

Short Commentary

Commentary: Rethinking Cultural Narratives of Infertility in Nigerian Cinema

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This study makes a noteworthy contribution to psychological research on reproductive health by revealing how cultural narratives shape personal experiences of infertility. Through a deconstruction of a hand-picked array of Nollywood titles, the analysis draws a detailed picture of how entrenched convictions about motherhood, femininity, and marital expectations still map out the social and emotional landscape of infertility throughout Nigeria. The commentary then pulls apart the ramifications of these representations, pondering how media can either uphold or disrupt the prevailing norms.

Infertility stakes a claim in a sensitive, symbol-laden corner of social life, where a woman's sense of self is often judged by whether she can bear children. The movies surveyed reveal that infertility is far from a medical issue; it morphs into a public proving ground for character, virtue and societal worth. The women portrayed shoulder a load: unrelenting family pressure, biting social scrutiny and a deep-rooted internalised shame.

The psychological strain that follows springs not from the inability to conceive but also from the cultural weight that childlessness carries. Jane, the protagonist of *Wives and Infertility* and Judith from *3 Nights and 3 Babies* both lay bare how being stripped of agency can gnaw at a woman's emotional core, seeping into every corner of her life. Their retreat, lingering grief, and the fear they keep locked inside echo the patterns repeatedly documented in research on infertility.

These movies illustrate how cultural myths that dump all responsibility onto women amplify the emotional weight they bear. By omitting any portrayal of infertility, the narratives reinforce gendered stereotypes that warp help-seeking habits and postpone necessary medical care. This pattern mirrors real-world trends where men tend to avoid fertility testing while women shoulder sanctioned blame. Such cinematic depictions matter because films function as mirrors, giving audiences the language to interpret infertility. When blame lands one-sidedly and drags a stigma along, the mental repercussions are heavy. Self-reproach, strife, and an ever-growing sense of social isolation keep reappearing.

Even as the films delicately convey this heft, they simultaneously lay bare a deeper contest for self-determination within the confines of patriarchal homes. Women navigate, endure and at times subtly push back against prescriptions, yet they often do so in muted tones, preserving both dignity and communal equilibrium. This understated

bargaining mirrors the doctrines of nego feminism, which recognises that resistance, across African milieus, seldom erupts as overt confrontation. Instead, it emerges as calculated decision-making that lets women persist within bounded environments. The psychological fallout of these coping tactics is, predictably, a tapestry. They may shield women from the social fallout, but in doing so, they leave them shouldering quiet, hidden emotional burdens that seldom get acknowledged.

The results also prompt questions about how the media either reinforces or challenges stigma. Nollywood's reach spans millions, throughout Africa and its diaspora. When movies tie a woman's identity closely to biological motherhood, they help shape a psychological climate that barely leaves room for alternative routes to building a family. The negative depiction of adoption and assisted reproduction in the films examined is especially worrisome, hinting that modern fertility solutions remain shadowed by suspicion and moral anxiety. These ramifications reach into health inform public-health education and shape the broader societal openness to a range of reproductive choices.

At the time, the rich emotional texture of movies such as *The Wait* hints that Nollywood could indeed steer public opinion in a new direction. The support group shown in the film, for instance, carves out a space where shared vulnerability can surface and psychosocial healing can take root. If storytellers lean into arcs, they might spark healthier conversations about infertility by bringing male infertility into view, portraying reproductive technologies in a positive light and crafting narratives that affirm women regardless of their reproductive outcomes.

Ultimately, the paper invites psychologists, media scholars and public-health practitioners to reflect on how cultural narratives intertwine with well-being. It stresses that portrayals need to be more balanced while recognising infertility as a shared burden and encouraging empathy rather than judgment. As stigma keeps women and couples unheard, Nollywood still offers a powerful stage for rewriting the cultural scripts that shape attitudes and behaviour.

The study clears a trail for cross-disciplinary ventures that knit together film, psychology, gender studies and public health. It urges a re-imagining of reproductive narratives with one that honours infertility's lived realities while refusing to amplify the surrounding

cultural anxieties. By framing infertility as a shared challenge rather than a personal moral lapse, Nollywood can chip away at stigma and foster healthier psychological outcomes for the individuals and families navigating this intricate experience.

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