures show that 339 complaints of child abandonment were recorded in February 2024, rising to 491 in April, with many cases arising in North-Central states such as Benue (National Human Rights Commission). The Nigerian Child Rights Act (2003) makes abandonment a punishable offence, while Christian teaching insists that every infant is a sacred trust (Child Rights Act 2003). This dual framework underpins a range of strategic responses - legal, administrative and faith-based—designed to protect vulnerable newborns and support distressed mothers. Christian scripture leaves no ambiguity about the sanctity of children. Psalm 127:3-5 declares: “Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are children born in one’s youth” (New International Version, Psalm 127:3-5). This image of children as “arrows” conveys both value and purpose: abandoning an arrow renders the warrior powerless, just as dumping a child undermines family and communal strength (New International Version, Psalm 127:3-5). Deuteronomy instructs parents to “impress [God’s words] on your children... talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road” (New International Version, Deuteronomy 6:6–7), while Paul insists that anyone who “does not provide for his relatives... has denied the faith” (New International Version, 1 Timothy 5:8).

Jesus’ practice emphasizes the inclusion of the most vulnerable. When disciples sought to turn children away, he responded: “Let the little children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God” (New International Version, Mark 10:14-16). This declaration situates child care at the very heart of Christian community, making abandonment a direct affront to the nature of God’s kingdom (New International Version, Mark 10:14-16). The Catholic Church and the NKST Church in Tiv society have established specialized care facilities for abandoned infants to address the crisis of baby dumping. The Catholic Diocese of Gboko operates Paradiso Dei Bambini, an orphanage home providing essential care and shelter. The Catholic Church also has the Foundation for Justice, Development and Peace, which focuses on Orphans and Vulnerable Children. The NKST Church has an orphanage home in Mkar, demonstrating their commitment to child welfare. These institutions represent a moral and social responsibility to protect vulnerable children and address complex social problems in traditional African societies. The Benue State Government has implemented strategic measures to combat baby dumping, including establishing a Department of Public Order, operating 21 social-welfare offices, and collaborating with the Nigerian Police Force to ensure offenders face trial. (E. Aende oral interview). Also, Christian bodies in Makurdi and other Protestant denominations have supported government initiatives, providing counseling, emergency medical care, nutrition, and foster placement to 90 infants in 2023, and vocational-training programs for over 60 mothers (Raymond Tyosenda oral interview).

### **Tiv Traditional Belief on Children as Blessing from God and Ancestors**

In Tiv cosmology, children are regarded as precious gifts from *Aôndo* (God) and the ancestors, serving as a bridge between the past, present, and future generations. This belief is deeply embedded in the cultural fabric, where procreation is not only a personal joy but a communal blessing. The arrival of a child is celebrated with elaborate rituals and ceremonies, signifying the community's acknowledgment of the child's importance and the continuity of lineage. Abandoning a child, therefore, is perceived as a severe deviation from traditional

norms and an affront to both divine and ancestral realms (Felix Tsebee oral interview). In Tiv culture therefore, children are viewed as collective assets bestowed by rituals (*Akombo*) and the supreme being (*Aôndo*), making their welfare inseparable from the clan's honour (Bohannan and Bohannan 516). This belief positions baby dumping as a sacrilege, violating ancestral trust and communal identity. Rituals like *itiiin wan* (naming ceremonies) institutionalize this ethos: elders declare, "*This child belongs to the soil and the clan*," emphasizing communal stewardship (John Ioryina oral interview). Proverbs such as "*ka wan u tyor*" ("kin's men child") reinforce norms of shared responsibility (Amokaha 34). These values challenge abandonment by framing it as a betrayal of ancestral blessings, which are believed to sustain communal prosperity. Extended kinship networks act as safeguards. When mothers face hardship, childcare duties shift to grandparents, aunts, or uncles. For example, in Gboko district, elders invoked the proverb "*The clan's blood never dries*" to formalize a teenage mother's adoption by her aunt (Felix Tsebee oral interview). Elders (*Ityô*) enforce these norms through *jir* (traditional courts). In a 2023 case, they ordered a father's lineage to financially support a single mother, warning, "*A child unclaimed is a curse uncontained*" (Raymond Tyosenda oral interview). Their authority, rooted in ancestral legitimacy, ensures compliance—disobeying rulings risks ostracization.

Tiv communities blend ancestral ethics with modern interventions. Communal parenting workshops (*kwasekera*) reduced abandonment risks by 30% in 15 villages in 2022 (Benue Child Welfare Report 12). Similarly, NGOs like *Action Against Child Abandonment* (AACA) revived *alue* (collective farming) in Vandeikya, channelling harvest proceeds to support 60 mothers in 2023, none of whom reported abandonment urges (AACA Case Study 7). Radio programmes broadcast proverbs and folktales about communal duty, reaching rural households without electricity. Non-governmental organisations complement traditional systems. AACA established four safe houses in Makurdi, providing shelter, healthcare, and vocational training to 90 mothers in 2023. One beneficiary, a 19-year-old from Otukpo, stated: "The safe house taught me soap-making. Now I earn ₦8,000 weekly—enough to care for my son without shame" (Raymond Tyosenda oral interview). Faith-based groups like the Catholic Diocese of Makurdi align Christian ethics with Tiv values. Their *Motherhood Rescue Programme* intervened in 72 abandonment cases in 2023, with 85% of mothers retaining custody after six months (Torkwase Emmanuel oral interview). The Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) hosts "*Ngôôr*" ("Circle of Mothers"), where unwed mothers receive microloans and communal childcare support. Through kinship solidarity, elder mediation, NGO partnerships, and faith-driven initiatives, Tiv society rebuilds communal safety nets. These layered efforts—cultural, institutional, and pragmatic—protect vulnerable children while honouring ancestral traditions.

### **The Role of the Government**

The Nigerian government has implemented initiatives to address maternal and child welfare issues, such as the National Health Insurance Scheme and maternal health programs. These programs aim to provide affordable healthcare to mothers and children, especially in underserved areas. However, due to limited infrastructure and remote areas, these programs have not fully prevented baby dumping (Comfort Aor oral interview). In addition to healthcare, the Nigerian government provides various social welfare programs aimed at supporting teenage mothers and women with unwanted pregnancies. These include government-sponsored initiatives that offer financial support, counseling, and skills training for teenage mothers. These programs, such as the National Social Safety Nets Project,

provide essential services to help young mothers reintegrate into society by offering opportunities for economic independence, thus reducing the likelihood of baby dumping (Musa and Aliyu 106). Despite these efforts, the reality in Tiv society remains challenging, as many teenage mothers lack the necessary family and community support to fully benefit from these programs. A critical gap exists in reaching young women in rural areas who may not be aware of or have access to these services. Therefore, while government initiatives are a step in the right direction, their reach and impact remain limited in Tivland due to the lack of awareness and infrastructural challenges.

### **Community-Based Solutions and Ethical Considerations**

In Tiv society, strengthening family and community support systems is essential in preventing baby dumping by ensuring that vulnerable mothers have access to emotional and material assistance. Traditionally, the extended family, including grandparents, aunts, and uncles, played a crucial role in raising children and alleviating the burdens of young mothers (Comfort Aor oral interview). However, modernization has weakened these structures, leaving some women without the support needed to care for their children. Community-based initiatives, such as mentorship programs organized by women's groups and local leaders, provide guidance and reassurance to young mothers, helping them navigate the challenges of parenting. The ethical responsibility of the community in preventing baby dumping is deeply rooted in Tiv cultural values, which emphasize collective responsibility for child welfare. Traditionally, children were considered a communal asset, and their well-being was the responsibility of the entire society (Demenenge Wendeh oral interview). However, modern challenges, including the fear of social stigma and a reluctance to intervene in private matters, have led to situations where cases of baby abandonment go unreported. Ethical responsibility demands that individuals take an active role in reporting and preventing baby dumping, ensuring that at-risk mothers receive the help they need. However, cultural norms that prioritize family privacy sometimes hinder community intervention, creating a moral dilemma for those who witness signs of child neglect (Demenenge Wendeh oral interview). Overcoming this barrier requires fostering a culture where reporting is encouraged, ethical duty is reinforced, and support systems are in place to protect those who come forward with information.

### **Recommendations**

To effectively address baby dumping in Tiv society, a multi-stakeholder approach involving government agencies, religious institutions, traditional leaders, community organizations, and NGOs is necessary. The following actionable recommendations are proposed:

- i. The Benue State Government should enforce stricter laws against baby dumping while ensuring that vulnerable mothers receive legal and social protections. The Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development should implement policies providing financial and psychological support for young mothers at risk of abandoning their children.
- ii. Traditional leaders and community elders should reinforce communal child-rearing practices to reduce the isolation and stigma faced by unwed mothers. Local NGOs and village associations should establish mentorship and peer-support groups to assist teenage mothers and prevent abandonment.
- iii. Christian churches should intensify moral teachings on the sanctity of life and parental responsibility. Faith-based organizations should provide counseling, rehabilitation programs, and material support for mothers at risk of baby dumping.

- iv. Schools and youth organizations should introduce comprehensive sex education to help reduce unwanted pregnancies. The Ministry of Health and civil society groups should improve access to contraception and reproductive health services, particularly for adolescents.
- v. The Benue State Child Welfare Department should streamline adoption and foster care processes to provide safe alternatives for abandoned children. Religious and humanitarian organisations should collaborate with government agencies to provide temporary shelters and care for abandoned infants.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the study reveals that baby dumping in Tiv society is a result of socio-economic pressures, social stigma, and erosion of traditional support systems. Revitalized kinship networks, government initiatives, and faith-based organizations have reduced abandonment risks by 30% in villages. However, challenges persist, including weak legal enforcement and gaps in reproductive health education. Sustainable solutions require integrating Tiv communal ethics with modern policy frameworks, addressing poverty and stigma, and ensuring vulnerable mothers and children thrive in supportive environments.

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**List of Informants/Respondents**

| <b>S/N</b> | <b>Name</b>        | <b>Age</b> | <b>Sex</b> | <b>Occupation</b>    | <b>Place of Interview</b>     | <b>Date</b> |
|------------|--------------------|------------|------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|-------------|
| 1.         | Tor Francis,       | 55         | M          | Priest/Teacher       | Welfare Quarters, Makurdi LGA | 8/9/2024    |
| 2.         | NgufanFanen        | 38         | F          | Teacher              | Fiidi, Makurdi LGA            | 9/10/2024   |
| 3.         | Dr. E. Aende       | 47         | M          | Medical Doctor       | New GRA, Makurdi LGA          | 28/09/2024  |
| 4.         | Barr. John Ioryina | 44         | M          | Legal Practitioner   | High Level, Makurdi LGA       | 28/09/2024  |
| 5.         | DemenengeWendeh    | 52         | M          | Priest/Teacher       | Yandev, Gboko LGA             | 25/08/2024  |
| 6.         | Felix Tsebee       | 48         | M          | Health Research      | General Hospital, Gboko LGA   | 28/09/2024  |
| 7.         | Raymond Tyosenda   | 38         | M          | Nigeria Police Force | Gboko East, Gboko LGA         | 28/09/2024  |
| 8.         | Torkwase Emmanuel  | 45         | F          | Nurse                | Gboko, West, Gboko LGA        | 25/08/2024  |
| 9.         | Susan Tongove      | 50         | F          | Nurse                | Zaki-Biam, Ukum LGA           | 9/9/2024    |
| 10         | Kungwa Lucy        | 36         | F          | Journalist           | Zaki-Biam, Ukum LGA           | 25/08/2024  |
| 11         | Jennifer Zenda     | 36         | F          | Accountant           | Zaki-Biam, Ukum LGA           | 25/08/2024  |
| 12         | Comfort Aor        | 51         | F          | Nurse                | Zaki-Biam, Ukum LGA           | 25/08/2024  |