

**TRADITIONAL BURIAL RITES AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC EFFECTS ON FAMILIES IN
IKWERRE SOCIETY**

IHUNWO, C.
Department of Sociology
Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Port Harcourt

&

OKODODU, S. A
Department of Sociology
Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Port Harcourt

&

WORDU, S. A.
Department of Sociology
Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Port Harcourt

Abstract

The study examined the relationship between traditional burial rites and the socio-economic condition of families in Ikwerr society using a mixed-method approach. The population consisted of four thousand and seventy-three (473). A sample size of four hundred (400) was drawn from this population using the Taro Yamane formula. Stratified and multistage sampling techniques were used. A total of ten Focus Group Discussions were carried out in the target communities. The univariate data were analyzed using simple percentages. The qualitative data were transcribed and presented thematically based on research objectives. The qualitative and quantitative results revealed that traditional burial rites affect the wellbeing of the bereaved members, hence, generating a circle of poverty in the community. The study recommends that traditional burial rites should be controlled and supervised by government agencies such as the court where restriction can be placed on excessive burial rites while awareness creation should be done in churches, communities on the implication of this obnoxious practice that encourages these practices

Introduction and Statement of Problem

African traditional societies are known for their peculiar customary practices which in most cases are expressed in rites of passage that involve the use of rituals and ceremonies to mark life events or stages. Traditional burial rites and ceremonies involve the performance of rituals which in most cases demand the killing of animals and use of crops for (sacred) feasts (Ojua, 2012).

Traditional funerals in contemporary times have been described as been ostentatious and most challenging for the bereaved households since they will have to accumulate enough money to be able to organize/support a befitting funeral ceremony/rites for their departed relative (Okaba, 1997)

Anthropological studies present these rituals as a body of customary ceremonies prescribed for religion or conferment of social status. Traditional burial rites are cultural practices that symbolize how ethnic or tribal societies honour their dead (Ofor, 2012, Michelle, 2010). These rites in recent times tend to affect the economy of families that engage in traditional burial/funerals to a great extent.

There has been concern about the plight of expensive and exorbitant traditional burial rites to their beloved ones. Also, the exorbitant amount of money spent by families in burying their dead has been observed by the government. (<https://dialypost.ng/2019/04/10/anambra-assembly-passes-bill-banning-expensive-burial-ceremonies/>). The Government has stated that the extravagance display of wealth by the people during funeral ceremonies must stop. Effective legislation to control the excesses was necessitated since expensive burial ceremonies now lead people into pitiable situations and bondage.

In the light of the above, it seems that it is now more expensive to die than to live Okaba, (1999). This study therefore will be important as it will proffer solutions on how to reduce the cost of funeral ceremonies in our society to forestall untold hardship in bereaved household

In Ikwerre society, like in ethnic groups especially in Africa, it has been observed that some bereaved families sold their real estate, personal properties to meet up with the expectations of society as regards traditional burial rites. According to a Newspaper report, businesses had folded, children had been out of school and sudden deaths had been recorded because people could not wriggle out of the devastating effects of the huge expenses incurred during funerals of their loved ones. (<https://dialypost.ng/2019/04/10/anambra-assembly-passes-bill-banning-expensive-burial-ceremonies/>). This is done in their bid to meet the excessive conditions and demands to cover the cost of expensive burials which the society generally has imposed on families.

Rather than give our people decent and befitting living, Ikwerr society tends to lavish money on burial ceremonies by displaying extravagance. This conflicting interest has variously affected the socio-cultural life of the people. According to Okaba, 1999 and Akpan, 2016, sending off the deceased in contemporary times seems to be the most elaborate, expensive, and highly ritualized of all our social celebrations.

In this circumstance, ostentatious funerals ceremonies have instigated unnecessary competition which in turn has become a matter of status and recognition. In the light of these expensive funeral ceremonies, it has become more costly for an average Nigerian to die than to live. What seems to bother the Ikwerre society is not the living but the dead (Abanyim, 2012). The people worry more about the money they will spend to send the dead home. There is much worry and anxiety when a person is sick because of the socio-economic burden death will put on them when it happens. Hence we tend to agree with Okaba, Abanyim, and Akpan that it is costlier to die than to live.

This claim, however, is easily appreciated through objective observation of events when death occurs on how ceremonies reveal that the dead person is being celebrated from the day he died through elaborate and expensive burial rites.

The experience of poverty and hunger in the midst of plenty best captures the current socio-economic and political condition/situation of Nigeria. The unprecedented ostentation and lavish display of resources by bereaved families during funeral ceremonies stand to question the legitimacy of the outcry of miseries suffered by families (Uche, 2013, Eze, 2010).

The display of wealth manifested in the show of affluence, unhealthy competition, individualism, spiritual apathy, and social class inequality that have infiltrated the Ikwerre traditional burial ceremonies has made it more expensive to die than to live in recent times, making it a double tragedy for the bereaved family. The outcome of this prevailing situation stands to create a serious effect of impact on the bereaved family in Ikwerre, especially on the children.

In extant literature on traditional burial rites emphasized the socio-economic implication of elaborate burial rites (Akpan, 2016), the socio-economic and religious implication of elaborate burial rites on families (Eze,2010), why Nigerians bury their death (Okaba, 1997), and motives for lavish funerals (Uche, 2013). There has not been any existing study on Ikwerre ethnic nationality traditional funeral rites. This is the gap identified. From the foregoing, therefore, the study is poised to achieve the following objectives:

- 1) Elucidate the major forms of traditional funeral rites performed in Ikwerre ethnic society.
- 2) Explore the reasons for the practices of traditional burial rites among the Ikwerre society.
- 3) Examine the effect of traditional funeral rites on children's education among Ikwerre society
- 4) Investigate the influence of traditional burial rites on land dispute

Methodology

A qualitative and quantitative research method was utilized in conducting the study which was carried out in Ikwerre communities. The population of the study consisted of four hundred (400) participants drawn from a total population of four Local Government Areas using the Taro Yamane formula.

In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were the two major instruments used for data collection. In-depth interview (IDIs) respondents included community members as well as community stakeholders, while focus group discussion (FGD) consisted of homogeneous (male alone and female alone) and heterogeneous (both male and female) participants from each of the selected communities. These respondents were purposively selected with the assistance of the Research Assistant drawn from the selected communities who arranged initial meetings and liaised between the researchers and would-be respondents in each of the communities. Furthermore, the youth leaders in each of the communities arranged for all the ten (10) focus group discussion which was made up of heterogeneous (men and women) and homogeneous (with only men and women) participants.

Interviews and discussions were conducted in pidgin English and auto-recorded. The principal researcher and the research assistant were involved in data gathering, transcription, and translation of data into the English language as well as the examination and coding of key variables concerning the issues and themes covered by the research instruments. Thereafter, results were written from translated texts, coded master sheets, and researcher's memos to ensure that reported responses were contextual. Some of the findings with contextual connotations were reported verbatim, most were summarized and others that were not so relevant to the study objective were left out. Reported findings were then compared with those of previous studies on similar issues and discussed.

Findings and Discussion

The result of the study is discussed herein in four sections. First, the socio-demographic data of respondents, the major forms of traditional burial rights practices by the Ikwerre society, the effect of traditional burial rites on deceased family livelihood, and the impact of traditional burial rites on the education of the deceased children.

Socio-demographic Data of Respondents

Four hundred (400) respondents participated in this research. Out of the four hundred (400) respondents, a higher proportion of the respondents are male (68.5%) while the frequency for the female participants is less in comparison (31.5%).

The marital status of respondents shows that most of the participants were married (62%); followed by the frequency for single participants (23.75%) then the least frequency for respondents was the divorced (14.25%).

The distribution for the qualification of the respondents reveals that the majority of the respondents have attained OND/HND certificates (33.75%), followed by the frequency for respondents that have obtained BA degree (22.5%), followed by the category of respondents who have obtained BSc degree (20%), followed

by the category of respondents who have obtained a secondary certificate (12%), followed by the category of respondents that have attained MSc degrees (9%), and then the category of respondents who have obtained MA degrees (2.5%) with the least frequency for the Ph.D. (0.25%).

The analysis on the religion of respondents reveals that most of the respondents affirm being Christians (67%) while the least affirm being traditional worshippers (33%).

Forms of traditional burial rites practiced in Ikwerre society

Different forms of traditional burial rites in Ikwerre ethnic society

Forms of traditional burial rites	Frequency	Percentage %
Royal Highness (Olili Eze/Nye Nwe Ali)	169	42.25
Priests of deity (Olili Nye ji Owhor)	154	38.5
Member council of chiefs (Olili Nye Oha)	44	11
Family Head (Olili Nye ji Nkpara)	33	8.25
TOTAL	400	100

Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 201

The study indicated different forms of traditional burial rites practice in Ikwerre society. A total of 169 (42.25%) attested to the existence of Royal Highness (Olili Eze/Nye nwe Ali), 154(38.5%) attested to the practice of Priest of deity (Olili Nye ji Owhor), 44(11%) had witnessed that of member council of chiefs (Olili Nye Oha) while 33(8.25%) had witness family head (Olili Nye ji Nkpara).

Respondent's participation in various forms of Ikwerre Ethnic Society traditional burial rites

Forms of traditional burial rites	Frequency	Percentage %
Royal Highness (Olili Nye Eze/Nye Nwe Ali)	170	42.5
Priest of deity (Olili Ne ji Owlor)	148	37
Member council of chiefs (Olili Nye Oha)	53	13.25
Family head (Olili Nye Ji Nkpara)	29	7.25
TOTAL	400	100

Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2019

Table 4.9 here illustrates the analysis for the distribution of the respondents based on their participation in Ikwerre traditional burial rite. The result reveals that 170 respondents representing 42.5% of the total study population agreed that they have participated in Royal Highness traditional burial rites in Ikwerre, while 148 respondents representing 37% had been involved and participated in the traditional burial rites of priests of deity, 53 (13.5%) had participated in the traditional burial rites of member council of chiefs, while 29 (7.25%) had participated in the burial rites of a family member.

The major reasons for the practice of traditional funeral rites in Ikwerr Society

Category	Frequency	Percentage %
Culture	164	41
Leadership	39	9.75
Societal status	61	15.25
Belief system	136	34
TOTAL	400	100

Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2019

The above revealed that 164 respondents representing 41% of the sampled population indicated that culture is the reason why burial rite in Ikwerre has continued to exist, 39 respondents representing 9.75% of the total study population indicated leadership as the reason for the continues existence of traditional burial rites in Ikwerre, 61 respondents representing 15.25% of the total study population have indicated that societal status is the reason for the continues existence of the traditional burial rites in Ikwerre ethnic nationality, and 136 respondents representing 34% of the total study population indicated belief system as the reason for the continues existence of Ikwerre ethnic society traditional burial rites.

Traditional burial rites and land dispute in Ekwerre Society

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Agreed	105	26.25
Strongly Agreed	200	50
Disagreed	54	13.5
Strongly Disagreed	41	10.25
TOTAL	400	100

Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2019

The above table shows that 105 respondents representing 26.25% of the total study population agreed that Ikwerre traditional burial rites contribute to land dispute in our communities, while 200 respondents representing 50% of the total study population have strongly agreed that Ikwerre traditional burial rites contribute to land dispute leading to communal conflict in the communities. About 305 respondents representing 76.25% of the total study population agreed that Ikwerre traditional burial rites contribute to conflict which in turn leads to communal conflict.

On the contrary, 54 respondents representing 13.5% of the total study population have disagreed that Ikwerre traditional burial rites do not contribute to the dispute in communities, and 41 respondents representing 10.25% of the total study population strongly disagreed that Ikwerre traditional burial rites do not contribute to the dispute which eventually results to communal conflict. About 95 respondents representing 23.75% of the total study population disagreed that Ikwerre traditional burial rites contribute to disputes leading to communal conflict.

Influence of traditional burial rites on children education of the bereaved

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Agreed	122	30.5
Strongly Agreed	95	23.75
Disagreed	82	20.5
Strongly Disagreed	101	25.25
TOTAL	400	100

Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2019

The above table illustrates that 122 respondents representing 30.5% of the total study population agreed that traditional funeral rites affect children of education age of the bereaved household, whereas 95 respondents representing 23.75% of the total study population strongly agreed that children of education age of bereaved households are affected by traditional burial rites. About 217 respondents representing 54.25% of the total study population agreed that children/wards of education age are affected by traditional burial rites. On the other hand, 82 respondents representing 20.5% of the total study population have disagreed that traditional funeral rites do not affect children of education age in bereaved families, and 101 respondents representing 25.25% of the total study population strongly disagreed that traditional funeral rites do not affect children of education age. About 183 respondents representing 45.75% of the total study population have disagreed that children of education age in bereaved families are not affected by traditional funeral rites.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The report for the result of the qualitative data analysis is presented in this section. The qualitative data were reported thematically based on the research objectives

Interviews comprised of Focus Groups Discussions (FGDs) which dealt with experiences of bereaved families and stakeholders within Ikwerre society. The interviewing process was carried out by two individuals, the lead researcher who served as the moderator of the interview process and an assistant who handled note-taking and the recording of information.

All generated data were transcribed and displayed thematically. Three main questions dominated the interview sessions:

1 *What are the main forms of traditional burial rites in Ikwerre?*

This served as the opening question during the interview session and assessed respondents' level of understanding and subjective perception with regards to the various forms of burial rites in Ikwerre society. Subsequent and emphatic questions examined the practices of the various form of burial rites.

What in your opinion are the major forms of burial rites in this community?

This question sampled respondent's opinions about the various forms of burial rites that could contribute to expensive spending. The questions were structured bearing in mind other antecedents of burial rites outside socio-economic factors, thereby allowing for the identification of the interplay of other unidentified factors. Subsequent follow-up questions examined the characteristics of these forms of burial rites.

Why do people practice these forms of burial rites in this community?

This question sought respondents' opinions with regards to the reasons why Ikwerre people still practice these forms of burial rites. Its emphasis was on finding out why most people accepted such forms of burial rites.

What are the effects of these forms of burial right on the wellbeing of the bereaved members?

This question examined respondents' opinions with regards to the effect of these burial rites on the family's wellbeing.

What is the relationship between the land dispute and conflict arising from expensive burial rites?

This question allowed for contributions and opinions outside the identified factors and served to generate feedback that can be utilized for recommendations with regards to land dispute and conflict during burial rites and how to prevent land dispute.

Discussions and findings

This study investigated the relationship between traditional funeral rites and the socio-economic condition of families in Ikwerre ethnic society. The study design was a survey research method and examined using both quantitative and qualitative methods, looking at the relative impact of households that experienced bereavement and traditional ceremonies in the recent past. The major premise for the study was therefore based on the observed literature gap which addressed issues of traditional funeral rites within the unique socio-economic context of Nigeria. Furthermore, this study sought to provide a more all-embracing methodological framework that could effectively address the observed limitations of previous empirical work that emphasized only the quantitative methods thereby having a narrow view of the effect of traditional funeral rites on the bereaved families (especially of Ikwerre ethnic society) which is experienced almost on

daily basis. This study, therefore, offered a summarized opinion of the ongoing relationship between the variables examined and provided insight as to how they affect the target elements.

The result of the qualitative data further validates the findings of the quantitative data, which indicates that traditional burial rites influence the wellbeing of bereaved families. This is as findings from the qualitative data indicate support for a substantive relationship between traditional funeral rites and the socio-economic condition of families in Ikwerre ethnic society. The study, therefore, finds that there is a harmony of results between the quantitative and the qualitative analysis concerning the relationship between the variables of the study.

The study, therefore, affords further reiteration of the argument put forward by various studies (Nyemadi et al, 2015, Ukeh, 2013, Genyi et al 2010 and Anozie, 2014. Abanyim, 2012, Phay, 2013, Ossai, (2016), that traditional funeral rites contribute significantly to affecting the socio-economic condition of families in Ikwerre ethnic society.

Conclusion

The assertions put forward by this study with regards to the relationship between traditional funeral rites and socio-economic condition of families in Ikwerre ethnic society are based on the empirical evidence provided by the quantitative and qualitative results of the study. The conclusions are therefore drawn with respect to the research questions which are as follows:

The results of the study offer substantial support for the argument that traditional funeral rites affect the socio-economic condition of bereaved families in Ikwerre. Therefore, this study asserts that elaborate traditional burial rite is a significant antecedent to socio-economic condition of bereaved families.

Recommendations

The recommendations put forward herein are geared towards addressing the observed societal inadequacies which have over time become accepted and which continue to tolerate and make excuses for the practice of traditional burial rites.

Traditional burial rites should be controlled and supervised by government agencies such as court where restrictions can be placed on excessive burial rites.

There should be awareness creation in churches and in communities on the implication of some of the obnoxious cultural practices that reduce the family to a scenario of poverty.

Social sensitization activities should be encouraged through programs and trainings on the ills and dangers of traditional burial rites. Community members should also be encouraged to participate in such programs and training which should aim at a reorientation of the mind set and perception of the family and of relationships. It should entail actual demonstrations either through drama or actual testimonies of victims of negative effects of traditional burial rites on the building of harmonious society

References

- Abanyim, N. L. (2012). The Significance of Befitting Burial and its Effects on the Development of Tiv Society of Central Nigeria. *Journal of Africa Dynamics of Social Science Research*. Vol. 2. No. 2 pp, 46-58.
- Akpan, P. (2016). Socio-Economic Implication of Elaborate Funeral Rites among the Ibibio. *International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research*, Vol. 4, Issue 2, pp: (328-330).
- Eze, O. N. (2010). The Socio-Economic and Religious Implications of Burial and Funeral Rites in Onitcha Ebonyi State, Nigeria. Thesis submitted to the Department of Religion and Human Relations, in partial fulfilment of the award of Masters of Arts Degree in African Traditional Religion. Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka-Anambra State, Nigeria.

- Ofori, O. (2012). A Taste for Ghanaian Funerals and some Strange Burial Practices of the World.<http://www.oralofori.com/2012/02/taste-for-ghanaian-funerals-and-some-html>
- Ojua, T. A. (2012). African Sacrificial Ceremonies and Issues in Socio-Cultural Development. *British Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*. Vol. 4, No. 1.
- Okaba, B. (1997) *Why Nigerians Bury their money: An Ethnography of Ijo contemporary Burial Ceremonies*. Emhai Printing & Publishing Co. Choba Park, Port Harcourt, Nigeria.
- Okaba, B. (1999). Change and continuities in funeral celebrations: Evidence from the Mein-Ijo of Western Niger Delta of Nigeria. In S. Okodudu (Ed.). *Selected issues in third world development crisis evidence from Nigeria*. (pp. 264-284). Port Harcourt: Paragraphics.
- Uche, R. D. (2013). Motives for Lavish Funerals among the Nembe People of the Niger Delta Region in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. *American Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 33-37.