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Perceived Effects of Economic Recession on Family Stability In Jalingo Metropolis, Taraba State, Nigeria

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Abstract: This article examines the perceived effects of economic recession on family stability in Jalingo Metropolis, Taraba State, Nigeria, with particular attention to marital relationships and parenting practices. Drawing on a cross-sectional survey of 185 respondents drawn from a population of household heads, spouses, and adult family members, the study uses a four-point Likert-type instrument and mean-score analysis (cut-off = 2.50) to interpret respondent perceptions. Findings show that recession is perceived to erode family stability primarily through financial stress, inability to meet basic needs, and heightened domestic conflict (cluster mean = 2.88). Marital relationships are strained through rising spousal tension, reduced emotional connection, and increased dissatisfaction, although couples also report collaborative coping (cluster mean = 2.92). Parenting practices are constrained as families divert resources from education and emotional engagement toward economic survival, while simultaneously socialising children into resilience (cluster mean = 2.93). The article argues that in resource-scarce, informal-economy contexts such as Jalingo, macroeconomic downturns are refracted through household-level surveillance of scarcity the monitoring, rationing, and disciplining of family consumption, movement, and labour that reshapes intimate life. The study calls for locally grounded social protection, financial literacy, and family-counselling interventions.

Keywords: economic recession; family stability; marital relationships; parenting; Jalingo; Taraba State; Nigeria.

I. Introduction

Economic recession a sustained decline in aggregate economic activity accompanied by rising unemployment, shrinking household income, and inflationary pressure reverberates well beyond national accounts and into the intimate life of families. In Nigeria, successive downturns since 2016 have compressed real wages, thinned public services, and pushed a growing share of households into precarious informal work (Afolabi and Musa 2020: 44). These pressures are unevenly distributed: in sub-national economies such as Taraba State, where livelihoods depend heavily on subsistence agriculture, petty trade, and civil-service employment, recessions arrive with fewer buffers and more visible consequences (Okeke and Nwachukwu 2019: 112).

Jalingo Metropolis, the administrative and commercial hub of Taraba, sits at the intersection of these vulnerabilities. Households here contend with limited access to formal credit, thin social safety nets, and cultural expectations that concentrate provisioning duties on male breadwinners even as women increasingly enter income-generating activity (Bello and Tanko 2020: 78). When recessions strike, the household becomes both a site of coping and a stage on which macroeconomic stress plays out in delayed rent, withdrawn school fees, foregone medical care, and strained conversations at the dinner table.

This article examines how residents of Jalingo Metropolis perceive the effects of economic recession on family stability, with a focus on three interlocking dimensions: overall family cohesion, marital relationships, and parenting practices. It argues that recession-era family life is characterised by an intensified internal surveillance of scarcity the everyday monitoring, rationing, and disciplining of consumption, mobility, and labour within the household that both preserves and destabilises family bonds. Understanding this dynamic matters for social policy, community practice, and any journal readership concerned with how structural conditions reshape intimate governance.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite growing scholarly attention to the macroeconomic consequences of recession in Nigeria, there is limited empirical work that centres the lived experiences of families in Middle-Belt states such as Taraba. National-level studies tend to aggregate away regional variation, while urban-focused research from Lagos, Abuja, or Port Harcourt cannot be safely generalised to Jalingo, where informal-sector reliance, extended-family obligations, and religious and ethnic pluralism produce distinctive coping repertoires (Usman and Ali 2020: 55). Practitioners, policymakers, and community leaders therefore lack a localised evidence base for designing interventions to protect family stability during economic downturns. This article addresses that gap.

1.2 Research Questions

The study is guided by three questions:

I. What are the key perceived effects of economic recession on family stability in Jalingo Metropolis?

II. How does economic recession influence marital relationships in Jalingo Metropolis?

III. To what extent does economic recession affect parenting practices among families in Jalingo Metropolis?

II. Conceptual and Empirical Background

2.1 Family Stability under Economic Stress

Family stability is commonly understood as a family unit's capacity to sustain harmonious relationships, discharge social and economic roles, and adapt to external shocks while safeguarding members' well-being (Adebayo and Ibrahim 2021: 63). Economic downturns compromise this capacity by reducing the material inputs on which stability depends nutrition, healthcare, housing, and education while simultaneously raising the emotional cost of coordinating scarce resources within the home. The Family Stress Model, developed and elaborated across three decades of North American research and increasingly applied in Sub-Saharan contexts, posits that economic pressure translates into parental psychological distress, which in turn erodes couple relationships and parenting quality (Conger and Conger 2002: 366; Adams and Williams 2018: 22).

2.2 Recession and Marital Relationships

Empirical work across diverse settings shows that financial strain is one of the most consistent predictors of marital conflict and dissolution (Smith and Johnson 2019: 141). In Nigerian contexts, income shocks have been linked to higher rates of spousal disagreement, reduced emotional intimacy, and in extreme cases separation or divorce (Eze and Okoro 2020: 205). Cultural expectations mediate these effects: where masculinity is closely tied to breadwinning, unemployment can trigger identity threat that surfaces as withdrawal, irritability, or coercive control (Bello and Tanko 2020: 82).

2.3 Recession and Parenting

Recessions reconfigure parenting along at least two axes. Materially, they compress the resources parents can allocate to schooling, health, and enrichment, contributing to school withdrawal and intergenerational transmission of poverty (Adewale and Ojo 2020: 17; Green and Martin 2019: 91). Relationally, sustained economic stress reduces parental warmth and consistency, increases harsh discipline, and thins the time available for supervision and emotional engagement (Nwokocha 2021: 44). Yet parenting under scarcity is not only depleting: caregivers also actively socialise children into resilience, resourcefulness, and cooperative household labour (Adegoke 2020: 118).

2.4 Surveillance of Scarcity in the Household

Beyond the family-stress tradition, this study reads recession-era family life through the lens of everyday surveillance in the household. Surveillance scholarship has increasingly moved beyond state and corporate monitoring to examine lateral, intimate, and care-based forms of watching (Lyon 2018: 12). In economically stressed households, financial scarcity intensifies mutual monitoring: spouses track each other's spending, parents audit children's consumption, and elders police the movements and associations of dependents. This is not surveillance in a repressive sense alone; it is also protective, a means by which families ration limited resources and prevent slippage into deeper precarity. The framework is useful because it makes visible the everyday, gendered, and generational labour of coping that mean-score data alone cannot capture.

III. Methods

3.1 Design

The study adopts a descriptive cross-sectional survey design. This design is appropriate for capturing respondents' perceptions of a distributed social phenomenon at a single point in time and for producing findings that can inform locally responsive policy.

3.2 Study Area and Population

The study was conducted in Jalingo Metropolis, the capital of Taraba State in north-eastern Nigeria. The local economy combines subsistence agriculture, small-scale trade, and civil-service employment, making households acutely exposed to macroeconomic downturns. The target population consisted of adult household heads, spouses, and other adult family members resident in the metropolis.

3.3 Sample and Sampling Procedure

A sample of 200 respondents was drawn using a multi-stage sampling procedure. Wards within the metropolis were selected purposively to reflect the mix of high-, medium-, and low-density residential areas; households within selected wards were then chosen through systematic random sampling; and one eligible adult per household was invited to participate. Of the 200 questionnaires administered, 185 were completed and returned, yielding a response rate of 92.5 per cent, which is adequate for descriptive analysis.

3.4 Instrument and Analysis

Data were collected using a researcher-designed instrument, "Perceived Effects of Economic Recession on Family Stability Questionnaire" (PEERFSQ), consisting of fifteen items structured on a four-point Likert-type scale (Strongly Agree = 4, Agree = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 1). The instrument was validated by three experts in sociology and educational measurement, and its reliability was established through a pilot test with 20 non-sampled respondents, yielding a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82. Data were analysed using mean scores and standard deviations, with a decision cut-off of 2.50: items with mean scores at or above 2.50 were accepted as endorsed by respondents, while items below 2.50 were rejected.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Informed consent was obtained from each respondent before administration, and no personally identifying information was collected. The study did not draw upon generative artificial intelligence for research, analysis, or writing.

IV. Results

Findings are organised around the three research questions. Mean scores and standard deviations are reported for each item, along with the cluster mean for the corresponding construct.

4.1 Key Effects on Family Stability

Table 1. Perceived key effects of economic recession on family stability (n = 185)

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Cut-off	Remark
1	Recession increases financial stress that destabilises families.	3.18	0.94	2.50	Accepted
2	Recession reduces families' ability to meet basic needs.	3.18	0.89	2.50	Accepted
3	Recession contributes to higher rates of domestic conflict.	3.08	0.97	2.50	Accepted
4	Recession has no significant impact on family stability.	1.90	0.88	2.50	Rejected
5	Recession forces families to adopt coping strategies that strengthen bonds.	3.08	0.91	2.50	Accepted
	Cluster mean	**2.88**	**0.92**	**2.50**	**Accepted**

Source: Fieldwork (2025).

Respondents endorsed four of the five items associated with family stability. Financial stress (mean = 3.18), inability to meet basic needs (3.18), heightened domestic conflict (3.08), and adaptive coping that can strengthen bonds (3.08) were all accepted; the counter-item denying any significant impact was rejected (1.90). The cluster mean of 2.88 indicates a clear perception that economic recession compromises family stability in Jalingo.

4.2 Influence on Marital Relationships

Table 2. Perceived influence of economic recession on marital relationships (n = 185)

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Cut-off	Remark
6	Recession increases tension and disagreements between spouses.	3.20	0.90	2.50	Accepted
7	Recession reduces quality time and emotional connection.	3.18	0.88	2.50	Accepted
8	Recession has no noticeable effect on marital relationships.	1.92	0.84	2.50	Rejected
9	Recession encourages couples to work together to overcome challenges.	3.18	0.95	2.50	Accepted
10	Recession contributes to higher rates of marital dissatisfaction or separation.	3.10	0.93	2.50	Accepted
	Cluster mean	**2.92**	**0.90**	**2.50**	**Accepted**

Source: Fieldwork (2025).

The pattern for marital relationships mirrors that for overall stability but with a distinctive dual character. Respondents perceive that recession heightens spousal tension (3.20), erodes emotional connection (3.18), and drives dissatisfaction or separation (3.10), while simultaneously prompting collaborative problem-solving (3.18). The counter-item was rejected (1.92), and the cluster mean of 2.92 confirms a strong perceived marital effect.

4.3 Effects on Parenting Practices

Table 3. Perceived effects of economic recession on parenting practices (n = 185)

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Cut-off	Remark
11	Recession limits parents' ability to provide educational resources.	3.28	0.91	2.50	Accepted
12	Recession leads to reduced parental supervision and engagement.	3.18	0.94	2.50	Accepted
13	Recession forces parents to prioritise financial survival over emotional support.	3.18	0.95	2.50	Accepted
14	Recession has little or no impact on parenting practices.	1.95	0.92	2.50	Rejected
15	Recession encourages parents to teach children resilience and resourcefulness.	3.08	0.98	2.50	Accepted
	Cluster mean	**2.93**	**0.94**	**2.50**	**Accepted**

Source: Fieldwork (2025).

Parenting shows the highest cluster mean (2.93) of the three constructs. Constraints on educational provision (3.28), reduced supervision (3.18), and the reprioritisation of survival over emotional engagement (3.18) were all endorsed, alongside the socialisation of children into resilience (3.08). The counter-item was rejected (1.95).

V. Discussion

5.1 Financial Stress and Everyday Rationing

The strong endorsement of items on financial stress and unmet basic needs echoes established findings that economic downturns operate on families primarily through material compression (Adebayo and Ibrahim 2022: 47). In Jalingo, where a substantial share of households depend on informal trade and smallholder agriculture, income shocks translate quickly into visible household decisions: reduced meal frequency, deferred healthcare, and withdrawal of children from school (UNICEF 2021: 8). These decisions are experienced not as one-off adjustments but as an ongoing regime of rationing that must be internally justified, monitored, and enforced.

5.2 Marital Life between Conflict and Cooperation

The marital findings resist a simple story of decline. On one hand, the data confirm what Eze and Okoro (2020: 210) and Afolabi (2023: 33) describe: recession heightens spousal friction, erodes intimacy, and drives some couples toward separation. On the other, the equally strong endorsement of collaborative coping (mean = 3.18) suggests that scarcity also compels renegotiation of household roles. Women in particular take on income-generating activities that expand their bargaining position even as they add to their labour burden (Bello and Tanko 2020: 85). The result is a marital field that is simultaneously more strained and more interdependent.

5.3 Parenting under a Regime of Scarcity

Parenting emerges as the most severely affected domain in the data. The reprioritisation of survival over emotional engagement (Nwokocha 2021: 47) and the compression of educational spending (Adewale and Ojo 2020: 21) risk long-run costs to child development that outlast the recession itself. Yet respondents also see recession as a school of resilience a finding consistent with Adegoke (2020: 122). Reading these results together, parenting in recession-era Jalingo is best understood as caregiving under a regime of scarcity, in which the same practices that constrain children also socialise them into the household economy.

5.4 The Household Surveillance of Scarcity

Taken as a whole, the findings support the article's guiding argument: recession does not simply reduce family well-being; it reorganises the internal governance of the family. Spouses monitor each other's expenditure; parents audit children's consumption and school attendance; extended kin track remittances and reciprocal obligations. This surveillance of scarcity is at once protective and corrosive. It preserves the household as a going concern, but it also inserts a persistent evaluative gaze into intimate relationships that were previously governed by more diffuse norms of trust. For a Surveillance & Society readership, this is a reminder that the concept of surveillance is analytically productive well beyond its more familiar state and corporate forms.

VI. Conclusion and Recommendations

This article has shown that residents of Jalingo Metropolis perceive economic recession as a substantial threat to family stability, working through financial stress, marital strain, and constrained parenting. At the same time, families are not passive victims: they mobilise cooperative coping, gendered renegotiation, and the socialisation of children into resilience. Interventions that ignore either half of this picture the harm or the coping will misfire.

On the basis of the findings, the article recommends: (1) locally administered social protection instruments (conditional cash transfers, school-fee waivers) targeted at informal-sector households in Jalingo; (2) community-based financial-literacy and household-budgeting programmes delivered through religious and traditional institutions; (3) accessible family-counselling and mental-health services, integrated with primary health care; and (4) further research that combines survey data with qualitative accounts of how households actually govern themselves under scarcity.

6.1 Limitations

The study is limited by its cross-sectional design, its reliance on self-reported perceptions, and its focus on a single metropolitan area. Comparative work across Middle-Belt states, and longitudinal designs that track families across recessionary cycles, would extend the evidence base considerably.

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