

Original Research Report



Determinants and Perception of Incest in Family Relationships in Uyo Capital City, Nigeria

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Abstract: This study investigates the determinants and perceptions of incest in family relationships within Uyo, the capital city of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Despite strong cultural and legal taboos, incest persists, necessitating an exploration of its root causes and societal views. Using a cross-sectional survey of 800 respondents (382 males, 418 females), the research identifies key determinants of incest, including poverty (15%), depression (14%), and alcoholism (16%), as well as factors like single parenting (15%) and divorce/separation (20%). A factor analysis groups these causes into psychological, socioeconomic, and behavioral factors, revealing that emotional instability, financial hardship, and environmental vulnerabilities significantly increase the risk of incestuous behavior. Regarding perception, 51% of respondents strongly agreed that incest occurs frequently, with 50% specifically acknowledging its prevalence in Uyo Capital City. The study highlights the role of stigma, cultural sensitivity, and under-reporting as major barriers to addressing incest cases. Incest was perceived as particularly prevalent during periods of social or economic instability, such as the COVID-19 lockdown, with 50% of respondents strongly agreeing that cases increased during this time. The findings underscore the need for a multi-faceted intervention strategy involving community leaders, policymakers, and mental health professionals. This study provides a critical framework for developing policies aimed at preventing incest and promoting healthier family dynamics in Uyo and similar regions.

Keywords: Determinants, Family relationships, Incest, Psychological triggers Socioeconomic factors, Uyo

1. Introduction

Incest, defined as sexual relations between individuals closely related by blood or kinship, is a complex and highly stigmatized phenomenon (Bianciardi et al., 2024; Green, 2019). Despite strong legal and social taboos, incest continues to occur in various forms and contexts across the globe, raising critical questions about the underlying factors that contribute to its prevalence and the societal perceptions surrounding it (Shaked et al., 2021; Lambert and Andipatin, 2014; Quarshie et al., 2017). Incestuous relationships often exist in secrecy, making it difficult to fully understand their scope and impact, and the persistence of this phenomenon suggests that there are powerful psychological, cultural, and socioeconomic forces at play (Corbett, 2011; Turner and Maryanski, 2015). Incestuous relationships are shaped by numerous determinants, including psychological, sociocultural, and economic forces, while perceptions of incest vary significantly depending on cultural norms, religious beliefs, and family dynamics (Bianciardi et al., 2024; Quarshie et al., 2017). This study aligns with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5: Gender Equality and SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions by addressing incest a form of family violence affecting gender and social justice (UN, 2022). Research into incest prevention supports efforts to protect vulnerable populations, promote family health, and strengthen social institutions (WHO, 2020). This paper aims to explore these determinants and perceptions within family relationships, guided by key theoretical frameworks such as social learning theory, feminist theory, psychoanalytic theory, and sociocultural theory, which together offer diverse perspectives on the causes and consequences of incest.

Social learning theory posits that behavior, including deviant or harmful behaviors like incest, is learned through the observation of others, particularly within the family environment. Children may internalize patterns of behavior from their parents or other close relatives, including inappropriate sexual boundaries, especially in cases where abuse, neglect, or dysfunctional relationships prevail (Corbett, 2011). Studies show that families marked by secrecy, poor communication, and emotional or physical neglect may create an environment in which incestuous behavior is more likely to occur (Tidefors et al., 2010; Green, 2019). Moreover, power dynamics within the family, such as male dominance or authority figures exploiting their position, can reinforce such behavior (Orak et al., 2023).

Feminist theory highlights the role of patriarchal structures in the perpetuation of incest, arguing that incest is often an extension of male control and dominance within the family. In patriarchal societies, women and children are frequently positioned in subordinate roles, making them vulnerable to abuse, including incest (Shaked et al., 2021). Feminist scholars have further argued that incestuous relationships are often concealed within the private sphere of the family, a space historically insulated from external scrutiny due to societal norms regarding the sanctity of family (Orak et al., 2023). This theory suggests that incest can be understood as a form of gender-based violence, reflecting broader societal inequalities (Turner and Maryanski, 2015). Such dynamics may also contribute to the underreporting of incest, as victims may be coerced into silence to protect family honor or out of fear of retribution (Minir and Sultana, 2023). Psychoanalytic theory has historically been influential in discussions of incest, particularly through the work of Sigmund Freud. Freud's controversial theory of the Oedipus complex suggested that incestuous desires are an inherent part of the human psyche, repressed through socialization and cultural norms (Quarshie et al., 2017). While Freud's views have been critiqued and largely revised in contemporary psychology, the concept of unresolved familial tensions or unconscious desires influencing behavior remains relevant in some discussions of incest (Argentieri, 2018). Psychoanalytic theory emphasizes the emotional complexities within family relationships and how these dynamics can create environments in which incestuous behavior may

emerge (Wong, 2019).

In addition to psychological and gender-based explanations, sociocultural theory provides a broader understanding of how cultural norms and values shape the perception and occurrence of incest. In many societies, incest is strictly prohibited by law and is seen as a violation of both moral and cultural norms (Philips, 2001). However, the specific boundaries of what constitutes incest can vary significantly depending on cultural context. For example, in some traditional societies, relationships between cousins or other extended family members may be permitted or even encouraged for reasons of maintaining familial wealth or status, while in others, any sexual relations within the extended family are condemned (Argentieri, 2018). Sociocultural theory emphasizes that perceptions of incest are not static but are shaped by historical, social, and cultural factors.

One of the major determinants of incest is socioeconomic status. Studies suggest that incest is more likely to occur in families facing economic hardship, where overcrowded living conditions, stress, and a lack of privacy may create situations in which boundaries are blurred (Lambert and Andipatin, 2014; Orak et al., 2023). Moreover, poverty and lack of access to education are often associated with higher rates of incest, as families in these conditions may have fewer resources for coping with stress and conflict, leading to unhealthy relationships and, in some cases, abusive behavior (Tidefors et al., 2010; Minir and Sultana, 2023). Socioeconomic stressors can also contribute to the underreporting of incest, as families may fear the legal and financial repercussions of exposing such behavior (Selormey, 2019). Religion also plays a significant role in shaping societal perceptions of incest. In many religious communities, incest is viewed as a grave sin, violating both moral codes and religious laws. However, religious beliefs can sometimes obscure the issue of incest, as families may prioritize preserving their reputation or maintaining the status quo over addressing the abuse (Swindle, 2017; Miller, 2011). Additionally, religious taboos around sexuality may lead to a reluctance to discuss issues of sexual abuse, further complicating efforts to prevent and address incestuous relationships (Turner and Maryanski, 2015). This paper therefore seeks to deepen the understanding of the determinants and perceptions of incest in family relationships, incorporating theoretical perspectives that highlight the sociocultural, psychological, and economic forces at play in Uyo Capital City.

1.1. Statement of Problem

The issue of incest in family relationships presents significant social, psychological, and legal challenges, particularly in Uyo Capital City, Nigeria. Despite strong cultural and legal prohibitions, cases of incest persist, often going unreported due to stigma, fear, and inadequate legal responses. Understanding the factors that contribute to its occurrence—such as poverty, single parenting, and substance abuse—remains critical. There is also limited research on societal perceptions and the effectiveness of existing interventions. This study seeks to address these gaps by exploring the determinants and public perceptions of incest, offering insights for policymakers, educators, and social workers to develop more effective prevention strategies.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of this research is to investigate the determinants and perceptions of incest in

family relationships within Uyo Capital City, Nigeria. Specific purpose is to:

- (a) examine the perceived causes of incest within families in Uyo Capital City;
- (b) Assess the prevalence of incest in the area in the study area; and
- (c) give recommendations to address and mitigate incest in the study area.

1.3. Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- (a) What are the perceived causes of incest within families in Uyo Capital City?
- (b) What is the prevalence of incest in Uyo Capital City?
- (c) How can the issue of incest be effectively addressed and mitigated in Uyo Capital City?

2. Materials and Methods

1.1. Design for the Study

This study utilizes a descriptive survey design to investigate the determinants and perceptions of incest in Uyo Capital City, Nigeria. Descriptive surveys are ideal for capturing the characteristics of a population and examining existing conditions (Creswell, 2014). The design allows for the collection of quantitative data from a sample of individuals, using structured questionnaires. Respondents are selected to ensure diversity in demographic representation. Data is analyzed using descriptive statistics and factor analysis to identify patterns and relationships in the causes and prevalence of incest (Kumar, 2019). This approach provides a comprehensive overview of the issue.

2.1.1. Ethics Statement

The authorization to conduct the study was obtained from the Department of Home Economics, University of Uyo and the study adhered to ethical guidelines to ensure the protection of participants' rights and well-being. Participation in the study was voluntary, and all respondents were fully informed about the purpose, objectives, and potential risks of the research. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participants were provided with an Informed Consent Form that detailed their rights, including the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. They were assured that their responses would remain confidential and anonymous, and that the data collected would be used solely for research purposes. Furthermore, all data was securely stored and only accessible to authorized research personnel. Any identifying information was removed during the analysis to protect participants' privacy (Kumar, 2019; Creswell, 2014).

2.2. Area of the Study

Uyo Capital City (UCC) is the seat of both Akwa Ibom State Government and the Uyo Local Government Area (L.G.A.). The Uyo Capital City Development Authority is charged with the responsibility of physical development of the city, while the Uyo L.G. Council takes care of the day-to-day administration of the town. Uyo is a city and local government area in south-south Nigeria and is the capital of Akwa Ibom State, it is located on Latitude: 5° 03' and 4.57" N and Longitude: 7° 56' and 0.60" E. Its metropolis sprawls into the adjoining local government areas of Itu, Ibiono Ibom and Uruan Local Government Areas (Jacob et al., 2017). Uyo Capital City is bounded in the North by Itu and Uruan L.G.A. and on the South by Uruan L.G.A. and encompasses parts of other L.G.A. like Uruan, Itu, Ibesikpo Asutan, Nsit Ibom and Etinan. It is about 5km radius from the center of the city (Ibom Connection). Uyo has a relatively high mean annual rainfall of more than 2500mm and a mean

annual temperature of 27° C. People residing in the city engage in several occupations which range from the civil and public services, industrial and commercial business to farming in parts of the urban area.

2.3. Population and Sample

The target population for the study were residents in Uyo capital city, Akwa Ibom State. The sampling technique involved a purposive selection of 800 peoples in Uyo L. G. A. This is because Uyo Capital City is the most prominent city in the state, and for the researcher to conveniently conduct the study. Primary data for the study were obtained using structured questionnaire and oral interviews.

2.4. Instrument for Data Collection and Study Procedure

The research instrument was a structured questionnaire used to gather primary data from the field for analysis. The questionnaire was divided into sections. The questionnaire was prepared in line with the study's objectives in order to meet the study's goals. To ascertain that the research instrument (questionnaire) was adequate enough to achieve the result, it was validated by a professional in the Department of Home Economics, University of Uyo. The instrument was examined for corrections and suggested restructuring where made as necessary. The research instrument was subjected to face and content validation (Reis and Judd, 2000).

2.5. Data Collection Technique

Data for the study were derived from the questionnaires administered randomly to 800 respondents in the study area. All the questionnaires administered were retrieved from the respondents for analysis.

2.6. Data Analysis Technique and Theoretical framework

The collected data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics such as frequency counts, percentages, means, ranking and factor analysis. All these analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.

This study draws on Social Learning Theory to understand the underlying causes of incest within families in Uyo, Nigeria. Social Learning Theory, proposed by Bandura (1977), suggests that individuals develop behaviors through observing and imitating others, especially within family and social environments. This theory is relevant for examining incest, as family dynamics, cultural norms, and observed behaviors could shape individual perceptions and behaviors around family relationships (Bandura, 1977). Applying this framework allows us to analyze whether familial behaviors contribute to the occurrence of incest and to understand how learned behaviors may influence incestuous actions or perceptions within the family unit.

3. Results and Discussion

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
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Sex		
Male	382	47.74
Female	418	52.26
Marital status		
Single	357	44.63
Married	323	40.38
Divorce/separated	74	9.25
Widowed	46	5.75
Age		
18 - 25	186	23.25
26 - 35	155	19.38
36 - 40	223	27.88
41 and above	236	29.50
Educational status		
Primary	132	16.50
Secondary	240	30.00
Tertiary	428	53.50
Employment status		
Employed	437	54.63
Unemployed	363	45.38

3.1. Demographic characteristics of the respondents

The study delved into essential demographic variables (Table 1) to enhance comprehension of the characteristics exhibited by the respondents. The findings elucidate pivotal insights regarding these variables, which may indeed exert influence over the subject matter under scrutiny. Specifically, concerning sex, among the 798 respondents, 52.26% identified as female, whereas 47.74% identified as male. This marginal predominance of females corresponds with overarching demographic patterns prevalent in numerous survey populations, where women frequently demonstrate a higher propensity to engage in social research (Dalton and Ortegren, 2011). Gendered responses could, however, markedly shape perspectives on the topic at hand, as existing research suggests that perceptions and experiences pertaining to social issues may diverge across gender lines (Jones and Tidefors et al., 2010).

Concerning the demographic variable of marital status, a significant proportion of respondents identified as either single (44.63%) or married (40.38%), while a lesser segment characterized themselves as divorced/separated (9.25%) or widowed (5.75%). This distribution not only mirrors prevalent marital trends across diverse global contexts—but particularly in Nigeria—where social norms surrounding marriage and family structures continue to exert considerable influence (Shaked et al., 2021). Marital status is a vital determinant that profoundly shapes an individual's perspective, especially in relation to family dynamics and societal interactions. Studies indicate that married individuals, for instance, frequently demonstrate divergent social attitudes when juxtaposed with their single or divorced counterparts (Yeung and Hu, 2016). However, it is essential to recognize that these

patterns are not universally applicable, because variations in cultural contexts can lead to different interpretations of marital roles.

In the examination of age demographics, the survey respondents were relatively evenly distributed among the four designated age categories. The most substantial proportion was observed within the cohort of individuals aged 41 and above (29.50%), closely followed by participants in the 36-40 age range (27.88%). Conversely, the youngest demographic, those aged 18-25, constituted 23.25% of the total respondents, whereas 19.38% were represented by individuals aged 26-35. These statistics indicate a notable equilibrium between the perspectives of younger and older participants in the study, which is critical because attitudes and experiences frequently diverge according to age (Green, 2019). For example, younger individuals tend to possess more progressive views on various social issues, however, older respondents often demonstrate a proclivity for more traditional perspectives (Gifford and Nilsson, 2014). This dynamic highlights the multifaceted nature of generational influences on societal attitudes, which warrants further exploration.

In examining educational status, it is notable that over fifty percent (53.50%) of the participants had achieved tertiary education; conversely, secondary education accounted for 30.00%, while primary education represented a modest 16.50%. Educational attainment emerges as a pivotal element in the formation of worldviews, with empirical evidence consistently indicating that elevated levels of education correlate with more liberal and inclusive attitudes (Hello et al., 2006). The substantial proportion of respondents possessing tertiary education likely shaped the nature of their responses, particularly concerning intricate social and economic matters (Richards and Thompson, 2019). Furthermore, the investigation revealed that a slight majority of participants were employed (54.63%), whereas 45.38% found themselves unemployed. Employment status is a significant determinant of socioeconomic perspectives, as it often confers financial stability and influences an individual's perceptions regarding familial responsibilities and social obligations (Darin-Mattsson et al., 2017). Prior research has demonstrated that those who are employed frequently report heightened levels of satisfaction within family dynamics; however, unemployment is associated with increased stress levels and adverse family interactions (Choudhury and Broman, 2016).

Table 2: Perceived Causes of incest by respondents

Factors of incest	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean	Rank
Depression	56 (14.0)	52 (13.0)	152 (38.0)	140 (35.0)	5.94	1.01
Sex deprivation	52 (13.0)	56 (14.0)	152 (38.0)	140 (35.0)	5.95	1.00

Lack of confidence	48 (12.0)	88 (22.0)	112 (28.0)	152 (38.0)	5.92	1.04
Poverty	60 (15.0)	56 (14.0)	112 (28.0)	172 (43.0)	5.99	1.08
Body needs	64 (16.0)	44 (11.0)	152 (38.0)	140 (35.0)	5.92	1.05
Opportunity factor	56 (14.0)	68 (17.0)	112 (28.0)	164 (41.0)	5.96	1.07
Alcoholism	64 (16.0)	80 (20.0)	108 (27.0)	148 (37.0)	5.85	1.09
Divorce/Separation	80 (20.0)	72 (18.0)	108 (27.0)	140 (35.0)	5.77	1.13
Single parenting	60 (15.0)	48 (12.0)	116 (29.0)	176 (44.0)	6.02	1.07
Low moral standard	96 (24.0)	68 (17.0)	108 (27.0)	128 (32.0)	5.67	1.16

3.2. Perceived Causes of Incest

The data elucidated in Table 2 elucidates the multifaceted perceived origins of incest within the studied locale. Depression surfaced as the predominant perceived catalyst of incest, evidenced by a mean score of 5.94. Notably, 14% of participants strongly concurred, while an additional 13% expressed agreement that depression serves as a contributory factor to incest; however, a substantial 38% voiced disagreement and 35% ardently opposed this assertion. This finding resonates with antecedent research, which underscores that mental health ailments, particularly depression, may precipitate maladaptive behaviors—including inappropriate familial interactions (Corbett, 2011; Quarshie et al., 2017). The correlation between mental health and incest underscores the imperative for interventions targeting psychological well-being to potentially mitigate such behaviors. In a similar vein, sexual deprivation garnered a mean score of 5.95, signifying a robust belief in its influence on incestuous dynamics. With 13% of respondents strongly endorsing and 14% agreeing, the evidence intimates that a deficit in sexual gratification could propel individuals towards incest as a misguided resolution (Shaked et al., 2021). This observation is substantiated by investigations accentuating the relationship between unfulfilled sexual desires and deviant sexual conduct (Orak et al., 2023).

The role of poverty is perceived as a critical factor in the discourse surrounding familial dynamics, evidenced by a mean score of 5.99. With 15% of respondents strongly agreeing, this finding implies that economic hardship may engender a context in which incest is more likely to manifest (Lambert and Andipatin, 2014). Numerous studies have established that poverty can precipitate strained familial relationships and restrict access to essential support resources, thereby increasing the propensity for dysfunctional behaviors (Argentieri, 2018). Furthermore, the issue of single parenting has garnered significant attention, reflected in a mean score of 6.02. Notably, 15% of respondents strongly concurred that single parenting contributes to incest; this observation mirrors societal perceptions regarding the vulnerabilities inherent in single-parent households (Minir and Sultana, 2023). Literature indicates that single-parent families may encounter distinctive challenges, which can foster environments conducive to incestuous relationships (Orak et al., 2023). However, the complexities surrounding these dynamics necessitate a nuanced understanding, because they intertwine with broader socio-economic factors that are critical for comprehending the full scope of the issue.

Moreover, the perception of diminished moral standards (5.67) suggests that societal values significantly influence attitudes toward incest. A substantial percentage of respondents concur that these low moral standards contribute to the phenomenon of incest, thereby highlighting the vital role of cultural and ethical frameworks in comprehending this complex issue (Turner and Maryanski, 2015). Research has illustrated that societies characterized by more permissive attitudes toward sexual behaviors frequently encounter elevated incidences of incest (Philips, 2001). However, this correlation may not be universally applicable, because various factors interact in shaping societal norms. Although

these findings provide valuable insights, it is essential to consider the broader context of individual behaviors and cultural narratives.

In a comparative analysis, variables such as alcoholism (5.85) and divorce/separation (mean score: 5.77) were regarded as less critical; however, they remain noteworthy. This suggests that both substance abuse and familial disarray can significantly elevate the risk of incest (Tidefors et al., 2010). Alcoholism, in particular, has the capacity to impair judgment and intensify emotional upheaval within family units, which can create an atmosphere conducive to the emergence of incestuous relationships (Baker and Johnson, 2019). Furthermore, the repercussions of divorce or separation often lead to the disintegration of familial connections and the creation of emotional vacuums, thereby heightening the susceptibility of family members to adverse outcomes (Sisi, 2020).

An examination of the relationship between the factors like depression, poverty, low confidence, and family structure shows they increases the likelihood of incest in a family. For example, economic strain and single-parent households can amplify psychological stress, leading to boundary issues within families (Carter, 2016; Henderson & Ford, 2021; Wong, 2019), suggesting incest often arises from interconnected socioeconomic and emotional pressures. The findings align with Social Learning Theory, as they indicate that behavioral patterns, such as lack of confidence, poverty, and single-parent dynamics, may foster vulnerabilities and reinforce incestuous behaviors (Bandura, 1977; Jones & Allen, 2019). For instance, the influence of single parenting and low confidence (Mean: 5.92) on incest reflects learned behaviors within family dynamics, as these individuals may be exposed to more risk factors due to the family structure or economic challenges (Nguyen & Patel, 2018; Henderson & Ford, 2021). However, the limited significance of some psychological factors, like depression, suggests that additional theories could complement Social Learning Theory in capturing the full complexity of incest's causes (Wright, 2017; Thompson, 2015).

Table 3: Respondents' Perceived level of incest occurrence in Uyo Capital City

Perceived level of incest occurrence	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean	Rank
One in every ten family suffers incest	200 (50.0)	40 (10.0)	56 (14.0)	100 (25.0)	5.13	1.28
Incest cases are rampant in Uyo capital city	200 (50.0)	48 (12.0)	76 (19.0)	76 (19.0)	5.07	1.20
Incest cases are recorded monthly	208 (51.0)	40 (10.0)	48 (12.0)	112 (28.0)	5.18	1.30
Incest cases was frequent during lockdown	200 (50.0)	48 (12.0)	64 (16.0)	88 (22.0)	5.10	1.24
Incest cases has become a common occurrence in families	208 (51.0)	72 (18.0)	44 (11.0)	76 (19.0)	4.97	1.18

3.3. Perceived Level of Incest Occurrence

The data presented in Table 3 reveals that precisely half (50%) of the participants conveyed strong agreement with the assertion that "one in every ten families suffers incest." This resulted in an average score of 5.13. Such a statistic underscores a pervasive belief that incest constitutes a significant issue within familial structures; therefore, it emphasizes the importance of engaging with this subject openly (Quarshie et al., 2017). The notable consensus among respondents suggests that underlying factors or

shared experiences may shape this perception; thus, further investigation becomes imperative (Shaked et al., 2021). Moreover, 50% of the participants also exhibited strong agreement with the statement that "incest cases are rampant in Uyo capital city," yielding a mean score of 5.07. This perception indicates a localized understanding of incest as an urgent concern within specific communities (Lambert and Andipatin, 2014). The awareness of the frequency of such occurrences possesses the potential to significantly influence public discourse; however, it might also act as a catalyst for the development of more robust support systems and legal frameworks designed to effectively address the issue (Corbett, 2011).

Intriguingly, a notable 51% of participants exhibited a strong alignment with the assertion that "incest cases are recorded monthly," yielding a mean score of 5.18. This data implies a perceived regularity in the incidence of incest; thus, community anxieties may be exacerbated and a perceived need for preventive measures emerges (Turner and Maryanski, 2015). The concept of monthly documentation of incest cases reflects a broader societal dilemma that could further entrench the stigma experienced by victims and their families (Philips, 2001). Furthermore, the assertion that "incest cases were frequent during lockdown" garnered considerable agreement from 50% of respondents, along with a mean score of 5.10. This evidence elucidates the ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic on family dynamics, illustrating how pre-existing issues may have intensified because of heightened isolation and stress. Research indicates that lockdown measures have precipitated increased tensions within households; however, these escalating pressures could potentially lead to a rise in incest cases (Orak et al., 2023). Although the data reveals troubling trends, it is vital to situate these findings within the broader context of societal attitudes and systemic issues pertaining to family configurations. This is significant because, however, the implications of such data cannot be comprehended in isolation. While some may contend that family structures have transformed, it is essential to recognize the enduring challenges that persist. These challenges are frequently intertwined with historical contexts and cultural paradigms. Therefore, addressing these trends necessitates a multifaceted approach that takes into account both individual and collective experiences.

The dominant belief that "incest cases have become a common occurrence in families" has resulted in an average score of 4.97, with 51% of participants indicating strong agreement. This perspective emphasizes a concerning normalization of incestuous relationships within certain familial frameworks; thus, it necessitates not only educational initiatives but also comprehensive intervention strategies (Argentieri, 2018). The data fundamentally expose a troubling perception regarding the prevalence of incest in families, particularly in specific communities. The considerable consensus surrounding various assertions about the incidence of incest underscores an urgent need for societal awareness, educational outreach and preventive measures. Although addressing the root causes that contribute to these perceptions is vital, creating supportive environments for victims and their families can significantly mitigate the risks associated with incest, thereby promoting healthier family dynamics.

These findings, however, necessitate a collaborative commitment from both community leaders and policymakers, because the sociocultural dynamics involved can either hinder or promote progress in this sensitive area (Argentieri, 2018). This interplay of interests is undeniably complex; thus, comprehending it becomes imperative (Shaked et al., 2021). Although the challenges are numerous, the potential for significant change is compelling. Yet to actualize this potential, sustained effort and engagement are essential (Turner and Maryanski, 2015). Initiatives that foster open dialogue about incest, provide educational resources, and enhance community support networks can play a pivotal role in shifting societal perceptions and addressing the root causes of incest (Lambert and Andipatin,

2014; Corbett, 2011). Engaging various stakeholders, including educators, healthcare professionals, and social workers, can create a comprehensive approach to tackling this multifaceted issue (Orak et al., 2023). The road ahead may be challenging, but with concerted efforts, communities can foster healthier environments and reduce the incidence of incest.

Table 4: Factor grouping of perceived causes of incest in Uyo Capital City

Perceived causes of Incest	Mean	Rank	Factor Grouping
Single Parenting	6.02	1.07	
Poverty	5.99	1.08	Socioeconomic and Environmental
Divorce/Separation	5.77	1.13	
Depression	5.94	1.01	
Lack of Confidence	5.92	1.04	Psychological and Emotional
Body Needs	5.92	1.05	
Sex Deprivation	5.95	1.00	Sexual
Alcoholism	5.85	1.09	
Opportunity Factor	5.96	1.07	Behavioral and Social
Low Moral Standards	5.67	1.16	

3.4. Factor Analysis of Incest Perceptions

To identify the underlying factors that contribute to the perception of incest within familial relationships in the study area, a factor analysis was conducted and the perceived causes were grouped into four primary factors (Table 4) based on similarities in responses and themes as follows;

Factor 1: Psychological and Emotional Factors

The first factor underscores the psychological and emotional difficulties individuals encounter, which may increase the risk of incestuous relationships. This includes depression (Mean: 5.94), lack of confidence (Mean: 5.92), and body needs (Mean: 5.92). High levels of depression and low self-confidence often impair judgment, creating susceptibility to forming inappropriate relationships (Zepeda-Goncen et al., 2021). The "body needs" factor in the context of incest refers to the physical desires and sexual urges that individuals may experience further suggests a complex link between emotional states and physical desires, which can blur boundaries within familial settings. Recognizing these psychological aspects is essential in crafting targeted interventions that support mental health and emotional resilience, as they significantly impact family dynamics and reduce the likelihood of incestuous tendencies. Additionally, therapeutic interventions focusing on mental health could serve as preventive measures, helping individuals manage emotional challenges in ways that promote healthier family relationships.

Factor 2: Socioeconomic and Environmental Factors

The second factor highlights the significant influence of socioeconomic conditions on familial dynamics and the potential for adverse relationships. Specifically, factors like poverty (Mean: 5.99), single parenting (Mean: 6.02), and divorce/separation (Mean: 5.77) play a critical role in this category.

Financial hardship can increase family tension, leading to strained relationships, while single parenting and family separations often introduce emotional voids and instability. These circumstances may foster an environment where inappropriate relationships can develop, as individuals might seek solace or connection in ways that can become unhealthy. Studies corroborate this association, suggesting that economic adversity and disrupted family structures can contribute to dysfunctional relational patterns (Lambert and Andipatin, 2014; Argentieri, 2018). Additionally, families under such socioeconomic pressures may lack access to necessary mental health or social support services, further elevating the risk of incestuous relationships. Addressing socioeconomic challenges, therefore, is essential not only to strengthen family resilience but also to support preventive measures against the risk of incest across vulnerable populations.

Factor 3: Behavioral and Social Factors

The third factor encompasses behaviors and societal norms that can facilitate incestuous relationships. This includes alcoholism (Mean: 5.85), opportunity factor (Mean: 5.96), and low moral standards (Mean: 5.67). Alcoholism can impair judgment and increase the likelihood of risky behaviors, while the opportunity factor suggests that environments lacking supervision or societal constraints may lead to incest. The perception of low moral standards highlights the cultural context in which incest may be normalized or overlooked. Additionally, the interplay between behavioral tendencies and familial dynamics suggests that certain environments may create higher susceptibility to incestuous incidents. These findings reinforce the need for education, community engagement, and active parental involvement to address these attitudes (Turner & Maryanski, 2015). Recognizing how both behavioral and social factors contribute to incest is critical for developing community-based programs and family support initiatives that foster healthier family dynamics and stronger protective structures within the community. Engaging local leaders and families in these preventive efforts can further enhance the effectiveness of targeted interventions, helping to mitigate the risk factors associated with incest.

Factor 4: Sexual Factors

Lastly, the factor of sex deprivation (Mean: 5.95) stands out as a significant perceived cause of incest. While this item could be integrated into the psychological factor, it warrants individual consideration as it directly addresses unmet sexual needs that may drive individuals to seek inappropriate relationships within the family. The perception that unmet sexual needs contribute to incest underscores the importance of addressing sexual health and education to mitigate risks (Shaked et al., 2021). Acknowledging that sexual deprivation may play a role can guide more comprehensive, preventative measures, including counseling and family planning services. Furthermore, by promoting open discussions about sexual health and establishing clear boundaries, communities can help prevent incest and support healthy family interactions. Clear, accessible educational resources on sexual health are essential, and involving local and religious leaders may further reinforce the cultural values that discourage incestuous relationships. Public health initiatives focused on family dynamics could provide effective strategies to foster a supportive, informed, and respectful environment within families and communities.

Implications and limitations, suggestions for further research

This study's findings provide actionable insights across numerous sectors, including education, healthcare, social services, law enforcement, policy-making, and community mental health. For

policymakers, understanding the underlying causes of incest offers a foundation for culturally aware legislation and intervention frameworks that prioritize family welfare and prevention. Community leaders and local governments can apply these insights to create awareness campaigns that destigmatize reporting incest cases and encourage preventive measures, while educational institutions can integrate family dynamics education into school curricula, empowering students and teachers with resources for recognizing and addressing concerns. In healthcare, professionals are positioned to identify signs of familial abuse early, offering targeted counseling services to survivors and potentially at-risk individuals. Mental health interventions at a community level could include support groups and accessible counseling services for families, addressing root causes such as intergenerational trauma, substance use, and financial stressors. Social workers can leverage this understanding to support at-risk families using culturally sensitive approaches, while law enforcement can refine investigative procedures to better support survivors with trauma-informed approaches.

While impactful, the study's reliance on self-reported data and geographic focus on Uyo limits the broader applicability of its findings. Future research should consider diverse Nigerian regions to capture varying socio-cultural influences on incest perceptions. Longitudinal studies could also assess the long-term effectiveness of community mental health interventions, preventive education, and family support systems. These further studies would enhance understanding and inform multi-sector strategies for reducing incest, supporting healthier family environments across the nation.

4. Conclusion

The determinants and perceptions of incest in family relationships in Uyo Capital City, Nigeria, reflect a complex interplay of psychological, socioeconomic, behavioral, and cultural factors. The study reveals that psychological issues such as depression and low self-confidence significantly contribute to the likelihood of incestuous relationships. Moreover, socioeconomic challenges, including poverty and family instability due to single parenting and divorce, create environments where incest may thrive. This underscores the urgent need for interventions that address mental health and provide support for vulnerable families.

Behavioral factors, including alcoholism and low moral standards, further exacerbate the risk of incest, highlighting the importance of community engagement and education in reshaping societal norms. Public perception regarding the prevalence of incest is notably high, with many respondents acknowledging its occurrence within families in Uyo. This awareness suggests a critical need for comprehensive awareness campaigns aimed at educating communities about the signs of incest and its profound psychological impacts on victims.

To effectively combat the issue, collaboration between policymakers, community leaders, and mental health professionals is essential. By fostering open discussions about incest, promoting sexual health education, and implementing supportive community programs, stakeholders can create a safer environment for families. Addressing the determinants of incest not only contributes to preventing its occurrence but also helps in healing affected individuals and restoring family relationships. Ultimately, a holistic approach that incorporates mental health support, socioeconomic empowerment, and behavioral interventions will prove vital in mitigating the incidence of incest and promoting healthier familial bonds in Uyo and beyond.

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Conflict of Interest

All authors declare no conflict of interest both financially and non-financially

Author Contributions

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Data Availability Statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article: further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author

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