

Healthcare Delivery In Africa: An Examination Of The Collaborative Effort Of The Indigenous And Western Health Providers In Esan, Edo State

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Abstract

This paper discusses diviners, healthcare and illness and the type of diseases or illnesses that require the services of these diviners in the context of African traditional spirituality and science. In many parts of Africa, especially the indigenous societies, diviners or soothsayers are consulted for different purposes, paramount among which is the attainment of good health. The study revealed that diviners play a crucial role in establishing the cause and treatment of diseases in many communities. The study further establishes that many diseases require the consultation of diviners before any intervention takes place, especially diseases whose etiology are embedded in the worldview of the local people. Such psychosomatic diseases are diagnosed and managed by indigenous healthcare providers. For instance, certain illnesses require ritual healing and sacrifice. In such cases different items including river sand, cowries mixed with stones and bones, sticks and water are all used by diviners to trace the source of afflictions. The work discovers that the neglect of the indigenous health workers dwindle the effort of holistic health attainment, hence, it argues that the collaborative struggle of the traditional and western health providers will facilitate maximum health assessment. The scope of this work is Esan in Edo State, Nigeria. To realize the set objective of this paper, the writer adopts the descriptive and the phenomenological methods. The study recommends the integration of divination with orthodox health care technology to achieve a holistic health care.

Keywords: Diviners; Healthcare; Indigenous; Western.

INTRODUCTION

Various countries have enunciated health – care policies geared towards the maintenance and improvement of the health status of their populations. This is borne out of the realization that good health care is paramount for the well being of the citizens and of their various societies. According to, Nigeria’s Health (Federal Ministry of Health), the national health policy is in term with traditional healing system in Nigeria prior to the introduction of orthodox medical practice. Health care delivery was the sole responsibilities of traditional healers whose medical knowledge and the understanding of their environment made the people to patronise them for their medical needs.

Traditional health care system has continued to thrive not only in the rural areas were over 70 percent of the population dwell, but also in the urban centres which have greater access to orthodox medical facilities. The stiff opposition to traditional medical practice from official quarters has not whittled down its level of patronage by the people simply because it was developed in response to the dictates of their environment Ogedegbe (61). Consequently, it is affordable, accessible and considered efficacious by the people. As at today, Nigeria runs a dual system of health care delivery. It is observed that, officially, orthodox system is recognized and that the traditional system is barely tolerated. Yet it is now obvious that the realization of the goal of the national policy on

health to harness all available resources for health care delivery hinges on a collaborative, rather than a competitive system by the two medical practices. This paper tends to look into the proper meaning of African traditional medicine for the benefit of the people. The work discusses the subject matter in perspective of Esan people of Edo State, Nigeria.

Definition of African Traditional Medicine

The twenty – first century is witnessing serious efforts to discover the active principles in African Medicinal plants. This urge has become more vigorous with the scientific findings that diseases are becoming antibiotics. In the United States of America for instance the number of days a patient is expected to stay in hospital for medical treatment has been increased by 3 – 5 days because of their induced side effects. This, no doubt, has caused much concern to different world governments, especially those sides of the industrialized countries. This concern is manifest in the recent movement away from the use of synthetic medicine to galenical and the use of medicinal medicine (WHO).

Secondly, the world health organization (WHO) by introducing the health for all programme realized that the achievement of this objective could not be through orthodox medical practice only. WHO, therefore, encourages the use of all available medical system, both orthodox and tradition. To this end, efforts are being made to provide enough data on

traditional medicine so that intensive scientific research can be carried out on the constituents of medicinal plants. Sofowora 2 and Iwu 3 emphasize the need to update the data bank by carrying out further study on medicinal plants, chemical composition and their reactions upon the disease in the question.

Maurice MmaduakolamIwu, however, sees the inability to provide useful data on African medicine forms bane its scientific study. As he observes: “Effective scientific reasoning depends first of all on access to evidence. Without a number of technical aids, the vastly greater part of our relevant evidence would still be hidden from us”. Such scientific research will, no doubt, assist in the isolation of new and useful medical agents. For instance, *Strophanthus* which is employed in traditional medicine for the care of venereal diseases and heart troubles has been isolated and is today used pharmacologically as cardiotoxic. In the same way, *digitalis* was used in Europe as a domestic medicine for external application until 1776 when wintering recognized and recommended its cardio tonic properties. The successful isolation of the active properties of *strophanthus* and *digitalis* and other such medicinal plants would have been impossible if the traditional utility was unknown. However attempts are being made to investigate Nigerian medicinal plants especially among the Yoruba and Igbo through the scholarly works of Iwu (263 – 274), Ohiaeri (n.d.) Ezeabasili (423 – 433), among the Igbo, Sofola (345 – 355), Dopamu (551 – 561), Ayoade (233 – 243) Prince (456 – 466), Una Maclean (660 – 670) and a host of others who have provided traditional useful information on some Yoruba medicinal plants. This has consequently led to the establishment of department of pharmacognosy in the Faculty of Pharmacy in some Nigeria university.

Definition of Traditions

Joseph OjoMume (38) defines traditional medicine as the transmission by word of mouth and by example the knowledge and practice based on customary method of natural healing or treatment of disease while Sofowora defines traditional medicine as “the total combination of knowledge and practice, whether explicable not and which may rely exclusively on past experience and observation handed down from generation to generation verbally or in writing(27).

A lot of work has been done on traditional medicine some scholars have stressed it’s wide coverage, others have pointed on the need to integrate traditional and modern scientific medicines. Yet others stress its religious dimension. Some scholars maintain that lack of medical personnel, coupled with the physical limitation of the state of under developed economy call for the incorporation of indigenous medicine into modern medical system. Both health and life constitute single continuum. Thus, the need

to maintain life in its wholeness becomes paramount. Hence healing basically involves harnessing the different facts of the man’s consciousness to set things alright i.e in their prearranged positions. Traditional medicine as conceived by Africans cannot be adequately translated in English. The Ososo word medicine for instance *Ogbeor* Igbo word *Ogwuor* Yoruba *Ogunis* not limited to materials applied for a strictly therapeutic purpose. The Esan name for Medicine is *Oghumu*, Its alleged efficacy goes beyond the treatment of ailment or prevention of disease (Sarwuan Shishima 97). Medicine for the African includes objects of materials, which exercise remote and miraculous effects on the efficacy of other objects. Thus, the African concept of medicine includes drugs or herbs for curing and preventing disease as well as objects or recipes with magical effects. Therefore, medicine can be used not only to heal or to kill but also to secure power, health, fertility, personality, moral reform, or make a bride patients and polite to her in – laws, a chief majestic or judge complaint Shishima 97. Medicine to the Esan man are taught to tap the power put by God into herbs and other substances which those who know the right formula can tap and use for their own ends good or bad. The essential ingredients of medicine are tress, herbs, plants and sometimes animal matter and incantations.

According to Arlo Davy Guthrie, Traditional medicine is “folk” or “Domestic” medicine which he identifies with the early prehistoric man. Guthrie believes that traditional medicine applies herbal remedies to mirror ailments such as colds or constipation which are accepted as part of existence. More serious and disabling diseases ascribed usually to supernatural origin are given a befitting treatment also involving the use of charms, talisman’s, incantation or sorcery. Magic and religion played a large part in the medicine of prednison or primitive man, thus, making the first doctors or medicine men in history to be witch doctor or sorcerer.

He however acknowledges the wisdom in the art of healing of primitive physicians because they administer medication to the whole man, soul as well as body (45), African traditional medicine may therefore be described as the total body of knowledge techniques for the preparation and use of substances, whether explicable or not that are based on the socio – cultural and religious bed rock of African communities which are founded on experience and observation handed down from generation to generation either verbally or in writing used for the diagnosis, prevention, or elimination of imbalances in physical, mental or social wellbeing (quoted in Shishima 96). Traditional medicine aims at healing the whole man which brings it closer to the Christian concept of healing i.e. “meaning whole” in contract which emphasizes the restoration of bodily health. A

wide range of works have been done on medicine on the aspect of African traditional medicine by the different respected scholars such as Maclean 1979, Twumas; 1975, Johada 1977, WHO 1978, 1982 Ademuwagun 1978, Bonsi 1982, 1984 (Shishima 96). While some scholars stress on the holistic nature of traditional and modern scientific medicine following the lack of enough medical personnel especially coupled with the fact of physical limitation of the states is in an under developed economy like ours call for the incorporation of indigenous medicine into the modern medical system including religious dimension within our local context.

African Traditional Medicine and African Religion

The term "African", African religions is called "African" because it is indigenous, aboriginal, foundational, or handed down from generation to generation (Moses OrshioAdasu 15). Again the religion is part and parcel of African life. It was founded by the African and is handed on from one generation to the other by word of mouth. Not only that the religion has been in existence long ago before the advent of foreign religions including Christianity on the African continent. Furthermore, it is only practiced by the Africans. The Africans are incurably religious people" (GeofferyParrinder9). Mbiti believes that since there are a thousand and one ethnic groups in Africa and each group has its own religion, African traditional religion should be talked to in the plural (1). However, many other scholars of African traditional religion have disagreed to this pointing to the fact of the similarities in beliefs and acts of worship including the concept of God which cuts across all African nationalities.

The Term Traditional

African religion is said to be traditional due to many factors. African religion is traditional because it is a religion and culture that is based on the life of the Africans. The pattern of life has been handed from generation to generation. Its mode of worship, articles of faith, materials used for worship in temples, shrine and holy places are all from the African local environment and it is practiced by the Africans on the African soil. It is a community affair and not limited to an individual. Religion is part and parcel of life in traditional African society. Religion permeates all aspects of life be it politics, economic, education etc. Thus, to be an effective member of the community, one must belong to the religion of the land.

Right from birth to death religion controls every aspect of life of the individual. (Parrinder 9) In the same vein traditional medicine plays out in all sphere of African experience. The traditional diviner is believed to be the main custodian of physical and metaphysical knowledge. Hence *Ifa* among the

Yoruba, *ewawa*, *oguega* and *ise* among the Edo and Esan people are significantly, religious *sine qua non*. In Nigeria, divination is the major diagnostic apparatus in traditional medical practice. For instance the *Ifa* among the Yoruba and *Oguega* in Esan is believed to be the encyclopaedia of traditional medical heritage (Ebhomienlen 52).

The Esan people trace the causation of diseases to immoral behaviour, such as adultery, stealing, breaking of communal covenant and the like and offence to the ancestors- the father of the land. Hence, divination comes into the ambience of traditional medical practice. In crucial situations the divination plays a complementary role in the treatment of ailments.

African Concept of Medicine

The physicians are responsible to diagnose diseases and injuries, administer treatment and advice patients on good diet and the ways to stay healthily. There are two lands of physicians, the Doctor of medicine (MD) and the Doctor of Osteopathy (DO). Both use medicines, surgery and other standard methods of treating disease. Doctor of osteopathy places special emphasis on problems involving the muscular and skeletal systems, which includes muscles, ligaments, bones and joints. Medical knowledge has advanced so far that no physician can master an entire field of medicine. Thus, doctors may refer patients with unusually complicated problems to specialists with advanced training in a particular disease or field of medicine. Specialists may even concentrate in one particular area, and become subspecialist. Even specialist in internal medicine, for instance, is an expert in diagnosis and nonsurgical treatment of adult disease.

Significance of African Traditional Medicine

Many traditional medicines therapies are supported by empirical evidence on safety and effectiveness. Such evidence is usually based on sources such as traditional scriptures, pharmacopoeias and / or clinical experience collected over hundreds of years. An increasing number of scientific studies now support the use of certain traditional medicines therapies. The effectiveness of acupuncture, for example, a popular treatment for pain relief, has been demonstrated both through numerous clinical trials and laboratory experiments (9, 10). Other example of traditional medicine therapies with a research derived evidence base are: St John's Wort (*hypericumperforatum*) for mild depression: and saw palmetto (*serenoaRepens*) for reducing symptoms of benign prostrate hyperplasia (11, 12).

Traditional medicine therapies may cause fewer adverse events than conventional therapies such as treatment with conventional medicines (pharmacotherapy). For example, a National

Institutes of Health (NLH) panel issued a consensus statement on acupuncture stating that incidence of adverse effects from acupuncture are extremely low and often lower than for conventional treatment (13). Another reason why patients turn to traditional medicine of complementary care is the increasing cases of chronic and debilitating disease for which there is no cure. Scientific studies of several traditional medicine therapies show that their use is effective, e.g. for HIV/AIDS and cancer patients (14, 15). As a result, UNAIDS is advocating collaboration with traditional medicine practitioners in AIDS prevention and care in sub Saharan Africa (16).

The advantages of traditional medicine include its diversity and flexibility: its availability and affordability in any parts of the world; its wide spread acceptance in low level of technological input required. As a result, traditional medicine therapies have the potential to contribute to a better health – care system in many countries (2).

In Africa, the two medical systems which have operated distinctively along each other are modern scientific medicine (MSM) and traditional medicine (TM). These forms of medicine have, indeed been beneficial to the country in the areas of increasing life expectancy and lowering death rate through scientific and systematic procedures.

Traditional medicine which existed before the introduction of modern scientific medicine continues to play fundamental roles in indigenous health – care system by curing and preventing diseases. Scientific medicine has been highly recognized and has consequently become the official medicine has been highly recognized and has consequently become the official medical system which is heavily funded by the state whereas traditional medicine has basically relied on individual practitioners for its substance.

Not with standing, traditional medicine plays a very important complementary role in health – care delivery and the dependency on traditional medicine continues to soar due to the increasingly expensive nature of modern scientific health care. According to the world health organization (WHO) report on traditional medicine, approximately 70 percent of the population in the developing world, especially Africa, depends on medicinal plants to meet their health – care needs. For that reason the need has always arisen to inculcate traditional medicine in modern scientific medicine. This has therefore brought the issue of integrating these medical systems into the fore – front of modern medical debate. Infact, the relevance of these medicines in the traditional African community can in no way be under estimated. They have been several ways influenced human health restoration either physically or spiritually (17 – 18).

ROLE OF TRADITIONAL AND ORTHODOX MEDICINE

This research discovered that with an estimation of the population of about 591,534 people, 2007 population census figures (Albert Segynola,20) in the region of Esan about three quarter of the people patronize the use of plants to substantiate their primary health care needs. It is also discovered that approximately about half the people living in urban cities in various states of Nigeria regularly make use of what is regarded as complementary and Alternative Medicine. This increase in the demand and availability of services for Complementary Medicine has outpaced the developmental policy of the Federal Governments of Nigeria and the health sector.

Remarkable Feats: In Nigeria, traditional medicine has been the main source of health care for the vast majority of people. It is currently estimated that between 70 and 80% - Africans use traditional medicine for the management of both communicable and communicable diseases such as cancer, malaria, HIV/AIDS, diabetes, Hypertension and tuberculosis. It is also noted that a high percentage of the rural populace patronize traditional midwifery for their maternal and neonatal health problems. Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAS) assists in majority of birth delivery of pregnant women in most Nigerian villages and communities' e. g. Ososo. Other areas where traditional medicine has contributed to the improvement of Health Care Delivery System includes the recent HIV/ AIDS menace where Dr. Abalaka, discovered curative herbs for the dreaded disease which many patients have been reported treated on private consultation (Ekeopara 56). The disagreement he had with the Nigerian Medical Association has hindered the wider scope of beneficiaries of his discovery. Herbs are also used in quick healing of open injuries, stopping of bleeding, miscarriages, toothache, extraction of bullets from gun shots etc.

Primary Sources of Modern Medicine: OssyKasilo (8), notes that “traditional Medicine has demonstrated great potential of therapeutic benefits in its contribution to modern medicine. An estimate of more than 30% of modern medicine is directly or indirectly sourced from traditional herbs such as analgesics (aspirin, Belladonna) anticancer medicines (Vincristine and Vinbiastine) anti – malaria (quinine, artemisinin); Anti – hypertensive agents (reserpine) and decongestants (ephedrine). As part of the contributions of traditional medicine in Health Care Delivery System in Nigeria, Chika Augustine Ekeopara notes that: ... to make a barren woman productive, a special concoction specially prepared to cleanse the reproductive organs is administered to the woman three times daily for a period of three days. Rituals might accompany such administrations if it is

believed that there is a spiritual agency involved in the barrenness (54). This connotes that traditional medicine has a lot to still contribute today in treating barrenness among women.

Uses of *Agbo* Drink (Traditional Medicine) In Esan

The Esan people prefer the use of *Agbo* to orthodox for treating *Ogobhekele*(Malaria), according to them it has a miraculous effect on them with regards to typhoid, malaria, dysentery, headache, waist pains, rheumatism etc. unlike orthodox which takes days for most orthodox drugs to suppress not heal the symptoms of the ailments, only for the ailments to become immune to the drugs with time. As it is now with the case of quinine. But with *Agbo*, the mixture works like magic. Words will fail to describe the healing capacity of *Agbo*. A first hand experience is all one need to make you an adherent”says the Ososo people.

With two hundred naira, a complete day dose can be well enjoyed. And the stress of going through the denseness of our public health centres bypassed. According to the Ososo to people you don't need to go the chemists to purchase drugs. Plants like lemon – grass, mango leaves and paw – paw leaves are planted all over the place in Ososo so you just need to cut the leaves and cooked then is ready to drink. It doesn't need to be registered first on needs a doctor prescription before taking it. Personal interview with Mrs. Sade Akinlola, Farmer in Akoko Edo, IkpennaOsoso – on 16th March, 2019.

With *Agbo*, there is no fear for fake or expiration; as a result of the porosity in our market the numbers of fake drugs dealers are on the increase; making it possible for more fake drugs to flood the system. But with *Agbo*there is no fear for fake or whether it has expired. The originality of the mixture is assuring and its life span is every green and there is no question of side effect.

It has been concluded by the Ososo people that *Agbo*'s nature's gift to its own and like every other gift from nature, they cannot be compared to the creation of man. They are hundred times better than the imitative products of science. In Nigeria, south of the sahara, two distinct types of medicine are known extensively used namely, herbal and orthodox medicines. The former is defined as made from herbs or plants and be said to posses several synonyms all of which refer to plants as the raw materials for medicine namely: phytomedicines, plant medicines, green medicines, traditional medicine portions, traditional remedies, plant drugs and forest health products among others (Anthony, AdeboluElujoba 30 – 43). The world health organization (WHO) also defined herbal medicine as finished labelled medicinal products that contain as active ingredients

aerials or underground parts of other plant material or combination thereof whether in the crude state or as plant preparation. Plant materials include juices, gums, fatty oils and any other substances of this nature. Medicines containing plant material combined with chemically defined active substances including chemically defined isolated constituents of plants are not considered to be herbal medicine. Orthodox medicines maybe defined as any substance of vegetable, animal or mineral origin or any preparation or admixture thereof or chemical compound which areko used for internal or external application to the human body in the treatment of disease. Herbal medicines remain part of the history of people despite the fact that orthodox medicines came with civilization; appear to have occupied the centre stage in the treatment of diseases states especially in modern medical practice.

Meanwhile the attributes of herbal and orthodox medicines in academic discourse had over the years revolved around the weather – beaten paths of regulation and standardization with emphasis on quality assessment based on certain quality assurance parameters of quality itself, safety and efficacy without recourse to obtaining first hand information from their users about certain salient but common physical attributes such as level of acceptability, packaging, cost (affordability), availability, level of advertisement in print and electronic media, among others. (Pharmaneous 2)

A summary of this work is now necessary in order to bring this research to an end. The false knowledge among the westerners that those who practice Traditional medicine are doing so out of poverty and ignorance, is fallacious this false knowledge is against the command and purpose of God when he said “let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was good”. Genesis 1: 11. To ascertain that Traditional medicine is old fashioned and should not be adapted tois erroneous. A research work like this, is necessary to portray whatTrado – medicine entails.

This work attempts to proffer solutions to both Traditional and orthodox medicines in Nigeria's society, based on the positive result we have seen on both medicines (Traditional and Orthodox) and also God the creator of human – beings and medicine with emphasis on Esan. The paper focuses on a comparative of Traditional and Orthodox medicines. This work attempted an exegesis of the above topic and applied the teaching to contemporary Nigeria citizens. In bid to suggest that the collaborative efforts of the western and traditional health providers is necessary is ultimate health care delivery must be attained.

CONCLUSION

The African philosophy of clinical health care practice is a bridge builder existing between people's well – being and enjoyment of the goodness of life graciously given to us by our creator and the Supreme Being. Therefore, in order to adequately maximize the health – care coverage of the multi – populated traditional Nigerian villages and communities with varied and variegated health challenges, sickness and ailments, there is obvious need for the formalization of the traditional health care services through the integration of traditional medicine into the health care delivery systems of various Local and State Governments in Nigeria.

There is also need for enhanced collaboration between practitioners of orthodox conventional medicine and traditional medicine for the benefit of all. The earlier this is done, the better for all of us. However, there is no gain saying that in spite of criticism, spite and distaste for traditional healing, the fact remains that many Africans do not hesitate to seek the help of traditional medicine men/ women when confronted with life threatening situations or problems. Evidence abounds as to the veracity of this assertion. Orthodox doctors have been known to refer medical cases beyond their comprehension to the traditional practitioners, especially when such medical cases could not be scientifically diagnosed. Traditional medicine is holistic, in the sense that it heals both physically and spiritually that is, it heals both body and soul. The world is yet to find a cure for HIV/ AIDS. Perhaps the cure will be found if more energy and attention is directed to traditional healing methods (Ekeopara 57).

It is noteworthy to state, that despite the impact of western civilization, orthodox medicine and religious awakening / enlightenment, the typical African man seeks help from the gods of his father's through traditional medicine whenever the chips are down. Idowu, concurred to this assertion when he stated in his book, African Traditional Religion: A Definition that it is well known that in strictly personal matters relating to the passages of life and the crises of life, African Tradition Religion is regarded as the final succor by most Nigerians and an average African.(206)

In hospitals for example, people who go on admission and have declared themselves Christians and indeed are practicing Christians, have medicines prepared in the traditional way smuggled in to them simply because psychologically at least, that is more effective in that it is consecrated medicine with the touch of the divine in contrast to the European's mere lored water. In matters concerning providence, healing and general well – being therefore, most Africans still look up to their religion as the way (206). There is therefore a need for traditional

medicine to be practiced as an alternative medicine to orthodox medicine.

RECOMMENDATION

If all the healing and curative treasures divinely embedded in our medicinal plant by the Mother Nature (the Supreme Being) will be adequately maximized in improving the health services being rendered to our people, definite and decisive actions need to be taken.

These include:

- i. Research: Research in traditional medicine and development need to be included in the national health research agenda.
- ii. Curriculum: Traditional Medicine should be included in the curricula of our Secondary and Tertiary Institutions.
- iii. Collaboration: There should be a forum and enabling environment provided for effective collaboration between orthodox Medical and Traditional Practitioners. The gulf existing between them which give room for jealousies and destructive criticisms should be narrowed.
- iv. Protection: Mechanisms for the protection of intellectual property rights and indigenous herbal knowledge should be developed.
- v. Training : Establishment of regular training programmers or National Institute for Traditional or Alternative Medicine, for traditional medicine practitioners should be encouraged.
- vi. Legislation: Legislative framework and national policy for the protection of the knowledge of medicinal plants as well as its preservation from wanton destruction through reckless bush burning and tree – cutting should be put in place.
- vii. Documentation: Government should establish units or departments for formal documentation of the details of the working of medicinal plants from the existing oral tradition in order to guard against its extinction or possible adulteration.
- viii. Branding and Marketing: The Federal Government and the Federal Ministry of Health should establish governmental agencies that will take care of both the packaging and the effective marketing of the traditional herbals productions both within and outside the country. It is important for Africa to borrow a leave from Traditional Chinese Medicine

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