

OMUGWO AS A CULTURAL TOOL FOR EFFECTIVE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND RELATIONSHIP IN ORAIFITE, ANAMBRA STATE

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Abstract

This study explores omugwo, the traditional Igbo postpartum care ritual, as a cultural tool for promoting effective human development and strengthening relationships in Oraifite, Anambra State. Omugwo is more than a maternal care practice; it embodies cultural values that support the health and well-being of both mother and child, while fostering unity within the family and the wider community. The research highlights how omugwo serves as a medium for transferring indigenous knowledge, nurturing emotional bonds across generations, and preserving cultural heritage. Through qualitative data drawn from oral interviews, personal observations, and existing literature, the study examines how this tradition contributes to maternal recovery, infant care, and the promotion of empathy, cooperation, and communal living. The findings reveal that omugwo not only provides critical physical and psychological support to new mothers but also reinforces social cohesion, respect for life, and a sense of belonging among family members. The paper argues that maintaining such indigenous practices in modern times can complement contemporary healthcare while sustaining the cultural identity of the people. The study concludes by emphasizing the need to preserve and adapt omugwo to ensure its continued relevance in promoting healthy family dynamics and holistic human development.

Keywords: Omugwo, Cultural, Human Development, Relationship, Oraifite.

Introduction

Omugwo is a traditional Igbo practice of caring for a new mother and her baby after childbirth. It is one of the most cherished customs handed down through generations in Southeastern Nigeria. The essence of *omugwo* is to ensure proper care for both the mother and her newborn during the delicate period after delivery. As Anugwom (2007) explains, *omugwo* usually lasts for a specific number of weeks, traditionally measured in Igbo market days (with a week being four days). During this period, the new mother's mother or sometimes her mother-in-law comes to live with her daughter's family to take care of both mother and baby. This support helps the mother recover, provides her with much-needed rest, and ensures the baby is well looked after. *Omugwo* is not just about care but also follows the people's cultural beliefs and practices. According to Ohaja and Anyim (2021), it is a time of celebration marked by cultural rites such as naming the baby, burying the umbilical cord, circumcision (if applicable), and sometimes ceremonies believed to welcome the child's reincarnation.

The Igbo, like many African communities, believe in communal living and see child-rearing as a shared responsibility. This sense of togetherness and mutual support is central to the practice of *omugwo*. Ekweariri, cited in Ohaja and Anyim (2021), describes *omugwo* as a form of rehabilitation for the new mother. During this period, as Ejikeme and Ukaegbu (2013) note, the mother stays home, rests, and is not allowed to engage in strenuous activities. She only leaves the house when necessary, such as for postnatal checkups. Ibe et al. (2017) observe that *omugwo* is also an opportunity for passing down traditional knowledge on how to care for a baby and for oneself as a nursing mother,

including breastfeeding practices. Ujummadu (2018) adds that the woman who comes for *omugwo* often cooks special local dishes to help the mother regain her strength and heal properly. It is a period when the mother undergoes emotional and physical recovery, with the ultimate goal of preparing her to take full responsibility for her baby's care (Ejikeme and Ukaegbu, 2013). However, in today's Oraifite community, the practice of *omugwo* is gradually fading. Factors such as economic hardship, urbanization, and migration have made it difficult for families to maintain the tradition. Many new mothers return to their usual routines just a few weeks after childbirth. Some leave their babies in the care of housemaids, while others take their infants with them to markets, farms, or workplaces. This decline in the observance of *omugwo* has become a concern in the community. This study highlights the importance of *omugwo* for fostering strong human relationships and supporting healthy development. It calls attention to the need to revive and uphold this tradition in Oraifite, restoring its original purpose of communal care and solidarity.

Omugwo as a Concept

Omugwo is one of the most treasured traditional practices among the Igbo people, designed to care for both the new mother and her baby after childbirth. It is regarded as a time of rest, healing, and learning for the mother, and also strengthens family ties. According to Okonkwo and Eze (2019), this cultural practice involves the mother or mother-in-law staying with the family for weeks to assist with baby care and domestic responsibilities. It is deeply embedded in the communal way of life of the Igbo, where family and extended kinship support are highly valued (Onyeka and Nwankwo, 2020). The duration of *Omugwo* is traditionally calculated in Igbo market weeks, and during this period, the new mother is excused from all stressful activities. She focuses on bonding with her baby and regaining her health, while her caregiver provides emotional, physical, and practical support (Okeke and Nwosu, 2018). This practice also serves as an important medium of intergenerational knowledge transfer. Obasi and Ibekwe (2017) emphasize that elders use the *Omugwo* period to teach young mothers skills in breastfeeding, hygiene, and childcare.

Another significant aspect of *Omugwo* is the preparation of special meals and herbal remedies believed to help restore the mother's strength and protect her health. According to Iroegbu (2016), traditional foods like pepper soup and herbal baths are prepared to aid her recovery. Beyond physical care, *Omugwo* has a social dimension. It reinforces the communal spirit of the Igbo society by fostering closer relationships among family members and reaffirming cultural identity (Ezeanya and Okafor, 2021). In recent years, however, the observance of *Omugwo* has declined, especially in urban areas. Many young mothers now return to work soon after delivery or rely on hired help, missing out on the emotional and cultural benefits of the tradition. Anyanwu and Obi (2019) observe that modernization and economic pressures have weakened the practice in some communities, such as Oraifite. Therefore, Okoye and Chukwuma (2020) argue that it is necessary to revive and promote *Omugwo*, not only as a health-supportive measure but also as a way of preserving Igbo cultural heritage and family solidarity.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of Structural Functionalism, propounded by Talcott Parsons in 1951 in his classic work *The Social System*, provides a useful framework for understanding how cultural practices like *Omugwo* contribute to societal stability and individual well-being. Structural functionalism views society as a system composed of interdependent parts, each performing specific functions to maintain the equilibrium of the whole. Every social institution or practice, whether economic, political, educational, or familial, serves a purpose in meeting the needs of individuals and ensuring the continuity and stability of society. This theoretical perspective assumes that cultural norms and traditions, rather than being arbitrary, have evolved to fulfill essential social and psychological needs, thereby promoting social order and cohesion.

In the context of the Igbo cultural practice of *Omugwo*, this theory is highly relevant. *Omugwo* serves several important functions within the Oraifite community and beyond. At the familial level, it ensures that the new mother and her child receive adequate care and emotional support during the critical postnatal period. This care not only facilitates the physical recovery of the mother but also provides her with psychological comfort and confidence as she adjusts to motherhood. The elder woman (often the new mother's mother or mother-in-law) transmits vital cultural knowledge and skills such as breastfeeding techniques, child-rearing practices, hygiene, and postpartum health remedies to the new mother, thereby reinforcing intergenerational bonds. From the structural functionalist perspective, these roles are crucial because they maintain the family as a stable and nurturing unit, which in turn sustains the wider social system.

At the community level, Omugwo exemplifies the communal ethos of the Igbo society, which emphasizes interdependence, cooperation, and mutual aid. It reinforces social solidarity by reminding members of their responsibilities to one another and by preserving traditional values of care and togetherness. As Parsons argued, such cultural practices help to integrate individuals into the value system of their society, aligning personal behaviors with collective expectations. Therefore, the decline of Omugwo, as observed in contemporary Oraifite due to modernization, urbanization, and economic hardship, could lead to weakened family ties, diminished cultural identity, and erosion of social cohesion. In applying structural functionalism to Omugwo, this study highlights the practice's crucial role as a cultural mechanism for fostering human development and sustaining harmonious relationships. Revitalizing Omugwo is not only about preserving tradition but also about reinforcing the social structure and ensuring the continued well-being of the Oraifite community.

Oraifite in Historical Perspective

Oraifite is an ancient Igbo town located in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State. The town is made up of four main quarters: Unodu, Ezumeri, Irefi, and Ifite. Oral history traces the people's origin to migrations from Osumenyi and Aboh, with a shared ancestry with Nnewi and Ichi. These three communities are believed to have descended from a common ancestor, Ikenga, and they still maintain close cultural ties today. They celebrate some festivals together, such as Afia-Olu and Ilo-Mmuo, and they also worshipped the same powerful deity, Edo, in the past. Over time, Oraifite's four quarters were established through the descendants of Ikenga's son, Oraifite. The town is bordered by Nnewi to the east, Atani to the west, Oba to the north, and Ozubulu to the south. The land stretches from the Niger River plains through hills and is crossed by the Ekulo River.

The people of Oraifite are deeply rooted in Igbo tradition. They live by the Omenala, a set of customs and moral codes handed down from the ancestors. Omenala guides their everyday life and ensures peace between the living and the spirit world. When anyone breaks these rules, they perform cleansing rituals to restore harmony. The community celebrates colorful festivals like the New Yam Festival, Afia-Olu, Ofala, and the prestigious Ozo title-taking ceremony. Masquerades are also an important part of the culture, used for entertainment and maintaining social order. Every four years, the Mass Return event brings back sons and daughters living elsewhere to contribute to the development of the town. December is seen as a month of joy and celebration, so burials are not held during that time.

Religious life in Oraifite has evolved over time. Before Christianity arrived, the people practiced African Traditional Religion, worshipping Chukwu (God) and other deities like Edo, Ana, and Ogwugwu. Each family and quarter had their own shrines and rituals, with sacrifices, songs, and dances marking special occasions. Christianity came in the mid-19th century, bringing Anglican and Catholic missions. The first Anglican church was built at Udoji's palace before spreading to other places. Today, Christians and traditional worshippers live peacefully side by side.

Politically, the people of Oraifite follow the traditional Igbo system of leadership, which is democratic and community-based. Each quarter is led by an Obi, and together they are headed by the Isi-Obi, the overall traditional ruler. Councils of elders, age-grade associations, and even secret societies all play roles in maintaining law, order, and development in the town. Leadership is hereditary, passed from father to son, and the title of Isi-Obi has been in existence for over 400 years. During colonial times, Oraifite worked with the British administration under the Nnewi native court system.

Economically, Oraifite is a hardworking and prosperous town. The people are mainly farmers, traders, palm wine tappers, and craftsmen. They are known for their skill in farming and business, and their fertile land produces abundant crops every year. The Nkwo Ozulogu market is the commercial heart of the town, attracting traders from many neighboring communities. In addition to their traditional industries, the people have embraced education and modern development. The town today boasts schools, hospitals, banks, and even a radio station (Blaze FM), making it a thriving and progressive community.

***Ine Omugwo* in Oraifite Community**

In the Oraifite community, *Ine Omugwo* which means paying homage to a newborn child is a cherished tradition that reflects the deep respect the Igbo people have for children and childbirth. It serves as a way of welcoming the newborn into both the family and the wider world, while also acknowledging the blessing of life as a gift from God (*Chukwu*). For women still hoping to conceive, this occasion is often a time to pray and trust God for their own blessing, believing

that through honoring the newborn, their prayers may also be answered. The birth of a child is seen as a symbol of peace, and their arrival often helps mend broken relationships within the family, since everyone is expected to participate in the celebration. This aligns with the Igbo saying, “*Nwa bu nwa ora*”, and meaning a child belongs to everyone.” According to U. Chukwulobe (Personal communication, April 14, 2025), *Ine Omugwo* is not treated like an ordinary visit. Even if a person has previously visited the family of the newborn several times, they still make special preparations for this particular occasion. The father of the child typically chooses a day and invites family and friends to formally observe the rite. He is expected to bring items such as tubers of yam, a live animal, and some money, which are used to prepare nourishing meals that help the mother regain her strength and improve her breast milk production. Similarly, the visiting woman brings gifts like baby clothes, local spices, nappies, washing soaps and detergents, as well as wrappers for both the mother and the baby. These thoughtful gestures highlight the communal care and shared joy surrounding childbirth, reinforcing the bonds of family and community in Oraifite.

***Omugwo* Rites in Oraifite Community**

In the Oraifite community, *Omugwo* is a cherished tradition that provides a period of rest and care for a woman who has just given birth. In earlier times, it was customary for the new mother’s own mother to come and stay with her, offering care and support throughout this delicate phase. As noted by E. Kanu (personal communication, November 26, 2022), if the woman’s mother was unavailable due to illness or death another female relative, such as an aunt or sister, would step in to fulfill this role. During *Omugwo*, the visiting mother or relative took charge of cooking, house chores, and even overseeing the woman’s farm to ensure she did not lose crops or livestock because of her confinement. This included weeding and harvesting on her behalf.

Special meals were prepared for the new mother to help her recover and regain strength. According to E. Anagbakwu (personal communication, May 26, 2025), a common dish was a light yam porridge made without oil, cooked with dry fish, *uziza*, and pepper. The caregiver also bathed the baby, massaged both mother and child with warm water, and maintained proper ventilation in the room by leaving doors open while the baby slept. Before modern healthcare facilities, women typically gave birth at home, often near a banana tree, supported by neighbors, friends, and family members who helped clean and care for her and the newborn. After delivery, the umbilical cord and placenta were carefully cut and buried.

Children in the neighborhood also participated in welcoming a new baby. As described by N. Kanu (personal communication, May 25, 2025), they would collect firewood, which was then used to cook the mother’s meals. Afterward, the children shared whatever food was left, rubbing their faces with *nzu* (white clay) as part of the joyful ritual. *Nzu* was also applied to the baby’s skin to keep it smooth and healthy. Another unique practice, described by C. Unigwe (personal communication, May 27, 2025), involved collecting the ashes (*ntu ngwo*) from the firewood used during the *Omugwo*. These ashes, along with the baby’s waste and fallen umbilical cord, were kept for seven weeks before being disposed of at the base of the banana tree where the mother had labored.

Scholars have highlighted how birth rites across African societies embody deep cultural values. According to Grillo (2012), rituals are a way of passing on cultural beliefs and values with emotional and dramatic significance. Despite criticism of certain traditional practices, studies (Nwadiokwu et al., 2016; Honkavuo, 2021) show that many of these birth-related customs promote maternal and newborn health by offering protection, rest, and nourishment. Dietary restrictions and prescribed meals (Elom, 2019; Honkavuo, 2021) are part of these precautions. In Oraifite, childbirth is celebrated with joy and communal involvement, through songs, dancing, and family gatherings. As Ebeogu (2017) observed, birth songs are an integral part of Igbo oral traditions, reflecting the cultural importance of childbirth. The communal participation reinforces the African ideal of togetherness, as noted by Agulanna (2010), where the individual is seen as inseparable from the community.

The *Omugwo* ritual, with its care and support for the new mother, embodies this spirit of communal living. Older women help with chores, bring gifts, and allow the new mother to rest and recover a practice also noted in other African societies like South Africa (Selepe and Thomas, 2000). Research by Dennis et al. (2007) shows that such postpartum support benefits maternal health, eases the transition to motherhood, and may prevent postnatal anxiety and depression (Umunna, 2012 and Odinka et al., 2019). Finally, birth rituals also have spiritual significance, influencing the names given to children (Kanu, 2019) and fostering a connection with ancestral spirits (Honkavuo,

2021). These traditions enhance community bonds and affirm the spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being of both mother and child.

Birth Songs and Dance (*Egwu Onu Nwa*)

Childbirth is widely regarded as a profound blessing, described by Chukwu (2015) as “an avalanche of blessing from nature to man.” In the Oraifite community, the birth of a child is received with great joy and celebrated communally. As soon as news of the delivery spreads, women from both the immediate and extended family, as well as the larger kindred, gather at the home to welcome the newborn with ululations, traditional songs, and lively dances. This collective display of joy signifies not just the arrival of a new life, but also the continuation and expansion of the family lineage. According to Uzochukwu (2006), birth songs (*egwu onu nwa*) are a central part of the celebration.

These songs, with their rhythmic patterns, are crafted to enhance participation, drawing women into spirited dancing and singing. This underscores the communal nature of childbirth in Igbo culture, where it is seen as an event that concerns the whole community. Beyond their festive quality, birth songs often carry meaningful lyrics: they announce the sex of the newborn, express gratitude to *Chineke* (God the Creator), and highlight societal values tied to fertility and family. As Ebeogu (1992) notes, birth songs also serve as a platform for women to voice their thoughts and reinforce their integral role in family and community life. While the birth of any child is celebrated, it is worth mentioning, as observed by Chukwu and Ume (2020), that the festivities tend to be more elaborate and vocal when the newborn is male a reflection of the cultural emphasis traditionally placed on male children in Igbo society. For the people of Oraifite, music and dance are woven into the fabric of ritual and cultural life, and childbirth ceremonies are no exception. The use of *egwu onu nwa* not only celebrates the new life but also reinforces communal bonds, spiritual gratitude, and the cultural identity of the people.

The Umbilical Cord and Placenta Rites

The way the umbilical cord and placenta are handled is an important part of the traditional rites of passage in many cultures, including Oraifite. These practices are deeply rooted in cultural beliefs, which see them as spiritual acts that protect the wellbeing of the baby, the mother, and the wider community (Van Bogaert and Ogubanjo, 2008). Cutting the umbilical cord, for example, is more than just a medical act. It symbolizes the child being welcomed into the human community. As Kanu (2019) explains, it marks the child’s separation from the ancestral realm and incorporation into the world of the living.

For generations, the people of Oraifite have treated the placenta with great care and respect, unlike in Western medicine where it is often seen as mere medical waste. Many African traditions view the placenta and umbilical cord as powerful and sacred, and so they are handled in special ways (Adamson, 1985). Among the Oraifite, the placenta is seen as a kind of “companion” to the baby, helping them journey from the spirit world into the human world — a belief also observed in communities like the Sahel-Niger (Cooper, 2019). In Oraifite, where the placenta is buried carries symbolic meaning: for a baby girl, it is buried on the left side of the mother’s house, reflecting the belief that daughters eventually marry and leave home, while for a baby boy it is buried on the right side, representing his role in continuing the family lineage (Mulemi and Nangendo, 2001). Burying the placenta and cord is also believed to help heal the mother, restore her fertility, and secure the child’s future. According to N. Kanu (personal communication, April 25, 2025), the Oraifite people see the placenta as the newborn’s “deceased twin,” and so it is often buried under a tree being symbols of life and continuity. For the Igbo, the tree planted or chosen for this purpose is believed to remain connected to the child, serving as a spiritual and earthly link. Overall, these practices show just how much value is placed on the placenta and umbilical cord in African cultures, recognizing their biological and spiritual importance in the child’s life journey.

Implications of *Omugwo* for Effective Human Development

Omugwo have great effect on the development of the human person. Babies make us happy as they serve as a physical reminder of the love between the couple. After delivery, the baby has to be cared for which can be challenging for first-time parents. In Nigeria, Dimeji-Ajayi (2020) denotes that various tribes have various practices to accommodate a new baby into the family like “*omugwo* for Igbo”, “*ojojo omo* for Yoruba” and “*umaan* for Akwa Ibom.” *Omugwo* is a traditional Igbo custom for postpartum care by the mother of the couple. The importance of this practice is that it helps the new mother to ease into her new role through the experience of the mother (husband or wife). During *omugwo*, it’s the responsibility of the mother (of the husband or wife) to put her through what she needs to eat to help

with milk production for the baby's consumption, Swedish massage techniques and hot water therapy. After childbirth, the grandmother helps the new mother with hot water therapy and sitz bath. Hot water therapy involves soaking a cloth in hot water and using it to massage the new mother's belly. Sitz bath is a necessary practice if the new mother gave birth vaginally so that blood clots in her womb can come out so she can heal properly internally.

Kanu (2019) opines that the occasion marks the beginning of acquiring knowledge, which is otherwise not accessible to those who have not been through the process. It is a period of awakening to so many things, a period of dawn for the nursing mothers when the collective cultural wisdom of Oraifite community is transferred to the members of the community. It provides a socio-cultural context during which meanings are communicated for the development of the person in question. According to Mbiti (1969) this happens when they withdraw from other people to live alone in specially prepared huts away from the villages during which time, they receive secret instructions before they are allowed to rejoin their relations at home. This is a symbolic experience has special educational training for the participants which will help them to live up to their expectations in the future as mothers, fathers, parents in the family or the society at large.

Kanu (2019) further observes that, teaching and learning within the context of the *omugwo* are not abstract or based on definitions, but rather the students are taught based on roles and responsibilities that they are expected to carry out daily concrete historical circumstances. *Omugwo* which is vital in traditional Igbo society can make a contribution towards stability. Furthermore, *omugwo* have several implications for effective human development which includes:

a. Improved maternal and infant health: Omugwo helps new mothers recover both physically and emotionally after childbirth. With the presence of her own mother or mother-in-law, the new mother is guided on what to eat and how to care for herself so her body heals properly. Practices like hot water therapy and sitz baths help reduce pain and restore the womb to health. The grandmother also ensures the baby is bathed correctly, kept warm, and fed well. This guidance lowers the risks of complications like infections or postpartum depression. The emotional comfort of having an experienced caregiver close by gives the new mother confidence and peace of mind. The baby also benefits from proper early care, which supports good growth and development. In essence, Omugwo creates a safe, healthy environment for both mother and child to thrive. This strengthens the health and wellbeing of the family right from the start. Over time, healthy mothers and babies contribute positively to the community's human development.

b. Stronger social support systems: Omugwo reinforces the importance of family and communal support during one of life's most vulnerable times. It reminds the new mother that she is not alone, and that her family and community stand behind her. The presence of grandparents and extended family fosters a strong sense of belonging. This emotional and social backing helps the mother handle stress better and adjust to her new responsibilities. For the family, it strengthens connections across generations, as everyone contributes to caring for the new life. Neighbours and relatives often join in by visiting and offering gifts, showing that childbearing is a shared joy. This creates a culture of solidarity and empathy that extends beyond the family unit. Strong support systems also help to cushion families during hard times, building resilience. Over time, such support networks foster harmony and stability within the community. This is vital for social and human development.

c. Preservation of cultural heritage: Through Omugwo, traditional Igbo knowledge about postpartum care is passed from one generation to the next. Young mothers learn from their elders about proper baby care, healing practices, and how to fulfill their role as mothers. This keeps the community's cultural identity alive and strong. Practices like special meals, traditional massages, and symbolic rituals all reflect Igbo values and worldview. Omugwo also teaches respect for elders and their wisdom, which helps preserve family hierarchies and values. As modern life changes family patterns, Omugwo reminds people of their roots and shared traditions. Preserving such cultural practices protects the community from losing its unique way of life. It also helps younger generations understand their history and heritage. A strong cultural identity contributes to confidence, social harmony, and a sense of purpose all of which are key to human development.

d. Enhanced family bonding: Omugwo brings families closer by involving everyone in the care of the mother and newborn. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, and even neighbours participate, creating a joyful and supportive atmosphere. This shared experience strengthens emotional ties and fosters love within the family. It gives grandparents a chance to bond with their grandchildren right from birth. The new parents also feel more connected to their own parents, as they rely on them for guidance and help. Children growing up in such a supportive family learn the value of teamwork and care for one another. Family bonding during Omugwo helps reduce feelings of isolation and strengthens the family as a unit. A close-knit family is more likely to raise emotionally stable and confident children. Such strong families

contribute to a healthy and stable community. Over time, this builds a society where people feel connected, responsible, and committed to each other's welfare a foundation of human development.

Implications of *Omugwo* for Effective Human Relationship

The honour attached to *omugwo* which is approved only for married women who have given birth leads to chastity among youths in Oraifite community society and Igbo land at large. Onwubie (2016) views that chastity before marriage is one of the highly valued norms on the side of a woman in Igbo society. A young lady who is found undefiled in marriage is a credit to the parents and entire community because it attracts respect and gifts from parents to show appreciation for inculcating good norms and values in their daughter for not losing her virginity. Chastity before marriage is encouraged for all youths as it helps to reduce sexual immorality, teenage pregnancy, rape, prostitution, abortion, Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs). The negative effects of pregnancy out of wedlock or teenage pregnancy is enormous but could be best prevented by chastity which is hinged on fulfillment of pregnancy rite. From the foregoing, pregnancy rite promotes morality and adherence to indigenous values of which chastity is among.

According to Miller (1981), adultery is seen as the act of sexual intercourse between a married man and a woman not his wife or between a married woman and a man not her husband" (p. 151). One of the essential features of adultery is that one of the parties involved must be married. Oforchukwu (2010) affirms that:

Adultery is considered a serious crime in Nigerian society. It is such a serious crime that even the Mosaic Law forbids it. The Law also prescribes penalties against those committing adultery. In the covenant, he made with the Israelites; Yahweh included adultery among the sins that must be avoided. The Book of Exodus stated that followers of God must not commit adultery. Couples must avoid committing the sin of adultery. It is a sad truth that some families have failed due to adultery. Adultery represents a sin against God, justice, man, and nature. In short, the adulterer has fooled himself or herself. The victim of this injustice is the innocent member of the couple, whose marital rights have been violated by the other party. (p. 67).

It could be said that the present conditions of our society offer little encouragement for faithful couples. Thus, the proper keeping of pregnancy rite could inculcate into wives the dignity for preserving their body solely for their husbands. Pregnancy rite also helps in preserving the sanctity of human life. The Igbo considers life as God given thus, pregnancy which is the genesis of life must be handled with care. Ezenweke (2012) affirms that pregnancy in many African cultures is connected to life itself and so held with great care and respect. This ensures that abortion and the shedding of human blood by anyone in the community is considered as an abomination (Mbah, 1993). This is vital in preserving the sanctity of human life.

According to Ekei (2016), it is true that every culture and institution has a respect for human life but traditionally the Igbo have a profound regard for human life, it would be affirmed that in the hierarchy of values, human life is the most primary. Life is seen as a value of no mean magnitude. Some Igbo proverbs portray the indispensable and inalienable place of human life in the scheme of things; *ndu-ka-aku* (life is of more value than wealth and riches), *ndu-bu-isi* (life is a primary value). Ekei (2016) affirms that this proverb is a principle that comes up during a critical moment of decision; it plays its role when people are confused whether to undertake a certain risk at the detriment of their lives. The following areas are various ways *omugwo* can serve as an effective strategy for human relationship:

a. Building closer family connections: *Omugwo* offers a rare opportunity for family members to draw closer to one another in love and care. The birth of a baby naturally brings joy and excitement, and during *omugwo*, everyone comes together to support the mother and her newborn. This collective effort deepens the sense of unity within the household. Family members share responsibilities, like preparing meals, cleaning, and watching over the baby, which fosters cooperation and teamwork. The presence of relatives during this period helps ease the burden on the new parents and reminds them that they are not alone. Even distant family members who may not visit regularly find a reason to reconnect. Conversations and laughter shared in the home during *omugwo* make the bond stronger. It reminds everyone of the value of family and what it means to show up for each other in times of need. This spirit of togetherness often lingers even after the *omugwo* period ends, leaving lasting memories. The bonds formed during this time create a more supportive and loving family environment. Such connections also set a good example for younger members to carry the tradition forward. It proves that family is not just about being related by blood, but about standing by one another. By working as a team during *omugwo*, families in Oraifite nurture love and respect for one another.

b. Bridging generational gaps: Omugwo creates a bridge between the old and the young in a natural and meaningful way. Traditionally, it is the grandmother or an elderly female relative who leads the omugwo process. This gives her the chance to pass down her wisdom and experience to the younger mother. Young mothers learn valuable tips about caring for a baby and recovering after childbirth, lessons that no book or hospital can fully teach. The older woman also shares stories and cultural teachings that help keep family values alive. These moments foster respect for the elderly, as younger people realize how much they have to offer. At the same time, the elders feel appreciated and valued for their knowledge. This back-and-forth strengthens the relationship between generations, closing the gap created by modern lifestyles where young and old often feel disconnected. Children in the home also observe these interactions and grow up understanding the importance of family history and respect. The cultural identity of the family is reinforced when the younger generation learns the customs that have been practiced for decades. This relationship keeps traditions alive and ensures that future generations will uphold them. It also reminds everyone that each age group has something to contribute to the well-being of the family. Through omugwo, the elders guide the young, while the young honor the elders. This exchange of knowledge and respect keeps the family united across generations.

c. Encouraging compassion and support: One of the most beautiful aspects of omugwo is the compassion shown to the new mother and her child. This is a vulnerable period, and the presence of family providing help and comfort means everything. Emotional support is as important as the physical help given. The mother feels loved, cared for, and valued, which boosts her mental well-being. Family members learn to notice when someone is struggling and step in with kindness. This act of caring teaches everyone in the home the power of empathy and patience. Omugwo encourages a culture where no one is left to suffer alone. When people see how much the new mother benefits from their support, they are inspired to offer the same care to others in need. Children growing up in such an environment naturally learn to be considerate and helpful. Family members bond over shared chores and late-night feedings, often forming deeper connections. This atmosphere of love also extends to the baby, who grows up surrounded by warmth and affection. As everyone comes together to help, they also get to appreciate the sacrifices others make. Compassion becomes a shared value in the family. Over time, these little acts of kindness strengthen relationships and make the family a safe and loving space for everyone. Omugwo teaches that love and support are the foundation of any strong family.

d. Instilling a sense of inclusion: Omugwo helps the new mother feel like she belongs, not just to her immediate household but to the wider family and community. At a time when she may feel overwhelmed, the presence of loved ones reminds her she is not alone. The care and attention she receives reassure her that her role as a mother is important and appreciated. Other family members also feel included as they each contribute in their own way, creating a sense of purpose and unity. This shared involvement strengthens everyone's sense of belonging. Even children in the family feel part of the process, learning early that family means caring for each other. The family becomes a place where everyone knows they matter and have a role to play. This feeling of inclusion boosts confidence and self-worth, especially for the new mother. Being surrounded by supportive people reduces feelings of isolation and helps her adjust to her new responsibilities. At the same time, the family feels proud to welcome a new member into their fold. This strengthens the identity of the family as a close-knit unit where everyone is valued. The celebration of new life brings everyone together and reaffirms their connections. Omugwo reinforces the idea that every member is an essential part of the family, and together they create a loving, inclusive home.

Conclusion

Rituals are a beautiful way through which people express and pass down their beliefs, values, and identity from one generation to the next. They are not just old customs but remain an important part of everyday life for many African communities. In Oraifite, the *omugwo* ritual is more than just helping a new mother recover, it is a powerful tradition that shows care, love, and unity in the family and community. It reminds everyone that raising a child is not just the job of the parents but a responsibility shared by all. *Omugwo* benefits both the mother and the baby in many ways. It gives the mother the rest and support she needs to heal properly, helps her bond with her baby, and also protects both of them from harm physically, emotionally, and spiritually. It also brings the family closer, strengthens ties between generations, and keeps alive the deep connection with ancestors and culture. These qualities make *omugwo* not just a helpful practice but also a meaningful celebration of life and togetherness. That is why it is important to encourage and support women to observe the parts of *omugwo* that are good for their health and well-being. Even as times change, we should remember that traditions like *omugwo* carry wisdom and lessons that are still useful today. It is more than just a postpartum custom. It is a way of honoring life, family, and community. Keeping this tradition alive ensures that its rich values continue to guide and inspire future generations.

Recommendations

- i. The need to organize programmes on educating mothers on after birth practices should be carried out in churches, schools and other areas with young wives and women of marriageable age as main targets.
- ii. There is need for schools to organize cultural day where indigenous cultural practices will be displayed in form of drama for the students to learn from them.
- iii. Religious leaders should encourage the practice of indigenous values that are in consonance with Christian values.
- iv. There should be severe punishment for abortion since it terminates life.

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