



# **Gossip and Interpersonal Relationship Among Adults in St. Matthew's Felele and St. Theresa's Ganaja Parishes Catholic Diocese of Lokoja Nigeria**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Gossip is characterized by the exchange of negative or private information about others, which has been a pervasive issue within human interactions, affecting interpersonal relationships in various contexts. This study investigated the levels of interpersonal relationships among adults in St. Matthew's Catholic Parish Felele and St. Theresa's Catholic Parish Ganaja, in Lokoja Diocese. The study was grounded in Robin Dunbar's Gossip Theory and used a descriptive research design, the research instruments used for the collection of quantitative data was questionnaires, the FIAT-Q-SF for interpersonal relationships, and interview guides for qualitative data. The target population is 1,120 adults while the sample size is 295 participants. Simple random sampling was used to sample participants for quantitative data. The objective was analysed using descriptive data analysis. The results of the study was presented using percentages, frequencies, and tables. The study findings affirmed a moderate level of interpersonal relationship among Christians of St. Matthew's Parish Felele and St. Theresa's Parish Ganaja Lokoja and highlighted the need for parishioners to improve their interpersonal relationship. The Bishop and The Parish priests should implement clear communication channels within religious communities that will help minimize the spread of gossip, encourage open dialogue and provide platforms for individuals to address concerns or conflicts directly rather than resorting to gossip.

**Keywords:** Interpersonal relationship; Gossip; Church Gossip; Adult; Psycho-Spiritual Therapy and Counselling

## **1.0 Study Background**

The importance of social interaction and information exchange as motivators cannot be over emphasized. Dunbar (2004) proposed that gossip might be used to build connections and preserve social cohesiveness. Religious scholars such as Campbell (2004) have suggested that gossip can sometimes be motivated by a desire to safeguard and uphold the moral principles of the faith. Adults in the Christian community can endeavour to establish healthier and more rewarding interpersonal relationships by encouraging open and honest communication, encouraging accountability and forgiveness, and cultivating a culture of grace and understanding.

The term interpersonal relationship has been defined in a variety of ways by diverse authors, yet they all point to the same meaning. Devito (2004) defines interpersonal relationship as communication that occurs between two individuals who have created a relationship, and the people are related in some way. According to Berschield (1999), an interpersonal connection is a strong, deep, or close association and acquaintance between two or more persons that might range from brief to long-term. This connection could be motivated by love, inference, or solidarity. Burns (2017), the origins of interpersonal relationship studies may be traced back to the social science fields of sociology and psychology. Yingshan and Fangwei (2017) believe that relationships do not happen by chance, but rather as a result of social labour, because an interpersonal relationship is the social link between two or more people. Interpersonal relationships are an essential part of human life, impacting people's happiness, personal development, and societal integration.

Ogu et al., (2022) conducted research in Nigeria on the Influence of Interpersonal Relationships on Psychosocial Well-Being of Consecrated Catholic Women Religious in Ibadan, Nigeria. The purpose of the study was to look at the impact of interpersonal connections on the psychosocial well-being of Consecrated Catholic Religious Women in the Ibadan Archdiocese of Nigeria. An individual's psychosocial well-being is critical for improving interpersonal interactions. Those who are psychosocially stable are physically, psychologically, professionally, culturally, and spiritually strong.

Gossip is a behaviour that may be found in many cultures and societies, including religious communities. While gossip is frequently seen as harmless or insignificant, its consequences can be far-reaching, especially in close-knit societies like adult Christians. Interpersonal relationships are important in the lives of Christians because they serve as the foundation for their faith-based communities. Gossip has been demonstrated to have certain psychological effects in social psychology research. People who have been the target of gossip have been demonstrated to experience sadness, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, and eating disorders, according to Beersma and Van Kleef (2012). Furthermore, it is never simply the individual who is targeted who suffers. Investigating

the influence of gossip on these connections becomes critical for uncovering latent sources of conflict, division, and loss of trust among the participant of St. Matthew's Parish Felele and St. Theresa's Parish Ganaja. Gossip is a global phenomenon that exists in all cultures and society.

Campbell (2014) investigated how church gossip might damage one's faith and/or service in the Christian church through study on church gossip in Canada. The study looked into the hazards and benefits of gossip in the Christian community across four provinces and seven denominations in Canada. The study discovered that one of the important markers of whether church gossip was supposed to be detrimental or beneficial was the intent of the individual giving the information.

St. Matthew Catholic Church Felele Lokoja, Kogi State, is located in the North central part of Nigeria. Her worshippers have lived in unity since the community started. However, it has been a thing of concern on how information have been handled and communicated from persons to persons which is causing seeming division among the people. There have been undocumented studies of gossip and its influence on the interpersonal relationship of the Parishioner. This informed the purpose of this study. Similar research was carried out at St. Theresa Catholic Church Ganaja, Lokoja Diocese, Nigeria.

Interpersonal relationship in the parishes seem to be a problem. Parishioners tend to believe that invalidated information among adult Christians have affected greatly the interpersonal relationship in St. Matthew's Catholic Church, Felele, and St. Theresa Catholic Church Ganaja, Lokoja Diocese. In St. Matthew's parish for example, Parishioners find it difficult to relate well because of underline issues that revolve around gossip. The Mass seems to be the only unifying factor that keep the people of God together, such that, after the mass it is nearly impossible to get adult Christians to agree on other issues as it concerns the life and growth of the people of God. Many of the reason of the unspoken conflict, through bi-directional communication is perceived to be tied to gossip.

Alleged issues of malice, enmity, division among the people of God as a result of misinformation, unverified information and wrong channels of communication, has also led to psychological issues. Psychological issues like depression, anxiety and suicidal tendency of people who have been the subject of gossip and are not able to integrate properly with fellow church members. It is perceived that some people spread rumours out of disrespect for personal space and boundaries; others spread rumours out of a desire for entertainment or a desire to pass the time. People may gossip to make their social connections stronger or to divert attention away from their personal issues or dissatisfaction; the need for approval and validation from others. People may engage in gossip as a means of gaining favour, being noticed, or fitting in with a particular social group. Therefore, this study investigated the levels of interpersonal relationship among adult Christians in both parishes.

Previous studies by Ogu et al. (2022) studied the Influence of Interpersonal Relationship on Psychosocial Well-Being of Consecrated Catholic Women Religious in Ibadan, Nigeria, but did not focus on the levels of interpersonal relationship among parishioners. This presents a knowledge gap, which the present study, addressed by investigating the levels of Interpersonal Relationship and Gossip among adult Christians of St. Matthew's Catholic Church Felele, and St. Theresa Catholic Church Ganaja, Lokoja Diocese, Nigeria.

### ***1.3 Purpose of the study***

To investigate the level of interpersonal relationship among adult Christians in St. Matthew's Catholic Church Felele, and St. Theresa's Catholic Church Ganaja, Lokoja Diocese, Nigeria.

### ***1.4 Theoretical framework***

Robin Dunbar's Gossip Theory guided this study. Robin Dunbar, a British anthropologist and evolutionary psychologist, proposed Dunbar's Gossip Theory (2004). According to Dunbar's hypothesis, gossip is essential in human social interactions and acts as a tool for preserving social links and managing relationships within a society. This research applied Dunbar's theory to the unique setting of adult Christians and their interpersonal relationships within the church community. The research also looked into the potential good and negative effects of gossip in this religious context. This study adds to our understanding of the role of gossip in interpersonal relationships among adult Christians by utilising Dunbar's theory to offer light on how gossip functions within this particular social and religious community.

This study aimed to increase awareness and stimulate meaningful debates about the implications of gossiping within faith-based communities by identifying the influence of gossip on adult Christian interpersonal relationships. The outcomes of this study, we hope, will encourage proactive actions to foster healthy, supportive, and inclusive Christian communities. Finally, cultivating strong connections based on trust and respect can contribute to the Christian community's general well-being and togetherness.

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## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Interpersonal relationships are an essential part of human life, impacting people's happiness, personal development, and societal integration. These relationships are especially important for Christians because of their spiritual beliefs and the emphasis on community in Christianity. A substantial corpus of research emphasises the critical function of religious groups in fostering interpersonal relationships among adult Christians. Church attendance and involvement, according to Rice and Rivers (2019), were positively associated with greater interpersonal interactions inside congregations, generating a sense of belonging and emotional support. Okoroafor and Nsereka (2021), who emphasised that church involvement frequently leads to the establishment of close-knit social networks that transcend beyond religious activities, corroborated this finding.

Herbert and Meijering (2015) collected data from 16 in-depth interviews with older individuals living in sheltered accommodation in a small town in the northern Netherlands for their study on the effects of interpersonal relationships on well-being. The social learning theory was applied in the study. Among their interpersonal ties, their participants had experienced contact with their children as an essential core aspect of existence. They did, however, find their contacts with other residents to be fairly superficial. As a result, in their experience, relating to their children provided emotional support and was helpful in playing critical roles in their well-being. They also stated that the social and physical activities planned by the residential care facility allowed them to stay physically and mentally fit. Furthermore, the survey found that the care they received from housekeepers and carers was another important aspect of interpersonal interactions that aided their well-being.

Amukugo et al., (2020) conducted a study in Namibia on the experiences of poor interpersonal interactions at the Ministry of Health and Social Services about quality improvement and quality assurance. The goals of this qualitative study include quality improvement and quality assurance in healthcare settings, which rely heavily on interpersonal interactions that allow for successful communication and understanding amongst persons. The findings revealed negative attitudes towards patients by health professionals, as well as inadequate communication among health professionals, a lack of motivation and teamwork, and resistance to change. It was determined that the majority of issues at MoHSS health care facilities are the result of a lack of good interpersonal relationships, either between patients and health professionals or between health professionals and management.

Ogu et al. (2022) conducted research in Nigeria on the impact of interpersonal relationship on the psychosocial well-being of Consecrated Catholic Religious Women in the Ibadan Archdiocese. The research used a descriptive quantitative design. The study had 86 participants and employed a simple random sampling procedure with Stovin's formula. The sample included 61 fully professed sisters and 25 temporary professed sisters from 16 congregations. The study found that an individual's psychosocial well-being is critical for improving interpersonal interactions. Those who are psychosocially stable are physically, psychologically, professionally, culturally, and spiritually strong.

The reviewed literature on interpersonal relationships did not investigate the levels of interpersonal relationships, a gap, which the current study filled by investigating the levels of interpersonal relationships among adult in St. Matthew's Catholic Church Felele and St. Theresa Catholic Church Ganaja in the Lokoja Diocese of Nigeria.

### 3. Methodology

This study used descriptive research design. According to Creswell (2014), Descriptive research is a research method used to determine the characteristics of a population or particular phenomenon. The objectives was tested with a questionnaire. This study employed quantitative data collection and analyses procedures. The quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23. The targeted population in this study comprised faithful from two parishes within Lokoja town. According to the annual Diocesan statistics of 2023, the population of the parishes are 350 and 770, excluding children, giving a total of 1,120. The study included both males and females from 18 years to 70years. This was because people between ages 18 to 70 were assumed to have full understanding of the concept of gossip and interpersonal relationship.

The research questionnaire comprised of 32 questions. The questionnaire constituted of closed-ended questions, and was administered to the participant of St. Matthew's Catholic Parish Felele, and St. Theresa Catholic Parish Ganaja, Lokoja Diocese. The questionnaire consisted two sections, A to B. The first section A, addressed the respondents' demographic information. The second section B, addressed the levels of interpersonal relationship in St. Matthew and St. Theresa Parishes. The research systematically followed the recommended data collection procedures. The researcher's authorization letter was obtained from the Psycho-Spiritual Institute of Lux-Terra Leadership Foundation Abuja: An Affiliate of Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Nairobi. This letter was obtained a week before the data collection exercise. The letter was presented to the Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Lokoja, where the Parish under study is located. The research also obtained the permission of the Parish Priests of St. Matthew's Parish Felele and St. Theresa Parish, Ganaja. Upon being granted permission to carry out data collection, the researcher prepared data collection exercise in a week time.

The researcher adequately communicated with the research assistant, who helped to organize a meeting with the respondents and made introduction about the research. This was done to assure the respondents of the confidentiality of any information they will provide and requested them not to write their names as they responded. Then the number of those to participate were by simple random sampling. The questionnaire that was distributed contained close-ended questions and they took on the average between 10 to 15 minutes to complete.

### 4. Results and Discussion

Callaghan (2006) developed the Functional Idiographic Assessment Template-Questionnaire (FIAT-Q) to aid in improving the efficiency of the assessment process by attempting to obtain a standardised set of data directly from clients. It makes it possible to track issues consistently and enhance interpersonal performance in all of its functional domains.

**Table 1: Levels of Interpersonal Relationship among Participants**

Rating	Frequency	Percent
Very High	3	1.4
High	41	19.4

Moderate	152	72.0
Low	15	7.1
Total	211	100.0

The distribution of responses in this study, which investigate the degree of interpersonal relationships among participants in St. Theresa's Parish Ganaja, Lokoja, and St. Matthew's Parish Felele, reveals varied degrees of interpersonal relationship intensity. According to the data, 7.1% of participant reported having low interpersonal relationships, 72% reported having moderate relationships, 19% reported having high relationships, and 1.4% reported having very high relationships.

This study showed that 72% of participants reported having a moderate level of interpersonal relationships; it is likely that a sizable portion of participants have relationships that are defined by a harmonious blend of intimacy and autonomy. This result is not consistent with studies showing that the majority of interpersonal relationships should be in the high range among Christians and not moderate. Rice and Rivers (2019) whose study associated high level of interpersonal relationship inside congregations, generating a sense of belonging and emotional support and increasing church attendance and involvement. Okoroafor and Nsereka (2021), lends credence to high level of interpersonal relationship among Christians, the authors emphasised that church involvement frequently leads to the establishment of close-knit social networks that transcend beyond religious activities. Therefore, the moderate interpersonal relationship reported by the respondents might have been due to potential challenges or barriers to creating high relationships within the Parish. Relationship intensity may be decreased in certain persons for reasons such as gossip, social isolation, interpersonal conflicts, or communication issues.

The existence of participants who reported a high (19%) and very high (1.4%) degree of interpersonal interaction however, highlights some people's ability to develop meaningful, profound connections that are marked by closeness, trust, and support for one another. These results imply 19% of the parishioners has strong social ties, which may support wellbeing and interpersonal interaction satisfaction.

The percentage of participants who reported having few interpersonal relationships (7.1%) raises concerns regarding possible difficulties or obstacles to forming deep bonds within the Parish. Some people may have lower degrees of relationship intensity due to things like interpersonal disputes, gossip, social isolation, or communication problems. Individuals who report having low interpersonal interactions may feel alone, cut off from others, or face interpersonal conflict in their religious group. Low interpersonal relationships can be a sign of unresolved emotional traumas, communication problems, or a lack of trust and closeness from a psycho-spiritual standpoint.

The majority of individuals who reported having moderate interpersonal relationships point to a foundation of involvement and social connectedness within the church community. From a psycho-spiritual perspective, people in moderate interpersonal relationships tend to retain meaningful connections while still honouring their own limits. This is indicative of a balance between autonomy and closeness. In order to improve overall wellbeing and foster stronger interpersonal relationships, therapeutic methods may emphasise developing empathy, encouraging authentic self-expression, and increasing communication skills.

In the faith community, participants who report high and very high degrees of interpersonal relationship may feel more supported, respected, and a greater sense of belonging. From a Psycho-Spiritual perspective, these people might interact with others with traits like empathy, compassion, and altruism, which would promote a cooperative and caring culture in the society. With this subgroup, therapeutic work may concentrate on upholding sound boundaries, controlling expectations, and utilising interpersonal strengths to assist others and make a constructive contribution to the community.

The results highlights the significance of addressing interpersonal relationship among the participants in the context of psycho-spiritual therapy. Therapists can help individuals develop healthier relationship patterns, empathy and understanding, and a sense of connection, belonging, and shared purpose within the faith community by delving into the psychological, relational, and spiritual aspects of interpersonal dynamics. Psycho-spiritual therapy also supports personal development and spiritual flourishing by assisting patients in connecting with their spiritual resources, strengthening their sense of interconnectedness with the divine and others, and directing their behaviour in accordance with their religious principles.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendation

This section examined the main findings and conclusion of the study in relation to the theory and practice of gossip and interpersonal relationship. The quality of interpersonal relationships tends to be moderate because of the prevalence of gossiping. This implies that people who gossip affect the level of the respondent interpersonal relationship.

The researcher encountered some challenges in the course of carrying out this study. A major challenge in this research was the few studies done on the relationship between Gossip and interpersonal relationship. This area of research although not new, most of the work to date, are only definitional in nature. Due to the distance from the study area, the research engaged in sending the questionnaire to the participants by email and WhatsApp, using the Google form. The research followed up through calls and text messages to make sure that the participants filled out and send back the questionnaires. However, the data obtained from the online questionnaires were sufficient for generalization of the research findings.

Gossip is a prevalent phenomenon in various social contexts, including religious communities. Understanding the dynamics of gossip and its impact on interpersonal relationships among Christian is crucial for promoting healthy social interactions within religious communities. There is an urgent need for

more research into the impact of gossip on adult Christians' interpersonal relationships, with a focus on culture, spirituality, and psychology. We need to investigate Christians' habits, beliefs, and attitudes to see how gossip influences individuals personally and, by implication, their faith.

The Parish priest should implementing clear communication channels within religious communities can help minimize the spread of gossip. Encourage open dialogue and provide platforms for individuals to address concerns or conflicts directly rather than resorting to gossip.

The bishop in connection with the Parish priest can offer educational workshops or seminars that highlight the detrimental effects of gossip on interpersonal relationships and community cohesion. Provide resources and strategies for addressing conflicts constructively and promoting a culture of respect and confidentiality. Foster a culture of accountability and support within religious communities by encouraging individuals to hold themselves and others accountable for their words and actions. Provide avenues for seeking support and guidance when dealing with gossip-related conflicts.

The Parish Priest can establish counselling and emotional support services within religious communities to assist individuals who have experienced trauma or relational strain due to gossip. Provide access to trained counsellors or pastoral care providers who can offer guidance and support in navigating interpersonal challenges. Emphasize the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation in resolving conflicts and healing relational wounds caused by gossip. Encourage individuals to practice forgiveness and seek reconciliation with those affected by gossip, fostering a culture of grace and restoration within the community.

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