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Exploring Coping Mechanisms, Marital Resilience, and Religion in Everyday Life Among Spouses of Nigerian Military Personnel in The Face of Infidelity

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Abstract

Infidelity remains a major challenge to marital stability among military families, particularly in contexts characterized by prolonged deployments and frequent separations. Despite extensive research on military marriages, limited attention has been paid to how religion in everyday life shapes marital resilience among Nigerian military spouses. This study explores coping mechanisms and resilience strategies by examining the role of everyday religious practices in sustaining marital relationships following infidelity. Employing a qualitative-descriptive approach, the research draws on interviews with spouses of Nigerian military personnel and analyzes their experiences through cultural and religious perspectives. The results indicate that everyday religious practices; including prayer, scriptural recitation, communal worship, consultation with religious leaders, and the internalization of values such as patience and forgiveness; constitute the primary coping mechanisms for managing emotional distress. Participants also relied on extended family networks, peer support within military communities, and women's associations to strengthen emotional well-being. Marital resilience was further reinforced through forgiveness, adaptive household routines, prioritizing children's welfare, and the reproduction of religious values in everyday domestic life. The study demonstrates that resilience among Nigerian military families is shaped not only by individual agency and communal support but also by the embodiment of religious beliefs in daily life. These findings contribute to scholarship on everyday religion, family resilience, and the anthropology

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of religion while highlighting the importance of culturally sensitive counseling and faith-based interventions for strengthening the well-being of military families.

Perselingkuhan merupakan salah satu tantangan utama terhadap stabilitas perkawinan dalam keluarga militer, terutama dalam situasi yang ditandai oleh penugasan berkepanjangan dan perpisahan dalam waktu yang lama. Meskipun penelitian mengenai perkawinan militer telah berkembang cukup luas, perhatian terhadap bagaimana agama dalam kehidupan sehari-hari (religion in everyday life) membentuk resiliensi perkawinan pada pasangan personel militer Nigeria masih sangat terbatas. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi mekanisme koping dan strategi resiliensi dengan mengkaji peran praktik-praktik keagamaan sehari-hari dalam mempertahankan hubungan perkawinan setelah terjadinya perselingkuhan. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif-deskriptif, penelitian ini didasarkan pada wawancara dengan pasangan personel militer Nigeria serta dianalisis melalui perspektif budaya dan keagamaan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa praktik keagamaan sehari-hari; seperti doa, pembacaan kitab suci, ibadah berjamaah, konsultasi dengan pemimpin agama, serta internalisasi nilai-nilai kesabaran dan pemaafan; menjadi mekanisme koping utama dalam mengatasi tekanan emosional. Para partisipan juga mengandalkan dukungan dari keluarga besar, jaringan sesama pasangan di lingkungan militer, dan kelompok-kelompok perempuan untuk memperkuat kesejahteraan psikologis mereka. Resiliensi perkawinan semakin diperkuat melalui pemaafan, pembentukan rutinitas rumah tangga yang adaptif, pemberian prioritas pada kesejahteraan anak, serta reproduksi nilai-nilai keagamaan dalam kehidupan domestik sehari-hari. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa resiliensi keluarga militer di Nigeria tidak hanya dibentuk oleh kapasitas individu dan dukungan komunitas, tetapi juga oleh penghayatan nilai dan praktik keagamaan yang diwujudkan secara berkelanjutan dalam kehidupan sehari-hari. Temuan ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan kajian tentang agama dalam kehidupan sehari-hari (everyday religion), resiliensi keluarga, dan antropologi agama, sekaligus menegaskan pentingnya layanan konseling yang sensitif terhadap budaya serta intervensi berbasis agama untuk memperkuat kesejahteraan keluarga militer.

Keywords: *Infidelity, Religion in Everyday Life, Military Families, Coping Mechanisms, Marital Resilience, Nigerian Context.*

Introduction

Infidelity within military families cannot be understood monolithically merely as a form of moral violation or interpersonal failure; rather, it requires a multidimensional analysis that considers the complex interaction between institutional, social, psychological, cultural, and religious factors(Atapour et al., 2021; Cox et al., 2025; Davis, 2026; Fekoor et al., 2024).In many studies on military families, infidelity is frequently associated with structural characteristics of military life such as prolonged deployment, high geographical mobility, emotional separation between spouses, militarized masculinity, psychological stress caused by armed conflict, and rigid institutional hierarchies(Maynard & Blalock, 1977; Riviere et al., 2012) Such perspectives tend to portray the military institution as a space that indirectly produces vulnerability to marital instability. However, these approaches are often excessively centered on individual experiences and fail to adequately

examine how cultural values, religion, and communal solidarity shape the ways couples interpret and respond to marital betrayal(Elmorshidy, 2025; Fincham et al., 2007; Karney & Bradbury, 2005; Penn et al., 1997)herefore, it is essential to explore how experiences of infidelity within military families are constructed through spiritual and religious dimensions, particularly in non-Western societies such as Nigeria, where collectivist traditions, strong religiosity, and deep attachment to family values continue to shape social life. In this context, responses to infidelity frequently differ from Western individualistic paradigms that prioritize relationship dissolution, personal autonomy, and individual psychological recovery.

In Nigerian society, marriage is not merely understood as a private relationship between two individuals, but also as a moral and social institution involving extended families, religious communities, and collective honor(Kolade-Faseyi & Ayenakin, 2021; Ntoimo & Akokuwebe, 2014; Ononokpono et al., 2025; Oseghale, 2025). Consequently, when infidelity occurs, the resolution process extends beyond emotional negotiation and involves religious values, cultural norms, and mechanisms of communal solidarity. At this point, the framework of *religion in everyday life* becomes particularly relevant. Religion in everyday life is not confined to formal rituals or theological doctrines; rather, it is embodied through daily domestic practices such as collective prayer, scriptural recitation, consultation with religious leaders, the use of religious language in managing marital conflict, and the internalization of values such as patience, forgiveness, and sacrifice in sustaining family relationships. Religion, therefore, functions not only as a source of moral legitimacy but also as a coping mechanism and resilience strategy that enables military spouses to navigate the destructive consequences of infidelity through moral negotiation, collective beliefs, and socio-religious support systems (Fauziah et al., 2024; Yulianty et al., 2024).

Academic debates concerning the role of religion in responding to infidelity also reveal significant complexity. Some feminist scholars argue that religious narratives emphasizing patience, forgiveness, and marital endurance often reproduce women's subordination by normalizing domestic suffering. From this perspective, women who become victims of infidelity are socially encouraged to remain in the marriage for the sake of preserving the family institution, even at the expense of their own emotional and psychological well-being. Conversely, perspectives emerging from the anthropology of religion and religious psychology suggest that spiritual practices may function as sources of personal agency and emotional strength that help individuals cope with trauma. In certain contexts, forgiveness does not necessarily signify passive submission, but rather represents a form of moral negotiation and adaptive strategy aimed at preserving social stability, children's welfare, and familial identity. Therefore, the experiences of women affected by infidelity must be understood contextually, particularly in deeply

religious societies such as Nigeria, where patience and endurance are regarded as integral components of family morality.

Building upon these debates, this study seeks to further analyze the dynamics of resilience within military families confronting infidelity by examining how adaptive family resilience frameworks are constructed through collective beliefs, everyday religious practices, and spiritually grounded problem-solving strategies (Is et al., 2025). In this study, resilience is understood not merely as an individual's psychological capacity to withstand emotional distress, but also as a social and spiritual process that enables couples to maintain domestic stability amid crisis. This perspective is significant because previous studies have largely been dominated by individual psychological approaches emphasizing therapy, emotional regulation, and interpersonal communication, while the dimensions of lived religion and communal support have received relatively limited scholarly attention.

This study adopts a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of subjective experiences, particularly the resilience of wives who become victims of their husbands' infidelity within the Nigerian military environment (Nugraha & Rahmi, 2021). A qualitative methodology is considered appropriate because it captures complex emotional, spiritual, and social experiences that cannot be adequately reduced to statistical data alone. The research will focus on narrative and thematic analyses of in-depth interviews to identify patterns of adaptation, coping mechanisms, and resilience resources utilized by military spouses experiencing infidelity, especially those associated with spiritual and communal support systems (Jojonikus & Wahyuni, 2024; Varghese, 2024). Specifically, this study explores how resilience, understood as the capacity to recover from psychological distress and negative emotions caused by infidelity, is influenced by cultural and religious contexts among women who repeatedly experience marital betrayal (Putri & Aulia, 2021a, 2021b).

Previous studies demonstrate that forgiveness is closely associated with psychological resilience among victims of infidelity. Forgiveness is often understood as a mechanism that allows individuals to free themselves from emotional burdens, anger, and trauma caused by betrayal, while simultaneously functioning as an adaptive coping strategy that sustains subjective well-being (Deviana, 2022; Islamiati, 2012). Other studies indicate that forgiveness positively correlates with psychological resilience among wives who experience infidelity and may enhance their ability to adapt to domestic stressors (Deli & Amaliyah, 2025; Ririhena & Sapulette, 2021). Within certain religious traditions, such as Catholicism, forgiving infidelity is interpreted as a spiritual pathway for preserving the sanctity of marriage despite the traumatic experiences endured by victims (Pradipta & Shanti, 2023). These findings suggest that forgiveness possesses not only psychological dimensions but also profound religious and moral significance.

Furthermore, several studies reveal that many wives who experience infidelity exhibit relatively high levels of psychological resilience, reflected in their ability to recover, adapt, and reconstruct emotional stability following betrayal (Haziqatuzikra et al., 2025). Nevertheless, quantitative studies often fail to explain the deeper emotional and spiritual processes underlying such resilience. Therefore, qualitative case studies are necessary to uncover the coping strategies, forgiveness processes, and complex religious negotiations experienced by wives who become victims of infidelity (Ginanjar, 2009; Savitri, 2017). Some scholars also emphasize that forgiveness processes are strongly influenced by cultural and religious factors shaping how individuals interpret suffering, loyalty, and family responsibility (Steven & Sukmaningrum, 2020). In the Indonesian context, for instance, resilience among women experiencing infidelity and domestic violence is influenced by social support, access to resources, and individual autonomy (Miarsih et al., 2024). These findings indicate that forgiveness is not merely an individual act, but a complex socio-spiritual process shaped by social support networks, cultural norms, and religious beliefs (Rumondor & Wahyuni, 2026; Sari, 2012).

Despite the growing body of scholarship on resilience among victims of infidelity, there remains a significant lack of studies specifically examining the experiences of wives of Nigerian military personnel, particularly through the lens of *religion in everyday life*. Most previous studies continue to focus on Western contexts or civilian populations, leaving unexplored the ways everyday religious practices shape coping mechanisms and marital resilience within African military families characterized by strong religiosity and collectivist social structures. Therefore, this study aims to deepen scholarly understanding of how cultural values, religion, communal solidarity, and everyday spiritual practices interact in shaping forgiveness processes and resilience among wives of Nigerian military personnel who experience infidelity. In doing so, the study seeks to contribute theoretically to the fields of family resilience, lived religion, and the anthropology of religion, while also offering a contextualized perspective on women's experiences in navigating marital crises within military environments.

Method

This study employs a qualitative research design with a descriptive-interpretive approach to explore coping mechanisms, forgiveness processes, and marital resilience among spouses of Nigerian military personnel experiencing infidelity(Atoki & Gautam, 2024; Qodriyati et al., 2025). The qualitative approach was selected because the study seeks to understand subjective experiences, emotional negotiations, and everyday religious practices that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measurement(Agius, 2013; Allan, 2020; Ambert et al., 1995). Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with 20 wives of active and retired Nigerian military personnel who had experienced marital

infidelity and chose to maintain their marriages. Participants were selected using purposive and snowball sampling techniques to ensure the inclusion of informants with direct and relevant experiences. To strengthen contextual understanding, the study also incorporated supporting data from religious counseling materials, community narratives within military barracks, family-related policy documents, and previous scholarly studies on military families, forgiveness, and religion in everyday life. Fieldwork was conducted between January and August 2025 in several military residential areas in Port Harcourt, Abuja, and Kaduna, selected due to their significant concentration of military communities and religious support networks.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic and narrative analysis techniques. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded systematically through stages of open coding, axial coding, and thematic categorization to identify recurring patterns related to coping strategies, spiritual resilience, communal support, and forgiveness processes. The analysis particularly focused on how everyday religious practices—such as prayer, scriptural recitation, consultation with religious leaders, and participation in faith-based communal activities—were embodied within domestic life as mechanisms for managing emotional distress and sustaining marital relationships. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, the study employed triangulation through cross-checking interview data with field observations, religious narratives, and relevant literature. Ethical considerations were maintained by ensuring participant anonymity, informed consent, and confidentiality throughout the research process, given the sensitive nature of infidelity and family-related experiences within military communities.

Result and Discussion

Understanding Marital Resilience through Everyday Religious Coping

Military marriages have long attracted scholarly attention because they are uniquely characterized by prolonged separation, occupational stress, repeated deployment, and frequent relocation, all of which increase vulnerability to marital dissatisfaction and infidelity (Karney & Crown, 2007). Previous studies conducted primarily in North America and Europe demonstrate that prolonged deployment often weakens marital communication, intensifies emotional loneliness, and increases the psychological burden experienced by spouses remaining at home (Allen et al., 2005; Drummet et al., 2003). Within these contexts, coping mechanisms commonly include maintaining regular communication, utilizing psychological counseling, participating in military family assistance programs, and strengthening peer support networks (Knobloch & Theiss, 2012). Such findings suggest that resilience among military families is largely understood as the capacity to adapt positively despite relational disruption, with institutional support and emotional regulation serving as the primary protective factors (Bowen & Martin, 2011).

The present findings, however, indicate that the experiences of Nigerian military spouses extend beyond these structural explanations. Participants consistently described infidelity not merely as an interpersonal betrayal but as an event that threatened family identity, religious commitment, and social reputation. Unlike studies conducted in Western military settings that frequently emphasize professional counseling and formal support services, participants in this study relied predominantly on religious practices, extended family mediation, and communal relationships to navigate emotional distress. Daily prayer, Qur'anic recitation, Bible reading, fasting, and participation in mosque or church activities emerged as routine practices that enabled spouses to regulate their emotions while maintaining hope for marital restoration. These findings illustrate that religion functions not only as a spiritual belief system but also as an everyday coping resource embedded within ordinary family life.

The prominence of religious coping reflects the broader Nigerian sociocultural context in which marriage is understood as both a sacred covenant and a communal institution. Nigerian society generally values marital endurance, family honor, and collective responsibility over individual fulfillment (Mbiti, 1991; Isiugo-Abanihe, 1998). Consequently, participants rarely viewed divorce as an immediate response to infidelity. Instead, they described prolonged processes of negotiation involving parents, elders, religious leaders, and extended family members who encouraged reconciliation whenever possible. This finding supports previous African family studies demonstrating that communal structures frequently mediate marital conflict and reinforce family continuity rather than separation (Adegoke, 2010; Nwoye, 2006). Rather than functioning as passive social pressure, these communal interventions often provided emotional reassurance, practical advice, and opportunities for rebuilding trust.

Religious teachings further shaped participants' interpretations of infidelity. Muslim participants frequently referred to concepts such as *sabr* (patience), *tawakkul* (trust in God), repentance, and the prohibition of *zina*, whereas Christian participants interpreted marital fidelity through covenantal commitments, forgiveness, and sacrificial love. Although Islamic and Christian ethical traditions differ in their theological foundations, both encouraged forgiveness when accompanied by genuine behavioral change and sincere repentance. Consequently, prayer, fasting, scriptural reflection, and faith-based counseling became important mechanisms through which participants reconstructed meaning after betrayal. These findings resonate with Pargament's (2007) argument that religious coping enables individuals to transform traumatic experiences into spiritually meaningful narratives, thereby reducing emotional distress while strengthening psychological resilience.

Participants also demonstrated considerable variation in coping strategies depending upon their individual circumstances. Many women adopted emotion-

focused coping by concentrating on childcare responsibilities, regulating emotional responses, and accepting temporary uncertainty, whereas several male participants described suppressing emotional expression because prevailing gender norms associated vulnerability with weakness. Others pursued problem-focused coping through direct communication with their spouses, family mediation, financial restructuring, or participation in marriage counseling. This combination of emotional regulation and practical problem-solving closely corresponds with Stress and Coping Theory proposed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), which argues that individuals simultaneously employ emotion-focused and problem-focused strategies when confronting major life stressors. Within the Nigerian military context, however, emotion-focused coping appeared more dominant because cultural expectations emphasized patience, family preservation, and religious endurance before confrontation or separation.

The findings further demonstrate that marital resilience should not be understood as the absence of conflict or the immediate restoration of trust. Rather, resilience emerged gradually through continuous negotiation, observable behavioral change, mutual accountability, and sustained emotional commitment. Participants repeatedly distinguished forgiveness from trust, explaining that forgiveness represented an internal spiritual decision, whereas trust required consistent behavioral evidence over an extended period. Such findings reinforce contemporary resilience theory, which conceptualizes resilience as a dynamic developmental process rather than an inherent personal characteristic (Masten, 2001; Walsh, 2016). Consistent with Ungar's (2011) ecological perspective, resilience among Nigerian military spouses was constructed through interactions between personal beliefs, family relationships, religious communities, and broader cultural expectations rather than through individual psychological strength alone.

An important contribution of this study lies in demonstrating how religion mediates the relationship between coping mechanisms and marital resilience. Instead of operating independently, psychological coping strategies and religious practices mutually reinforced one another through an ongoing process of meaning-making. Emotional distress resulting from infidelity encouraged participants to seek religious guidance, while religious beliefs subsequently shaped emotional regulation, forgiveness, and decisions regarding marital continuity. Extended family members and faith communities further strengthened this process by providing social legitimacy for reconciliation and practical support during periods of military deployment. The resulting resilience therefore emerged from the integration of psychological adaptation, spiritual meaning-making, and communal solidarity rather than from any single coping strategy.

These findings also address a significant empirical gap within the literature on military families. Existing Nigerian studies have primarily examined occupational stress, deployment-related challenges, or general marital instability among military

personnel (Adebayo, 2019; Okonkwo & Eze, 2020), with relatively little attention devoted specifically to spouses' experiences of infidelity. By foregrounding the voices of military spouses themselves, this study demonstrates that responses to marital betrayal are profoundly shaped by the intersection of military life, religious ethics, and Nigerian communal culture. The findings therefore extend international scholarship by illustrating that coping and resilience cannot be adequately explained through psychological variables alone but must also incorporate culturally specific understandings of marriage, spirituality, and collective social responsibility.

Overall, this study proposes that coping, religion in everyday life, and marital resilience constitute an integrated adaptive process. Emotional distress caused by infidelity initiates both psychological and spiritual coping strategies; these strategies generate new interpretations of suffering through religious meaning-making; family and community support reinforce these interpretations; and, ultimately, spouses reconstruct trust and sustain marital resilience despite continuing relational challenges. This integrated perspective provides a more culturally grounded understanding of marital resilience among Nigerian military families and contributes to the broader literature on family resilience by demonstrating the inseparable relationship between psychological adaptation, religious practice, and communal support within non-Western military contexts.

Navigating Marital Infidelity: Coping, Everyday Religion, and Marital Resilience among Nigerian Military Spouses

A total of 30 spouses of Nigerian military personnel participated in this study, comprising 22 women (73.3%) and 8 men (26.7%). Participants were recruited from three military barracks in Abuja, Kaduna, and Lagos through purposive sampling. Their ages ranged from 27 to 56 years, with marriage durations varying between 4 and 29 years. Most participants had experienced repeated military deployments of their spouses, with 40% reporting frequent deployments exceeding six months per year. Such prolonged separations created conditions that participants associated with emotional distance, communication breakdown, and heightened vulnerability to marital infidelity.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Characteristics	Category	n	%
Gender	Female	22	73.3
	Male	8	26.7
Religion	Christianity	18	60.0
	Islam	12	40.0
Marriage Duration	1–10 years	9	30.0
	11–20 years	14	46.7
	>20 years	7	23.3
Military Deployment	Moderate	18	60.0
	High	12	40.0

The thematic analysis generated three interrelated themes that describe how military spouses navigate the consequences of marital infidelity: coping mechanisms, religion in everyday life, and marital resilience. Rather than emerging as separate processes, these themes formed a continuous trajectory through which participants managed emotional distress, reconstructed meaning, and sustained family relationships despite experiences of betrayal.

Immediately following the discovery or suspicion of infidelity, participants described intense emotional reactions characterized by anger, disappointment, shame, anxiety, loneliness, and uncertainty. Female participants generally reported stronger emotional expressions, whereas male participants tended to suppress their emotions due to prevailing cultural expectations regarding masculinity. One participant explained:

> "When I heard the rumours, I stopped sleeping properly. Every phone call made me anxious because I imagined the worst." (P08)
>
> Another participant reflected:
>
> "As a man, people expect you to hide your emotions. You suffer quietly because talking about betrayal makes you look weak." (P23)

Although participants experienced similar emotional pain, they adopted different coping strategies. Some redirected their attention toward childcare responsibilities, while others increased their involvement in small businesses or community activities to reduce psychological distress. Emotional avoidance, selective disclosure to trusted relatives, and maintaining daily routines also emerged as adaptive responses. These strategies enabled participants to regain a sense of control without immediately dissolving their marriages.

Religion emerged as the dominant resource underpinning these coping strategies. Almost all participants described religious practices as integral components of their everyday lives rather than emergency responses during periods of crisis. Daily prayer, Qur'anic recitation, Bible reading, fasting, attendance at religious services, and consultations with religious leaders provided emotional stability and helped participants reinterpret infidelity within broader theological frameworks.

Table 2. Religious and Coping Practices Reported by Participants

Practice	Participants Mentioning	Percentage
Daily prayer	27	90.0
Qur'an/Bible reading	24	80.0
Child-focused activities	21	70.0
Economic activities	18	60.0
Religious counselling	17	56.7
Avoiding confrontation	15	50.0
Family support	13	43.3
Fasting	11	36.7

Professional counselling	5	16.7

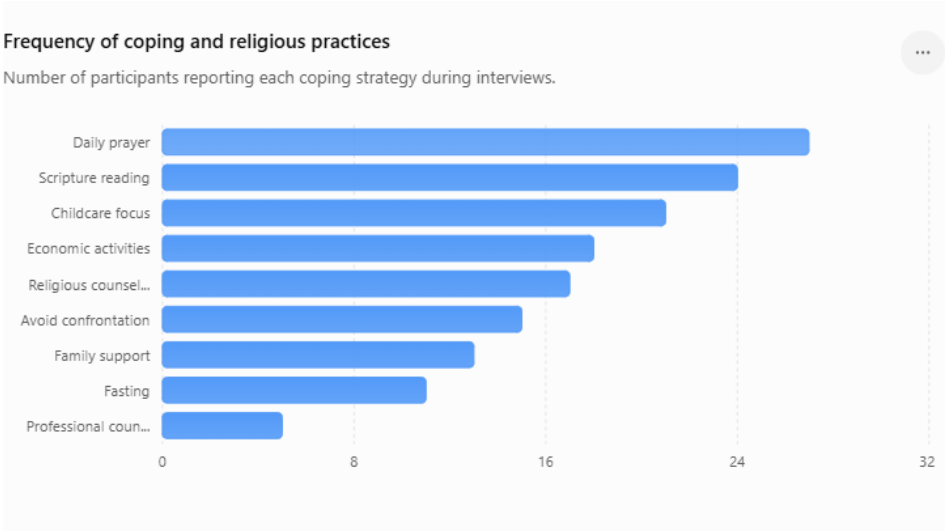


Figure 1. Frequency of Coping and Religious Practices Reported by Spouses of Nigerian Military Personnel Following Experiences of Marital Infidelity

The relative frequency of these practices further illustrates the centrality of religion in participants' coping experiences. Participants consistently emphasized that religious practices did not eliminate emotional pain but enabled them to endure it with greater patience and hope. As one participant stated,

> "Prayer did not change my husband overnight, but it changed the way I carried the burden." (P11)
> Similarly, another participant explained,
> "Every evening I recite the Qur'an before sleeping. It reminds me that every trial has a purpose." (P19)

These narratives demonstrate that religion functioned as a mechanism of emotional regulation, moral interpretation, and psychological endurance. Rather than encouraging passive acceptance, participants described religious teachings as motivating self-reflection, forgiveness, and constructive communication within marriage. The findings further reveal that marital resilience developed gradually through repeated interpersonal negotiations rather than through immediate reconciliation. Participants distinguished forgiveness from restored trust, emphasizing that reconciliation required observable behavioural changes by the offending spouse. Increased communication, financial transparency, joint participation in religious activities, and mediation by family elders or religious leaders were repeatedly identified as indicators of recovering marital stability.

Table 3. Indicators of Marital Resilience

Indicator	n	%
Improved communication	22	73.3
Mutual commitment	20	66.7

Shared religious activities	18	60.0
Family mediation	16	53.3
Financial transparency	14	46.7
Marriage counselling	9	30.0

One participant summarized this process by explaining,
"Forgiveness happened first, but trust returned slowly because his actions changed, not because he apologized." (P27)

Across interviews, extended families, women's religious associations, church fellowships, mosque communities, and military spouses' organizations also emerged as important social resources. These networks reduced feelings of isolation, normalized participants' experiences, and encouraged reconciliation while providing practical assistance during periods of deployment. Nevertheless, several participants acknowledged that fear of social stigma often discouraged them from seeking professional psychological counselling, making religious communities the primary source of emotional support.

Taken together, these findings indicate that coping mechanisms, religious practices, and marital resilience form a mutually reinforcing process embedded within everyday family life. Emotional distress resulting from infidelity initiated a search for coping resources, while religious beliefs provided a framework for interpreting suffering and sustaining hope. Social support from family and faith communities further strengthened participants' capacity to negotiate forgiveness, reconstruct trust, and maintain marital commitment. Consequently, resilience among spouses of Nigerian military personnel should not be understood as the absence of conflict or complete restoration of trust. Rather, it represents an ongoing process of emotional adaptation, spiritual meaning-making, interpersonal negotiation, and collective support that enables couples to preserve family stability despite the enduring challenges posed by military life and marital infidelity. Number of participants reporting each coping strategy during interviews.

From Betrayal to Resilience: Everyday Religious Coping among Nigerian Military Families

Coping with marital infidelity among spouses of Nigerian military personnel reflects a complex interaction between individual adaptation, religious beliefs, cultural expectations, family relationships, and institutional realities. Participants did not rely on a single coping strategy; instead, they combined spiritual practices, communal support, emotional regulation, and adaptive family routines to preserve marital relationships despite experiencing betrayal. This pattern suggests that resilience within Nigerian military families cannot be understood solely as an individual psychological capacity but as a socially and culturally embedded process

in which personal responses are continuously shaped by religious values, collective norms, and everyday family life.

One of the most prominent patterns emerging from participants' narratives is the central role of religion as an everyday resource for coping with infidelity. Prayer, fasting, Qur'anic recitation, Bible reading, and consultations with religious leaders were described as routine practices that provided emotional stability and moral direction. Rather than serving merely as emergency responses during periods of marital crisis, these religious activities formed part of participants' daily lives long before infidelity occurred. Consequently, religion functioned not only as a source of comfort but also as a framework for interpreting betrayal as a spiritual test requiring patience, repentance, forgiveness, and perseverance. This interpretation is consistent with Pargament's (2007) theory of religious coping, which argues that spirituality enables individuals to reconstruct the meaning of adversity. However, the present study extends this perspective by illustrating that, within Nigerian military families, religious coping is deeply integrated into everyday practices and therefore continuously reinforces marital endurance instead of being activated only during moments of psychological distress.

This religious orientation also distinguishes the Nigerian context from military family studies conducted in North America and Europe. Previous research has generally emphasized communication enhancement, professional counseling, institutional family support, and psychological intervention as the primary mechanisms for coping with deployment-related marital stress (Allen et al., 2005; Bowen & Martin, 2011; Knobloch & Theiss, 2012). Participants in this study acknowledged the importance of communication and counseling, yet these approaches were frequently mediated through religious institutions, military chaplaincy, pastors, imams, and faith communities. Emotional recovery was therefore inseparable from religious meaning-making, suggesting that the effectiveness of coping strategies is strongly influenced by the broader cultural and religious environment in which military families live.

Another important dimension concerns the role of extended families and community networks. Participants rarely described coping with infidelity as a private matter between husband and wife. Instead, parents, elders, relatives, women's associations, military spouses' groups, and religious communities frequently became involved in conflict mediation and emotional support. Such experiences reinforce previous African scholarship describing marriage as a communal institution rather than an exclusively individual relationship (Mbiti, 1991; Nwoye, 2006; Adegoke, 2010). At the same time, the interviews reveal that communal involvement extends beyond maintaining social norms. Family members and community networks provided practical assistance, emotional reassurance, childcare support, and moral legitimacy for reconciliation. These observations broaden existing interpretations of collectivist family systems by demonstrating

that communal structures simultaneously function as mechanisms of social control and sources of psychological resilience.

Participants likewise adopted various forms of emotional regulation to reduce the psychological burden associated with betrayal. Acceptance, forgiveness, emotional restraint, selective disclosure, and direct communication with spouses were frequently described as strategies for maintaining emotional balance while avoiding further conflict. Many women redirected their attention toward childcare responsibilities, household management, and income-generating activities, whereas male participants more often concealed emotional vulnerability because cultural expectations associated emotional expression with weakness. These patterns correspond with Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) distinction between emotion-focused and problem-focused coping. Nevertheless, the Nigerian military context illustrates that these strategies operate simultaneously rather than independently. Emotional regulation often preceded practical efforts such as family mediation, counseling, and renegotiation of marital expectations. Compared with studies conducted in Western societies, where problem-focused approaches frequently dominate discussions of marital recovery, participants in this study placed considerably greater emphasis on patience, endurance, and emotional restraint, reflecting cultural expectations that prioritize family preservation over individual emotional satisfaction.

Resilience also emerged as a gradual process of reconstructing relationships rather than simply recovering from emotional pain. Participants consistently distinguished forgiveness from trust, explaining that forgiving an unfaithful spouse represented a personal and spiritual decision, whereas rebuilding trust depended upon observable behavioral change, accountability, and sustained commitment over time. Such experiences support contemporary resilience theory, which conceptualizes resilience as an evolving process of adaptation rather than an inherent personal characteristic (Masten, 2001; Walsh, 2016). They also resonate with Ungar's (2011) ecological perspective, which emphasizes that resilience develops through interactions between individuals and their surrounding social environments. In the present context, resilience was strengthened not only by personal determination but also through the combined influence of religious beliefs, family relationships, communal expectations, and institutional support.

Children represented another important source of resilience throughout participants' narratives. Many spouses acknowledged remaining within their marriages primarily to protect their children's emotional well-being, educational opportunities, and social acceptance. This motivation reflects previous observations that Nigerian marriages are strongly oriented toward collective family welfare rather than individual fulfillment (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1998). However, the present study suggests that concern for children's futures functions as more than a cultural obligation. Parenthood provided participants with renewed purpose, allowing

emotional suffering to be reinterpreted as parental responsibility and encouraging long-term commitment to family stability. This perspective offers an important complement to international literature, which has generally emphasized marital satisfaction and individual adjustment as principal indicators of successful resilience.

Institutional support also played a meaningful, although comparatively limited, role in sustaining military families. Military chaplaincy, pastoral counseling, peer support groups, and informal networks among military spouses were widely regarded as valuable resources for emotional recovery and reconciliation. Nevertheless, participants repeatedly emphasized the absence of comprehensive family resilience programs specifically designed to address marital infidelity within Nigerian military institutions. Unlike military organizations in North America and Europe, where structured family support services are integrated into welfare systems (Segal & Segal, 2004), Nigerian military families continue to depend largely upon religious organizations, informal counseling, and extended family networks. This situation suggests that future institutional interventions should combine professional psychological services with culturally and religiously grounded approaches, recognizing that emotional recovery within Nigerian society is closely connected to faith communities and collective family structures.

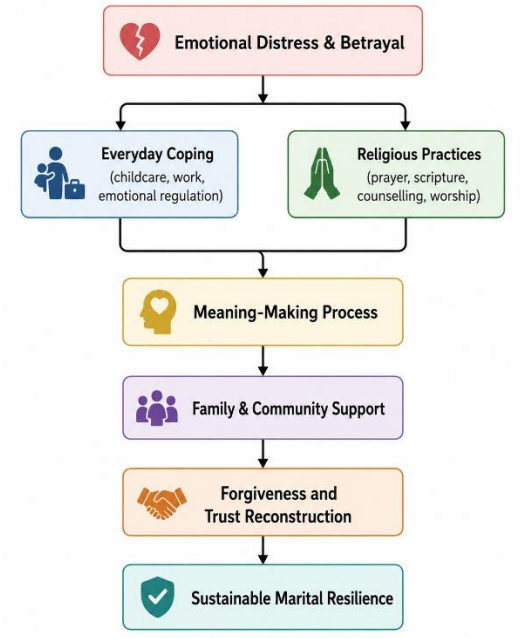


Figure 2. Conceptual Model of Coping, Everyday Religious Practices, and Marital Resilience among Nigerian Military Spouses Following Marital Infidelity

Taken together, these observations demonstrate that coping mechanisms, religious practices, community support, and marital resilience are not separate dimensions but mutually reinforcing components of a single adaptive process. Emotional distress resulting from infidelity initiates both psychological and spiritual responses; religious beliefs provide moral interpretations that transform suffering

into meaningful experience; family and community networks reinforce these interpretations through practical and emotional support; and adaptive routines gradually facilitate forgiveness, trust reconstruction, and marital continuity. This integrated perspective contributes to the broader literature on military families by demonstrating that resilience is shaped not only by psychological adaptation but also by the interaction between religion, culture, and everyday social life. In doing so, the study offers a culturally grounded understanding of marital resilience that complements existing resilience theories while expanding current scholarship beyond the predominantly Western contexts in which military family research has traditionally been developed.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that marital resilience among spouses of Nigerian military personnel facing infidelity is a dynamic process shaped by the interaction of psychological adaptation, everyday religious practices, family relationships, and communal support. Rather than relying solely on individual coping capacities, participants combined prayer, scriptural recitation, communal worship, consultation with religious leaders, forgiveness, and adaptive household routines to manage emotional distress and preserve marital stability. Religion in everyday life emerged not merely as a source of spiritual consolation but as a lived moral framework through which experiences of betrayal were interpreted, negotiated, and transformed into opportunities for sustaining commitment and reconstructing trust. These practices were further strengthened by the involvement of extended families, faith communities, and informal support networks, illustrating that resilience is embedded within broader cultural and social structures rather than being an exclusively individual attribute.

The study contributes to the literature by extending prevailing theories of family resilience and religious coping beyond predominantly Western military contexts. It argues that coping mechanisms and marital resilience among Nigerian military families cannot be adequately understood through psychological approaches alone, but require attention to the cultural, religious, and communal dimensions that shape everyday family life. The proposed conceptual model highlights religion in everyday life as the mediating process linking emotional distress, coping strategies, meaning-making, social support, forgiveness, and sustainable marital resilience. Practically, the findings suggest that military family support programs should integrate culturally sensitive counseling with faith-based interventions and community engagement to strengthen family well-being. Future research could employ longitudinal or comparative designs across different military institutions and religious communities to examine how everyday religious practices influence marital resilience over time and across diverse sociocultural settings.

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