

AN APPRAISAL OF THE ROLES AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF TRADITIONAL HEALERS IN HEALTH CARE DELIVERY SYSTEM IN IKWERE RIVER STATE

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ABSTRACT

The paper assess the role and contributions of traditional healers in health care delivery system in Ikwerre, the study evaluated the Obio-Akpor healers in the Ikwerre Community and their patients, the patients in particular perceived the efficacy of their services and have continued to patronage them up till date. A total of 200 residents participated in this study. The research utilized simple random sampling techniques and I purposive sampling on selecting the healers and their patients as well as people of Ikwerre Community. Questionnaire and oral interview were administered to the people of the Community and majority of them have expressed satisfaction with their healing practices, powers, skills and methodology. The finding also showed that all categories of Obio-Akpor people have been patronizing them, ranging strata, Christians, Muslims, amongst others, despite sex differences and differences in socio-demographic characteristics of the people, majoring of the respondents through. Regression analysis expressed satisfaction with the traditional healer's services. The study thus recommended that for greater impact of traditional healers to be felt by the people of Obio-Akpor, integrating them with modern healers at primary health care level should be the better option, than the present separate development strategy.

Keywords: traditional healers, health care delivery system, religion, and development.

INTRODUCTION

The traditional healthcare delivery system is a process of healing which entails the use of herbs and administering drugs by the healers to patients in the traditional African way or method. Which in most cases is based on the culture of the people in the community or society.

Before the advent of Western or Orthodox healthcare system; people, Africans received solely on the use of African herbs or medicine as a curative to all their ailments. Even in recent times; the use of herbal treatment is still evident as most people still patronize them. The amount of patronage gotten by herbal or traditional doctors cannot of be underestimated as both the literate and illiterate people of the Nigerian society patronize them (traditional healers) for the total cure of their illnesses. This is complementary to available modern healthcare facilities and inadequate equipment in our hospitals or health units. The ratio of physicians to

patient still stands at 1:10,000 patients likewise the paramedical staff. This study focuses on the Ikwerre people and their use of traditional medicine in Port-Harcourt, despite the availability of modern medical services in Port-Harcourt and its environs.

The Ikwerre traditional healers are known as "DIBIAS" and this is what they go by. Back in time, between 18th and 19th century, the Ikwerre traditional healers work believed to the 'gods' they saw and believed in, they were highly respected because of their extra ordinary ways of healing diseases especially the chronic illnesses which will ordinarily take a longer time to be treated by medical doctors. An Ikwerre traditional healer is also known as the "OFOR" holder which means that they are the eyes of the "gods" and can predict some unforeseen dangers especially impending calamities that could destroy an entire community in the Kwerre lands.

Traditional healers have some specified ways of treating patients who patronize them. They include:

1. Herbal medications, it is practiced with the use of herbs, that is leaves mostly gotten from the forest, shrubs and roots from some specific trees. All these are prepared using dry gin(Spirit) normally called Ogogoro which they believe to be a powerful match for the herbs to work with.

The herbs are mixed together with the gin and can be kept for days, hours, minutes or given to the patient immediately after mixture depending on the kind of illness and how chronic it is.

2. Patients are taken to the shrine for spiritual bath, in this kind of mediation, they believe that the patient must have done something preposterous against the "gods" of the land and needs spiritual cleansing in order to be forgiven and then delivered from his illness. In the Ikwerre Community, the category of people that patronize traditional healers depends on their location and cost. In rural areas, it is those who live within that vicinity that patronize them, although sometimes those from Urban areas today, the traditional healers there are more sophisticated and more expensive, hence those from the Rural community cannot afford that cost in my own opinion they are over priced due to the cost of living in the city.

The structural variable on the other hand pertains mostly to location. The Orthodox hospitals are located mainly in Urban societies are even the few Orthodox hospitals located in the Rural areas are not dependable due to lack of efficiency in the drugs administered and also the medical equipment used are either outdated or not functioning hence, most people living in Rural places rely solely on traditional herbs offered to them which is not only cheap and convenient but is also accessible and efficient.

The political variable is also evident because access to medical care is supposed to be the constitutional right of every member of the society, rich or poor, but this is not so as western healthcare delivery is solely for those who have the ability to pay and the reason why it is that way are all political questions where are left unanswered.

In one vein, medical treatment is a constitutional right which is supposed to be protected by the state but has been benefits to the economically and socially privileged members of the society in exclusion of the vast majority of the population. Medical cure for the rural populates or non-elites has remained a non priority as in the colonial days, and the hospitals referred to as "free clinics" are only free for those who can afford to pay for registration and counseling. Therefore, this work tries to make the public appreciate the importance of traditional medicine and the helpful role in plays to the rural indigenes of our country.

Traditional healers have excelled in their own curative abilities and this is evident in herbalists in Ikwerre Communities of Rivers State who have excellent tremendously in their practices like in the area of fixing or broken bones, broken limbs, improving fertility in women and curing diseases like Fibroid and Mental restoration and other areas of management where these traditional medical practitioners have also left their foot prints on the sand of time. Many decades ago, the only method of healing and treatment available to people was the traditional methods of healthcare delivery and it was universally used for achieving good health and till date, it is still argued that Western medicine are refined herbs gotten from Africa as a result of European contact missionaries and the influence of modernization.

Statement of Problem

Nigerians do not have equal access to medical care neither is the quality of treatment the same. This is also evident in the accessibility and quality of service rendered to various genres of people. Even in staff clinics, the quality of service rendered to senior and junior staff workers are very different as the senior staffs enjoy preferential and quality treatments while the junior staffs get meager or cheap treatment. This is so to prove that the major determinant of quality healthcare accessibility is money. Also, amenities like high-tech equipments are reserved for special or selected categories of people.

It is true that westerners introduced what is often referred to as letter method of healthcare" or "modern medicine" but before this period and even now, most people still adhere to the traditional method

of seeking healthcare and this is rampant in Emohua LG.A also an Ikwerre making community of River State.

However, despite the fact that some traditional healers are recognized to treat some ailment well, a great number of patients would be under any circumstances consult traditional practitioners for treatment. Fortunately or unfortunately, until recently, these traditional practitioners had been exuded from the general healthcare delivery system.

In other words, this work will hopefully help to removed negative ideas about traditional healers and medicine viewed as "devilish" "fetish" and "dogmatic". The intension of this work is also to make known to the people activities of the Ikwerre traditional healers and why they should not over looked in healthcare delivery system and also why the traditional healthcare system should be integrated permanently in the general healthcare delivery system in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

Traditional medicine has stood the test of time for this reason, it will be expedient to look at its place as means of cure using spiritual. Nationalism which originated from analogies between societies and living organisms. The organic analogy was widely prevalent in precaution thought. The most important manifestation of this pattern has been linked to the concepts of structures and functions which already appeared in the works of Spencer, were also used by Durkheim and figured prominently in the work of British Social Anthropologists Malinowski and Radcliff Brown. It also has some effects in American Sociology particularly among students and followers of Talcott Parsons.

It is now generally known as Structural Functionalism, Structural Functionalism has its prime emphasis on society and interrelation of its institution. It addresses itself to how social life is maintained and carried forward.

The fundamental postulates of Structural Functionalism includes that:

1. A Structure which performs a function that is no more useful or which is harmful to the total organism is gotten rid of.
2. A given pattern fulfils some vital system needs this fulfillment explains the existence of the pattern.
3. The existence or persistence of a given structure or pattern is explained by means of its consequences or effects which are presumable but necessary and beneficial to the system in question.
4. Every society is composed of structures which are permanent and differentiated from each responsible for the performance of different functions and every function is valued and defined in terms of its role or usage for the existence and development of the total Socag Margaret Peil (1977) Before the advent of Europeans in South Eastern part of Nigeria, Ikwerre Traditional Healers answer to the needs of the sick and also to the prevention of diseases and the protection of people against evil forces, it still perform these invaluable function.

During the Colonial Era, the Ikwerre Traditional Medicine was played down by Authorities as been "Unscientific". The European introduced Western Medicine flourished side by side. The rural literates flocked to these medicine men but Westerners were more surprised when the educated Urbanites also patronized them.

The belief in traditional medicine is still strong even when hospitals are available and qualified medical personnel are employed. The question then is why is this so? Does the answer lie with the fact that medicine men give their patients two things, sympathy and understanding which Western medicine hardly provides. No matter how thorough western practitioners may be, a purely scientific approach may fail lack of human touch.

Therefore, this approach attempt to identify the place of traditional practitioners as an important structure to the society and the functions they perform toward health care delivery.

Scope of the Study

This research is carved out to explore the perception of Ikwerre people and the role of traditional medicine in healthcare delivery

why people still patronize traditional healers.

Reasons for visiting traditional healers	Frequency	Percentage
Because its cheap	103	51.5
Because it's nearer	26	13
They are always available	39	19.5
Efficacy of traditional medicine	32	16
No opinion	-	-
Total	200	100

The table above shows that 103 (51.5%) of the respondent patronize because it is cheap while 39 (19.5%) patronize because of its efficacy. Hence, it can be included that traditional healers still get high patronage. The table below shows the religious permits of the people in patronizing traditional medicine.

Religious value and traditional medicine	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	170	85
No	20	10
No opinion	10	5
Total	200	100

Source field survey by the researcher 2010

able 7. Distribution showing if traditional medicine appeal to People of Obio-Akpor in Ikwerre Community.

Relevance of Traditional Medicine	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	160	80
No	20	10
No opinion	20	10
Total	200	100

The table shows that 20 (10%) of the respondents their religion do permit them to take traditional medicine

while 170 (85%) permits to take traditional medicine.

The table below Shows the Respondents are aware of some ailments that can only be cured with traditional medicine.

Disease curable by Traditional Healers	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	100	50
No	70	35
No opinion	30	15
Total	200	100

The table above shows that some respondents are aware of illnesses that can only be cured by traditional healer 70 (35%) of respondents are not aware 30 (15%) are of no opinion. This shows that traditional medicine is efficient.

The table shows that traditional healers are more sympathetic and caring than the modern physician or doctor.

Sympathy of patient care	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	100	50
Disagree	50	25
No opinion	50	25
Total	200	100

The table shows that 100 (50%) of the respondents agree that traditional healers are more sympathetic than the orthodox physician while 50 (25%) are of no opinion and the other 50 (25%) disagree.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study is on the perceptions of the role and contributions of traditional healers in health care delivery system.

From their response of the respondents on the research questions included in the questionnaire, it was gathered that traditional medicine plays an important role in the people of Obio-Akpor Community of Ikwerre Local Government in River State. It was observed that female partake more than male in the seeking of traditional medicine. Majority of the respondent strongly believe in the use of traditional medicine to that of the orthodox medicine. Here they believe that the traditional medicine has more and quicker effect than that of the orthodox medicine. To the respondent they see the traditional medicine as what has been in use before the introduction of the orthodox medicine because they feel it is cheaper and easy assessable to the orthodox medicine. It was also noted that they are some ailment that the orthodox medicine takes a longer period of time while the traditional medicine does a quicker and faster work. They prefer it as a more cheaper and easy assessable to the orthodox medicine.

According to Sopowora (WHO. 1978) The greatest gain to be made in integrating traditional and Orthodox systems of medicine into the official healthcare system of developing nations is that, increase in manpower would provide total health coverage for all, this is because after integrating the two sides, training and enlightenment for traditional practitioner must follows primary healthcare at least would then be

available to decide population. It is at this level that the experiences of the traditional practitioners will be most useful.

Finally it has been observed that the role of traditional healers play a significant and vital role of the people of Obio-Akpor in Ikwerre Local Government in River State.

CONCLUSION

Relying on experience with a traditional healer, focus group discussion and oral interview with traditional healers, I have analyzed the functions and importance of traditional healers in the healthcare delivery system of Nigeria. It is concluded that in a society where healing involves not just the curing of disease but also the protection and promotion of human life; the physical, spiritual and material well being, traditional healers remain the very embodiment of conscience and hope in their respective communities.

The holistic and cathartic nature of their treatment and the fact that in certain places in the country, they are the major or only source of healthcare, make them very important. The debate over the possible integration of traditional and scientific medicine is also examined. It is concluded that out-right integration would be too ambitious and practically impossible but that some form of cooperation is possible, given political will. Regardless of the official government policy on the issue, the two traditional are complementary and Nigerian patronize both of them.

RECOMMENDATION

The place of traditional medicine in healthcare delivery can be viewed from different perspectives of which this approach is only one. Traditional medicine and healers have attended to the health needs of people from time immemorial. It has been in existence long before the Orthodox form of treatment was introduced it is therefore reasonable to sustain it. There is need for mutual integration or recognition of traditional and orthodox medicine. The major difference between the two system of healing or healthcare delivery is that orthodox medicine evolves as a scientific method that originated from base conceptions of the universe - man while traditional medicine strives to treat the whole person rather than his isolated parts and to think of him in relation to his emotional sphere and physical environment.

Government should also take part in the location allocation of the premise of traditional medical centre. Although traditional medicine not have doses like the orthodox medicine but can be looked into by the scientific way.

Traditional medicine should also be taught on how to make use of it like the orthodox medicine that follows with instructions cultural practices that aid the spread of traditional medicine should be encouraged.

Traditional medicine should not only be centralized in the Rural area but also be introduced in the Urban areas.

Traditional medical centre's should be made more attractive like the orthodox medical centre in order for people in the Urban areas to be attracted to them. Traditional practitioners should be more enlightened in order for people to patronize them

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