

What Problem do Women Seek Spiritual Help for?

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ABSTRACT Available literature showed that large proportions of attendees of spiritual houses are women and they attend these spiritual houses to seek help on diverse issues. The objective of this study is to investigate the problems that African women (particularly Yoruba women) seek spiritual help for. Using an ex post facto design and multistage sampling, 320 participants were drawn from the population of women help-seekers from 8 spiritual houses within Ibadan metropolis. Of this sample, 150, (50%) were singles, 90, (26.6%) were married, 50 (13.3%) were widowed; and 30, (10.1%) separated. Their ages ranged between 20–60 years, with lowest educational qualification being secondary school leaving certificate and highest educational qualification being Ph.D. Validated scale was used to collect data. SPSS was used to carry out a one way ANOVA and Scheffe's Post-Hoc statistical analysis of the data collected. Result of analysis revealed that topmost among the problems women seek spiritual help for is family problems, followed by health problem, career, finance and persecutory problems. Deriving from above, professionals should begin to focus on the development of therapeutic measures that will address specific problems as identified above and consideration should be given to the inclusion of spiritual therapy in their help-giving process.

INTRODUCTION

Research findings from both within and outside the African region have revealed that more women than men seek informal help, particularly from spiritual houses (Ahmed et al. 2001; MacKian 2003; Rahman 2000). That African women will prefer to seek help from spiritual houses for whatever problem they have should not pose any surprise to whoever is familiar with the African culture. This is owing to the fact that:

First, the believe in spirits and the supernatural is paramount in Africa. (Fadipe 1970). Second, the importance of spiritual houses to the help-seekers in the African continent cannot be overemphasized, most especially when one considers their role in counseling, help-giving and other social functions they perform in relation to help-seekers, most especially in a patriarchal culture where women are usually relegated and

discriminated against (Oladipo 2007). Third, Women are often perceived by other members of the society as having more problems than men and are not always given the chance of expressing themselves, hence the need to seek an alternative measure that will give them the desired peace of mind which has been proved to be found in the spiritual help-givers (Oladipo 2006).

Literature review has shown that considerable work has been done in the area of identifying the kind of problems that women seek help for and it has also been documented that the problems for which people seek help are divers (Koenen et al. 2003). The observation however, is that majority of these works were conducted outside the African continent and none was specifically done to explore the kind of problem that women seek spiritual help for (particularly in an African setting). It is therefore not known if African women help-seekers in an African setting will seek help for the same problem as reported by previous researchers from the West.

Researchers like Koenen et al. (2003) have reported that people seek help for problems ranging from physical problem, financial lack, having accommodation problem, how to deal with low self-esteem to depression or working through

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grief. Eades, (1980) also reported that the problems for which people seek help include (a) post-traumatic stress, (b) physical illness (e.g., cancer), (c) substance abuse (e.g., alcoholism), (d) vocational planning (e.g., applying for a job), (e) academic concerns (e.g., study skills), (f) affective concerns (e.g., anxiety and depression), and (g) loss (e.g., death and or divorce).

Despite the above, more still needs to be known in the area of the type of problems that African women seek spiritual help for. If researchers outside Africa have been able to identify most of the general problems that women seek help for, it is necessary also to find out if the same or similar problems are presented by women help-seekers in Africa. This is deemed necessary in order to find out the similarities and or differences that exist among help-seekers in Africa and other parts of the world. It is this researcher's believe doing this will enhance generalisability of research findings as well as the possibility of developing, adopting and applying the same therapeutic measures in helping or assisting help-seekers. This will not only save time and cost, it will also enhance the effectiveness of the help-givers.

The objective of this study, therefore, is to investigate the specific problems that African women (specifically Yoruba women) seek spiritual help for. It is the believe of this researcher that knowing the kind of problems that women present will assist help-givers to be better informed and equipped to provide a better and more efficient service to the help-seekers.

METHOD

The study was an ex post facto survey research with the study samples drawn from the population of women help-seekers in Ibadan metropolis a prominent city in the south-western region of Nigeria. The researcher did not consciously manipulate any variable in the study, therefore the use of the ex post facto design.

Participants: Participants in this study were 320 women help-seekers who were randomly selected from eight (eight) different spiritual houses within Ibadan metropolis. These were women who have gone for spiritual help from spiritual houses for more than twice. Their age ranged between 20 60years. 150 (50%) of the total sample were singles; 90 (26.6%), were married; 50 (13.3%) were widowed; while 30 (10.1%) were

separated. The lowest educational qualification of participants was the secondary school leaving certificate while the highest educational qualification was Ph.D.

Sampling Procedure: Multistage sampling method was employed for the purpose of this study. For example, women were the focus in this study and only those spiritual houses that conducted counseling and other related help services were included in the study. The study thus employed the purposive sampling method in the selection of the spiritual houses that were used in this study. Systematic random sampling method was used in the selection of the participants in this study.

The selection of the spiritual houses that were included in this study followed the pattern below. A list of registered spiritual houses was obtained from the Corporate Affairs Commission (C.A.C.). From this list, eight (8) spiritual houses that met the purpose of the study were randomly selected. Only those spiritual houses that hold counseling sessions for their clients were included in the study and not just those who conduct general services. The reason for this is that those who hold counseling sessions have more contacts with the help-seekers since the help-seekers have to come more than once to see the help-giver. This is not so in the case of general service where those who come for a service may not need to come again to the spiritual house.

The systematic random sampling method was used in the selection of participants in this study. The odd-even number method was employed in the selection of the 320 women who participated in this study. In most of the spiritual houses where samples were drawn, help-seekers were usually given numbers in the order of arrival. In some spiritual houses, the help-seekers who had odd numbers were sampled; while in some others those who were given even numbers were sampled (it was done in the alternate manner. For example, in spiritual house 'A' help-seekers who were given odd numbers and were willing to participate in the study were sampled. In spiritual house 'B' help-seekers who were given even numbers were sampled. In spiritual house 'C' help-seekers who were given odd numbers were sampled etc.). Thus, all the 320 participants were selected.

Instrument and Measures of Data Collection: The Women Spiritual Help Seeking Behavior Measure (SHSBM)), which was developed

by Oladipo (2006) was used as the instrument of data collection. It was a 39-item scale with five dimensions (family, career, health, finance and persecution). It has a Cronbach's Alpha reliability co-efficient of .98 and a Guttman split-half reliability of .96. The item total correlation for the scale was between .56 and .87. The scoring is in the likert format, ranging from '0' not applicable, to '5' strongly agree. An individual whose score is mean or above the mean on any of the five dimensions is regarded as being high on such a dimension and vice versa.

The scale can both be used as a summated scale (hence the possibility of getting composite score for participants). However, each of the five dimensions can be used independently, therefore, the psychometric properties of each of the dimensions was established and reported as follow. The dimension on family related problems has a Cronbach's Alpha reliability of .95 and a Guttman split-half reliability of .87. The dimension on health related problems has a Cronbach's Alpha reliability of .77 and a Guttman split-half reliability of .66. The dimension on finance related problems has a Cronbach's Alpha reliability of .77 and a Guttman split-half reliability of .85. The dimension on career related problems has a Cronbach's Alpha reliability of .86 and a Guttman split-half reliability of .85. The dimension on persecutory related problems has a Cronbach's Alpha reliability of .84 and a Guttman split-half reliability of .82.

Family issues in this paper include marital disharmony, having broken engagements or not having a suitor at all, childlessness, having in-laws that are non-cooperating and any such thing. Health issues in this paper include any form of sickness or bodily ailment that is capable of hampering the functionality of an individual. It may be as mild as headache and as serious as any of the terminal diseases. Career issues include experience of delayed promotion in the office, having problem with one's boss or co-worker, not deriving job satisfaction from one's job and any such matter. Finance issues include indebtedness; inability to meet one's financial needs such as house rent payment, electricity bill and the likes. Persecutory issues include feelings that witches and wizards are after an individual's life, feelings that evil spirits are obstructing one's fortune, feelings that curses are working against one's life.

Administration of the Questionnaires: This researcher, along with research assistants that have been trained for the purpose of this research went to secure appointment with each of the help-givers who were overseeing the spiritual houses that were sampled for this study for a date to administer the questionnaires on the respondents. On the appointed date for each of the spiritual houses, the questionnaires were taken down and administered to randomly selected participants who indicated their interest to participate in the study. 40 participants were sampled from each of the spiritual houses, thereby giving a total of 320 participants. The approximate time of completion of the questionnaire was 10minutes; it was therefore possible for this researcher to retrieve the questionnaires the same day and 100% return rate was recorded.

Statistical Analysis: The One way Analysis of Variance in conjunction with the Scheffe Post-Hoc test were used to analyse the data collected.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings from the analysis of data revealed that foremost among the problems that women seek spiritual help for are Family issues, followed by health, career, finance and persecutory issues respectively. The result is presented in tables 1, 2 and 3.

The findings from this research work partially buttress previous research findings as reported by Koenen et al. (2003) that the problem that people seek help for ranges from physical problem, financial lack, lack of accommodation problem, how to deal with low self-esteem to depression or working through grief and Eades (1980) who reported that the problems for which people seek help include (a) physical and emotional illnesses (health problem), (b) vocational planning (career problem), (c) Death of spouse and or divorce (family problem). The departure however was in the fact that the most prominent of the themes reflected in the problems that women seek spiritual help for is family problems. This finding should not be a surprise to any African; because of the African view of the family institutions as well as the importance attached to it as a social institution. For instance, despite the effects of globalization on most African family (Balogun and Olutayo 2007), the extended family system is still appreciated and practiced.

Table 1: The mean and standard deviation on each of the five dimensions of the women spiritual help-seeking measure

	<i>Family factor</i>	<i>Health factor</i>	<i>Finance factor</i>	<i>Career factor</i>	<i>Persecutory factor</i>
N	320	320	320	320	320
Mean	54.78	17.43	16.92	28.51	18.32
Std. Deviation	20.68	6.21	6.55	9.57	6.20

Table 2: Summary table showing the result of one way analysis of variance.

	<i>Sum of squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Squares</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Between Groups	427856.24	4	106964.059	485.001	.000
Within Groups	351767.36	1595	220.544		
Total	779623.60	1599			

Table 3: Summary table showing pair-wise comparison through Scheffe's Post-Hoc Test.

<i>Factors</i>	<i>Family</i>	<i>Health</i>	<i>Finance</i>	<i>Career</i>	<i>Persecutory</i>
Family		.00	-36.88*	-25.02*	-35.13*
Health	.00		-36.88*	-25.02*	-35.13*
Finance	36.88*	36.88*		11.86*	1.75
Career	25.02*	25.02*	-11.86*		-10.11*
Persecutory	35.13*	35.13*	-1.75	10.11*	

* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Historically, the Yoruba family was the basic political, religious, social, and economic unit in society and as such, was both a public and a private institution. It educated the young, functioned as an agent of socialization, served as the first level of government, and cared for the sick, the elderly, and the disabled. An individual could be a member of several families during his or her lifetime. One might grow up in one family, serve as apprentice in another, work as a joinman or maidservant in another, set up a business, get married and become head or mistress of one's own family, and in old age become a dependent in someone else's home. These various functions that the family performed and is still performing have made it vital to the Yoruba people in particular.

In the Yoruba families, there was a tradition of wives being subordinate to their husbands, but authority was more dispersed. Parental responsibilities such as the care and education of children were shared with a broader kin group. Grandparents and other older relatives passed on family and clan history and traditional lore. A Yoruba adage "It takes a village to raise a child," sums up this intertwining of family responsibilities. The Yoruba kinship connections extended laterally in one dimension, binding an individual to nearly everyone in the locality, and vertically (or historically), connecting the living with de-

parted ancestors and children yet unborn. Social behavior and familial obligations were determined by the nature of kinship links between individuals since a person could have hundreds of "fathers", "mothers", "uncles" and "brothers." As a community was regarded as an organic whole bound by intricate ties among relatives, so an individual's life within that community derived its deepest meaning from its unity with the communal existence (Babatunde 1992). Physical, emotional, and spiritual growth were marked by rites of passage that signified a person's progressive integration into the corporate body of kin, both living and dead.

The Yoruba's view of the family, which may probably account for the importance they have attached to it, could be explained with the following: First, the Yoruba culture demands that everybody should be married (except for those who by reason of their devotion to religion have decided to live a celibate life and those who are eunuchs). Any woman who does not get married at the culturally stipulated age of marriage for whatever reason) is usually stigmatized; she becomes a concern to everyone in her immediate and extended family (including members of her community). She is either perceived to be suffering from a curse, or that there are spiritual forces that are to be appeased for her to be freed; hence the help-seeking from spiritual houses. It is in-

interesting to note that though it has been established that so many factors may be responsible for the experience of delayed marriage for a woman and some women may not even desire to marry (Oladipo 2004), the prevalent practice has been that women seek for spiritual help to handle the problem of delayed marriage, despite the existence of other established help structures that could as well help.

In the Yoruba culture, the family is an agent of procreation; therefore, every marriage is expected to be 'fruitful'. In other words, every family must have children. Any marriage that fails to meet this expectation is an aberration in the Yoruba culture. Yoruba culture places extremely high value on children. It is safe to say that children are the highest good - of the Yoruba. An economic rationale underlies this value, as has been pointed out by Caldwell (1976) and other "price tag theorists" (Olusanya 1987), who imply that parents bear many children because they profit from them financially. Financial profit in the sense that the more children one has in the Yoruba setting, the larger his farmland because there will be more hands available to work on the farm (since the society then used to be more of an agrarian society).

One needs to quickly point out here that; arguments that parents bear children for crude economic incentives are not just demeaning but are also inaccurate. The value of children to their parents may better be expressed in spiritual terms. A spiritual view explains why women, whom Olusanya (1987) refers to as "fertility martyrs," continue to bear children when further child-bearing may actually not only be unprofitable, but also place women's health at risk. According to Babatunde (1992) and Hallgren (1991), the very nature of the immortality of the soul flows cyclically through the lineage through the birth of children, and not primarily through the type of after-life pictured by Christianity or Islam. In traditional Yoruba religion, the various component parts of the soul can continue the good life eternally in a cycle of three states the living, the ancestors, and the unborn awaiting reincarnation. Children reincarnate ancestors of their own lineage. Continuing participation in this cycle depends on bearing children, living a long, full life, and being venerated by one's descendants. Although the majority of Yoruba now belong to either Christianity or Islam, this researcher has observed that their feelings about the value of

children engendered by the earlier belief system do not appear to be greatly altered by new beliefs.

Because of the value placed on child bearing in the Yoruba family, even if the couples involved do not want to manifest anxiety for not having children, personal experience as well as the reported experience of others have shown that, parents, in-laws and significant others around such people usually mount pressure on them. Consulting a medical practitioner is not usually encouraged in a typical Yoruba family; the believe is that such a thing is a personal family issue that should not be discussed with no other except an agent of the supreme being referred to as 'Olodumare'. The spiritual is the ultimate, because it is believed that consulting with supernatural will give insight into what could be responsible for the childlessness being experienced by the individual experiencing it.

In addition to the above, family matters are not usually expected to be discussed with an 'outsider' who is not a member of the family. Therefore, if a woman has an irresponsible husband who is probably a drunkard, gambler, womanizer, impotent, or in-laws that are troublesome, the woman is not expected to wash her dirty linen outside, she is supposed to keep enduring it. Bottling such an experience of course can lead to serious emotional and other psychological disturbances. Hence, women see consulting with the spiritual help-givers as a way of relieving themselves of emotional tension and letting out the 'steam' by seeking for spiritual help from spiritual help-givers who are expected to keep whatever has been discussed with them with utmost confidentiality.

Research findings also showed that apart from family matters, women seek help more for health issues. The possible question arising as a result of this finding is 'why would women seek spiritual help to solve health problems in the twenty first century, despite the availability of medical centres?' The purpose of Yoruba traditional healers is not merely to counteract the negative forces of disease in the human body, but also to achieve spiritual enlightenment and elevation which are the means of freeing the soul. As with all ancient systems of medicine, the ideal of Yoruba herbology is to condition the body in its entirety so that disease will not attack it. In every traditional Yoruba society therefore, there are traditional healers who are highly revered

because they are believed to be powerful enough to diagnose and treat illnesses and diseases using their ability to communicate with spirits and receive instructions about treatment of illnesses and diseases (Abiobola 2001).

Divination is one important means of diagnosis employed by the traditional healers which has probably justified the high patronage they enjoy. A typical Yoruba desires to know what the spiritual cause of her problem is and she therefore consults with the traditionalists and not the orthodox medical practitioner because she believes that the orthodox medical practitioner is not sufficiently equipped to give spiritual explanation for the health problems she may be having. Even with the advent of Christianity and Islam help is still sought for spiritual healing based on the same believe that spiritual help-givers have the ability to diagnose the spiritual cause of the illness and proffer lasting solution based on spiritual recommendations (Buckley 1997, Gbadegesin 1991, Tariq-Sawandi 2001).

Research findings revealed that career and finance factors were not top on the list of the problems women presented in the spiritual houses. This of course can be explained based on the gender role allocation in the Yoruba culture. For instance, Yoruba women are both autonomous and subordinate to men. Autonomy arises through a fairly rigid sexual division of labor, which excludes women from most agricultural work, and means that traditional women work independently of their husbands and not jointly or cooperatively with them (Lloyd 1974). Although the man is the breadwinner yet, the woman does not stay idle. A woman traditionally expects her husband to provide her with capital to start trading or to establish her craft, she is her own supervisor and income derived from her labor is her own to spend on herself and her children, after fulfilling her obligations to share in purchasing food, clothing, and sundries.

An aspect of the division of labor that is often ignored but which puts women at some economic advantage in Yoruba land is that, except in the case of cash crops, Yoruba social expectation and conjugal etiquette forbids the farmer to carry his own farm products to the market to sell. Any man who does is regarded as a miser. Since it is the wife who sells these items, whatever she declares as a sales profit is what the man will accept. It is not unusual for women to use some of such funds to begin petty trading in other

goods as well. It follows therefore, that the typical Yoruba woman does not really have career problem and if there are financial problems, the extended family social network takes care of the financial needs.

Last on the list of the problems that women present in spiritual houses are persecutory feelings. One would have expected that this would be topmost on the list of the presented problems especially when one considers the perceived feeling that more diabolical powers are in operation in Africa. However the findings of this research did not support that persecutory feeling constituted so much problem to the women and this may be an indication that the popular saying that Yoruba women have more persecutory feelings may all have been an assumption.

CONCLUSION

Research findings as presented and discussed above revealed that topmost on the list of problems that Yoruba woman seek spiritual help for is family problem, followed in the order of importance by health problem, career, finance and persecutory feelings. This thus implies that help-givers (formal and informal) should begin to pay attention to these specific problems and device better means of helping women tackle these problems. Scholars should also begin to pay more attention to the inclusion of spiritual-therapy in their therapeutic packages since it is in consonance with the believe of the people.

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