

Mandatory DNA testing for newborns in Namibia: a complex personal security challenge

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Abstract

This article explores the implications of the anticipated mandatory DNA testing for newborns in Namibia, focusing on the complex personal security challenges it presents. While DNA testing can offer valuable insights into a child's genetic heritage and potential health risks, it raises important personal security issues. This study employed a qualitative research approach. Participants were interviewed, focusing on their perspectives regarding the implications of mandatory DNA testing on personal security in Namibia. In-depth interviews were conducted with the participants to elicit their views on the research objective. The responses were transcribed and analysed thematically. The study revealed that the policy could lead to increased violence, particularly due to exposure to infidelity. It could disproportionately affect women and potentially exacerbate gender inequalities. Legal and ethical challenges were also highlighted, particularly concerning individual rights and consent. Gender disparities emerged as a significant concern, suggesting that the policy might not deter cheating but rather prompt women to seek alternative means to avoid shame and blame. To address these concerns, the study recommends a comprehensive public education campaign, strengthening legal and ethical frameworks, adopting a gender-sensitive approach, providing mental health support services, and ongoing evaluation of the policy's impact. These recommendations aim to balance the benefits and potential drawbacks of mandatory DNA testing in Namibia and ensure personal security for all citizens.

Keywords: DNA Testing, Newborns, Personal security, Gender disparities, Mandatory.

1. Introduction

One of the central to the entire disciplines of human security is the concept of personal security, which is crucial for the well-being and safety of individuals. In 1994, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) outlined a comprehensive list of protections and metrics necessary to achieve human security for all. This list encompassed seven key types of protection, including economic safety nets, food security, access to health care, environmental protection, personal security, community security, and political security (UNDP, 1994). These dimensions of human security shift the focus from merely state security to the well-being of its citizens, addressing security risks that can affect individuals even in times of peace (Collins, 2020; Chilunjika & Gumede, 2021). While the human security framework covers a range of aspects, the current study specifically examines the implications for personal security associated with the mandatory requirement for newborns in Namibia to undergo DNA paternity tests. Personal security, in this context, pertains to an individual's protection from violence, crime, and physical harm. The recent focus in Namibia has been on the proposed legislation that seeks to mandate DNA paternity testing for all newborns to establish their biological father (Vatileni, 2023; Nashama, 2023). This initiative comes as a response to a few tragic cases where children were mistakenly placed with individuals who were not their biological parents, resulting in tragic consequences (Nashama, 2023).

Customarily, personal security encompasses various aspects of human life and safeguards individuals from threats and dangers that can impact their well-being, health, and physical safety. The mandatory DNA testing of newborns has gained significant attention in Namibia and other countries due to the potential benefits of obtaining comprehensive genetic information right from birth, particularly in determining legitimate paternity. However, the mandatory testing of newborns can have far-reaching implications for personal security, especially in cases involving paternity disputes. While DNA testing can offer precise and definitive evidence of biological relationships, it may also lead to instances of violence, crime, and gender-based violence (GBV). These issues can arise from concerns about illegitimate children and disputes over paternity, potentially impacting personal security. This paper considers the personal security implications of implementing mandatory DNA testing for newborns in Namibia.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Mandatory DNA Testing and Its Implications on Personal Security

Personal security ensures that individuals are free from violence and threats to their physical well-being (Rusu, 2022). This includes protection from domestic, interpersonal, and public violence (Mabuku, 2022). It also encompasses measures to prevent physical harm from civil conflicts, terrorism, and war. Ensuring freedom from violence is a fundamental aspect of personal security. Similarly, personal security was defined by Koundouri and Dellis (2022, p. 30). This further implies that personal security equally concentrates on physical safety from violent conflict, human rights abuses, domestic violence, crime, child abuse, and self-inflicted violence, such as drug abuse (Tabo, 2023). Personal security involves safeguarding individuals from various forms of crime, such as theft, robbery, assault, and sexual harassment (Mabuku, 2022; Koundouri and Dellis, These relationships may partly be explained by the fact that effective law enforcement and legal mechanisms are vital in this context to provide a sense of security to the population. It also includes the

protection of individuals' property and possessions. With this, it can be seen that the government has an essential duty through the police and military to ensure the internal preservation of security in countries across the globe. This may imply that the government is recognised as having a fundamental duty to establish and maintain these agencies and legal mechanisms to provide a sense of security to the population (Buzan, 2008; Mabuku, 2022). The military may also play a role in exceptional situations or external defence, but the primary responsibility lies with law enforcement (Mabuku & Masake, 2023). Therefore, the possibility cannot be excluded that this statement underscores the importance of effective law enforcement and government action in upholding personal security and maintaining law and order within a nation.

Recently, considerable evidence has accumulated to show that individuals have access to a fair and impartial legal system (Saxena & Saroj, 2022; Bosio & Jaramillo, 2023). This basically ensures that justice is served when personal security is compromised, and those responsible for harming others are held accountable through legal proceedings. Equally important, personal security relates in this context to ensuring that victims have access to legal redress and support. In a study conducted by Shokunbi (2019) on human security, conflicts and human development, personal security is observed in the absence of conflict, which also involves mechanisms for resolving conflicts and disputes peacefully, both at the interpersonal and international levels. Clearly, there is no doubt that effective conflict resolution contributes to the prevention of violence and physical harm and helps individuals live in a stable and secure environment.

Pons, Lord and Stein (2022) demonstrated in their study that the personal security dimension equally emphasises the importance of protecting human rights, which are essential for personal safety and a prerequisite for attaining an individual's peaceful existence. This includes the right to life, liberty, and security of person, as outlined in international human rights treaties (Des Gasper & Oscar, Gómez, 2015). With this thinking, conclusive remarks may be provided that human rights violations can directly impact personal security, so their protection is paramount. When understanding personal security from a broader perspective, it is pertinent to indicate further that personal security is affected by the threats to individual safety that can manifest in various ways. This may encompass physical harm inflicted by government authorities such as the police and military, internal conflicts like civil wars, acts of terrorism on both local and global scales, and episodes of ethnic and religious violence (Mabudusha, 2022). In addition, abductions, criminal gang activities that may involve violence between spouses or family settings, child exploitation, labour and sex trafficking, substance abuse issues, homicide, and more.

The mandatory DNA testing of newborn babies can have far-reaching implications on personal security, particularly in cases involving paternity disputes (Robert, 2019). While DNA testing can provide accurate and conclusive evidence of biological relationships Gaurav and Verma, (2022), it may also lead to instances of violence, crime, and gender-based violence (GBV), often originating from concerns about illegitimate babies and disputed paternity (Kalunta-Crumpton, 2023). Understanding these implications is crucial to address the potential harm that may befall individuals, especially women and children, as a result of such disputes. The revelation of a child's true paternity through DNA testing can incite intense emotions, particularly in cases where the

biological father was previously unknown or disputed. This emotional turmoil can manifest in violent actions, including physical confrontations, threats, and verbal abuse. Often caught in the crossfire, family members may also experience violence or threats. In situations where the mother of the child had kept the biological father's identity secret or disputed it, mandatory DNA testing can expose her to domestic violence or emotional abuse. If previously unaware of his paternity, the father may react violently or engage in coercive behaviours, endangering the mother's and children physical and emotional well-being (Shepard et al., 2022). In extremely rare circumstances, it is possible that the above can be better comprehended when referencing Khan's work (2022), where he cautions that children who endure family instability within their homes may tend to amass a wealth of negative experiences, ultimately contributing to societal instability in their youth. While there are the number of scholarly works with regard to the topic at hand, there is also a notable absence of more literature on the mandatory test of new babies apart from those done when disputes arise and the court orders, such as to link a suspect to the crime. This revelation is not a surprise in the literature; perhaps this can be explained by the fact that most countries do not impose mandatory tests on their citizens to establish the child's paternity. Moreover, less exploration may be justified due to its ethical implications and the component of violating human rights.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Method

The research adopted an exploratory qualitative research approach to examine the impact of social contract and stakeholder theories on maintaining internal security in Namibia. Qualitative research was deemed suitable for delving into intricate matters that cannot be readily quantified and require the incorporation of various viewpoints (Du-Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research operated within an interpretive paradigm, considering the constitution's mandate for the Namibian Police Force to uphold internal security and the relevance of social contract and stakeholder theories in comprehending this function (Mukherji & Albon, 2018).

3.2 Research Population and Sampling

The study's sample consisted of a diverse group of participants who were selected using a non-probability purposeful sampling method. This included five senior police officers from directorates within the Namibian Police Force. Additionally, one representative from a Namibian human rights non-governmental organisation (NamRights) was included. This organisation closely collaborates with the police on public engagement and the monitoring of human rights issues. Furthermore, one member from the Legal Assistance Centre, an entity that offers policy advice, legal information, and research contextualisation on a wide range of matters, was part of the sample and one member from Women in Media, the organisation that advocates for women's wellness in Namibia. To provide general perspectives on DNA-related issues and the implications for personal security, two married couples were included.

2.3. Data Collection

Data gathering encompassed the acquisition of both secondary and primary data. Secondary data involved retrieving peer-reviewed journal articles and pertinent books pertinent to the research subject. On the other hand, primary data was procured through recorded face-to-face or semi-structured interviews. The selection of interviews as the data collection method was made to capture comprehensive insights and the participants' expertise regarding the maintenance of internal security. Semi-structured interviews provided the flexibility for open and candid discussions, enabling the exploration of participants' viewpoints, further elaboration on their thoughts, and the enhancement of comprehension regarding the subject matter in question (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014; Holt & Hughes, 2021).

3.4 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was utilised for the examination of the data. As an interpretive procedure, thematic analysis involves the methodical exploration of patterns and themes in the data to gain insight into the subject under investigation (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). The researchers employed thematic analysis to uncover central themes and perspectives by transcribing and scrutinising the primary data (Caulfield, 2019).

4. Results

In presenting the results, the research designated "**Participant 1**," "**Participant 2**," and "**Participant 3**" to represent responses from the first, second, and third individuals interviewed, respectively. This same pattern was applied to the other seven participants. The use of codes was necessary to maintain anonymity. The answers were categorised based on their commonalities and organised to create themes that encapsulated shared opinions. These themes were further elucidated by selecting specific responses from each individual to provide clarity and depth to the findings.

The following table shows key themes emanating from the data analysis.

Table 2: Key Themes

Theme	Frequencies
1. What could be the security implication on personal security of implementing mandatory DNA testing for newborns in Namibia?	10
Theme 1: Increased Violence Due to Exposure	10
Theme 2: Rising Incidences of Family Separations	6
Theme 3: Rising Mortality Rates among Women	10
Theme 4: Stigmatisation	3
Theme 5: Legal and Ethical Challenges	6

Theme 6: Gender Disparities	5
Theme 7: Child's Well-being	10

Source: Mabuku (2023) conceptual idea

What could be the security implication on personal security of implementing mandatory DNA testing for newborns in Namibia?

The above question was used to ascertain the anticipated implication of mandatory DNA tests. This question was vital in assessing the multifaceted implications of mandatory DNA testing in Namibia. It serves as a foundation for understanding the potential impact of the policy on personal security and guiding the recommendations that are provided in the present study.

Theme 1: Increased Violence Due to Exposure

All participants are of the opinion that the introduction of mandatory DNA will lead to increased violence associated with exposure to infidelity, as shown below:

Participant 1: *"Families could turn hostile if they discover betrayal or discrepancies in paternity, leading to potential violence."*

Participant 2: *"Revelations from mandatory DNA tests may lead to confrontations, even within families, possibly escalating domestic violence."*

Participant 3: *One interviewee shared that domestic violence rates might surge if DNA test results trigger suspicions or accusations.*

A good summary of the classification of increased violence due to exposure has been provided by

Participant 5:

The fear of violent reactions to DNA test outcomes is a significant concern for many families. [The exposure of infidelity] or doubts about paternity can ignite conflicts, potentially resulting in physical violence. This will result in [personal security] of family members, especially women and children, may be compromised due to increased violence resulting from these tests.

Participant 7: *"Concerning the theme of increased violence, a participant noted, 'Mandatory DNA testing could place families at risk of emotional and physical harm.'"*

Participant 9, warned:

Violence stemming from DNA test results could pose a significant threat to personal and familial security. The potential for violence due to DNA testing could strain relationships and endanger the well-being of those involved. While transparency is important, it could lead to unintended [consequences], such as an uptick in violent incidents within households.

Theme 2: Rising Incidences of Family Separations

Another important finding from the study was that the concern about increased broken homes is closely tied to personal security. As 6 participants interviewee mentioned:

Participant 3: *"When families break apart due to the ...[revelations] from mandatory DNA tests, it can disrupt children's stability and emotional security."*

Participant 5 emphasised that *" children growing up in single-parent households may face financial and emotional challenges that affect their overall well-being [because] DNA tests may lead to separations, and this can have lasting consequences on the emotional and physical safety of family members"*.

Participant 4 note:

Family stability is a pillar of personal security, and when it erodes due to mandatory DNA testing, it can leave individuals, especially children, feeling vulnerable. Personal security can be compromised when homes break apart since mandatory DNA tests may not only reveal genetic information. [Therefore] potential increase in single-parent households can place additional stress on already vulnerable family units.

Participant 7: *"The consequences of more [fragmented] homes due to mandatory DNA testing may extend to issues like child custody disputes and financial insecurity, impacting overall personal security."*

Theme 3: Rising Mortality Rates among Women

Another theme that emerged from all participants in the study was the anticipated rise of mortality rates among women. The concerns about the potential increase in the death toll of women are deeply intertwined with personal security. The selected responses are depicted below:

As one interviewee noted, *'Women's personal security is at risk if they resort to unsafe practices, such as clandestine abortions, out of fear of DNA test consequences.'*(P2).

Participant 4 pointed out, “when women feel threatened or cornered due to mandatory DNA testing, their safety can be jeopardised, and they might make risky decisions.”

Participant 5 highlighted the connection between the death toll of women and personal security, stating, “The fear of [negative repercussions] from DNA tests can push women into life-threatening situations, undermining their overall safety.”

Personal security is a major concern here; the potential increase in the death toll of women due to desperate measures like clandestine abortions raises serious worries about women's safety. [This will imply that] the women's lives may be at risk if they feel compelled to take extreme measures to avoid the outcomes of DNA tests, noted (P7).

Participant 6: “The theme of the death toll of women directly impacts personal security. A participant noted, ‘When women's lives are on the line due to mandatory DNA testing, their overall sense of security is significantly compromised.’”

Participant 10, “The increase in the death toll of women resulting from DNA testing consequences can have lasting repercussions on women's personal security and well-being and the desperate actions underscores the critical importance of ensuring women's safety in the context of DNA testing.”

These responses highlight the connection between the potential increase in the death toll of women and personal security, especially when women may resort to risky actions out of fear of DNA test consequences.

Theme 4: Stigmatisation

The most obvious finding to emerge from the analysis is that stigmatisation is the end product of DNA test results. In this regard, three participants indicated the implication of mandatory DNA.

Participant 1, “Stigmatisation can lead to feelings of insecurity and discrimination, particularly for children whose genetic backgrounds are made public.”

Participant 2, “When individuals or children face stigmatisation due to the revelation of their genetic background, their overall well-being and sense of safety can be compromised necessitated by social exclusion and emotional distress, affecting individuals' personal security.”

Participant 8, “In the context of personal security, stigmatisation is of great significance; when stigmatisation occurs, it can erode an individual's sense of safety and well-being. [In addition] psychological and emotional insecurity associated with this practice could impact an individual's overall sense of safety.”

These responses highlight how stigmatisation, particularly in the context of genetic background, can directly impact personal security, leading to emotional distress and feelings of insecurity.

Theme 5: Legal and Ethical Challenges

There were 6 participants who related the implication of mandatory DNA to personal security in relation to legal and ethical challenges.

Participant 1, *"Legal and ethical concerns are inextricably linked to personal security. As one participant pointed out, 'When legal and ethical challenges arise, it can affect individuals' sense of safety and the protection of their rights.'"*

Participant 4 emphasised the importance of addressing legal and ethical issues for personal security, stating, *"Neglecting these challenges may undermine personal security and leave individuals feeling vulnerable."*

Another broader explanation was provided by **Participant 6**, who highlighted the connection between legal and ethical challenges and personal security:

DNA, in its nature, is associated with legal and ethical issues; this might be worsened in the case where testing becomes mandatory. [Therefore], failing...to address these issues can erode trust and a sense of safety. [This could be because] when individual rights and consent are questioned, it can lead to feelings of insecurity and a lack of trust.

Participant 7, *"For the reason that compulsory DNA will be done forcefully, this will violate the protection of individual rights and consent of [individual] ...which might have consequences on personal security."*

These responses demonstrate the integral connection between legal and ethical challenges and personal security, particularly regarding individual rights and consent questions.

Theme 6: Gender Disparities

Five participants highlighted that the introduction of mandatory DNA testing for all newborns has implications for gender disparities. The following responses are in line with this theme:

Participant 2 noted, *"When introduced, this policy to me [sic] will affect women and worsen gender inequalities disproportionately; in return, this will directly impact women's overall personal security."*

Participant 2, *"The DNA will mean widen gaps between gender[s], and this will undermine personal security, as they may lead to discrimination and vulnerabilities experienced by women."*

Participant 9 narrated the following:

The gender more likely to be affected will be women, as men are likely to use their masculinity to avoid blame associated with infidelity. Consequently, since the DNA policy in Namibia can potentially exacerbate gender inequalities, it may result in feelings of insecurity and vulnerability among women, ultimately impacting their overall personal safety.

These responses illustrate how gender disparities can have a direct impact on personal security, particularly when policies disproportionately affect women and contribute to gender inequalities.

Theme 7: Child's Well-being

All participants registered concerns about the children's social welfare that might be affected due to mandatory testing results of DNA as illustrated by selected participants below:

As one interviewee mentioned (**Participant 3**) *'The emotional well-being of children is a fundamental aspect of personal security, and DNA tests can have a significant impact on it.'*

Participant 4 emphasised:

The DNA testing will undoubtedly disrupt the emotional stability and well-being of children. This disruption can lead to feelings of insecurity and vulnerability, directly affecting their personal security. When analysing this issue, it becomes evident that mandatory DNA testing negatively impacts the connection between a child's well-being and personal security. Therefore, concerns about the emotional security of children, which is essential for their overall well-being, become paramount.

One interviewee stated (**Participant 7**), *"Disruptions to the emotional well-being of children can have lasting consequences on their sense of [personal] security, [necessitated by] DNA results."*

During the interviews, (**Participant 10**) warned, *"The consequences of DNA testing on children's well-being can extend to issues like psychological distress and a sense of insecurity, impacting their personal security."*

These results illustrate the profound link between a child's well-being and personal security, emphasising how disruptions to a child's emotional stability can affect their overall sense of security and well-being.

5 Discussions

The research results consistently highlight the theme of increased violence due to exposure concerning the introduction of mandatory DNA testing for newborns in Namibia. Participants unanimously expressed concerns that this policy could lead to an upsurge in violence, especially related to the exposure of infidelity or discrepancies in paternity. Families facing such revelations may become hostile, potentially resulting in confrontations and domestic violence. For instance, when DNA test results reveal betrayal or doubts about paternity, it can ignite conflicts, sometimes escalating into physical violence. There are similarities between the views expressed by participants in this study and those described by Rusu (2022) with regard to the strong association between DNA results and violence. The result is interesting but not surprising. This pattern raises significant concerns about personal security, particularly for women and children within these families. The fear of violent reactions to DNA test outcomes was a recurring concern in the study. The study reveals that exposure to infidelity or doubts regarding paternity might lead to emotional and physical harm, ultimately compromising the personal security of family members. Consistent with the literature by Mabudusha (2022), this research found that violence stemming from DNA test results was discovered in this study as a substantial threat to both personal and familial security, with the potential to strain relationships and endanger the well-being of those involved. Another possible explanation for this is that transparency and clarity in matters of paternity are essential; the unintended consequences of this policy may include a higher risk of violent incidents within households, further emphasising the intricate connection between the introduction of mandatory DNA testing and the potential for increased violence, which can ultimately impact personal and familial security in Namibia. However, caution must be applied with a small sample size, as the findings might not be generalised in other countries.

The research findings, stating that the introduction of mandatory DNA testing will likely widen gender gaps and potentially undermine personal security, were quite surprising. What stands out is that women are more likely to bear blame for issues related to infidelity, even though cheating is not exclusively confined to women; men also play a significant role in promoting infidelity. However, the study's findings suggest that women are more likely to be held accountable for such outcomes. It is crucial to interpret these results cautiously, as all parties involved in cases leading to the conception of these babies should be held accountable rather than solely assigning blame to women. This result may be explained by the nuanced perspective being essential to promote fairness and equity in addressing the broader societal implications of DNA testing. Women's personal security is at risk when they resort to unsafe practices, such as clandestine abortions, due to the fear of consequences from DNA tests. This result also suggests that the introduction of mandatory DNA testing may not necessarily deter cheating; rather, women might seek alternative methods to avoid shame and blame associated with infidelity. It is on this basis that, when considering the security implications of introducing mandatory DNA testing, one should carefully weigh the benefits against the potential negatives associated with it. Nonetheless, it could be argued that the negative results were due to the fact that the introduction of mandatory DNA might impact the Namibian citizens in terms of violence and crimes than the anticipated benefits of such undertakings.

6 Conclusion and Recommendations

The introduction of mandatory DNA testing for newborns in Namibia is undeniably a complex personal security challenge. The research findings have shed light on the multifaceted implications of this policy, highlighting the need for a nuanced approach to address the various concerns raised. This policy can impact personal security in several ways, including increasing the potential for violence, exacerbating gender disparities, and giving rise to legal and ethical challenges. The potential for violence stemming from exposure to infidelity is a significant concern, and the policy may disproportionately affect women. Moreover, the legal and ethical aspects of the policy raise questions about individual rights and consent, adding an additional layer of complexity. Based on the study results, it is recommended that the Namibian government should launch a comprehensive public education campaign to inform the population about the rationale, implications, and safeguards in place for mandatory DNA testing. This will help address misinformation and alleviate concerns. Secondly, to ensure personal security and uphold individual rights, it is essential to strengthen legal and ethical frameworks surrounding DNA testing. Equally important, policymakers should adopt a gender-sensitive approach when implementing mandatory DNA testing. Special attention should be given to addressing potential disparities and ensuring the policy does not unfairly burden women. More importantly, recognising the potential emotional and psychological impact on individuals and families, the government should provide mental health support services to those affected by the revelations from DNA tests. Lastly, continuous monitoring and evaluation of the policy's impact on personal security and society should be conducted. Regular reviews will allow for adjustments as needed to balance the benefits and potential drawbacks of mandatory DNA testing in Namibia.

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