

Traditional Health Healers, Mental Illness and Substance Abuse: A Study among Hausa-Fulani of Jigawa State in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT The traditional healers play a key role in healing the health problems of communities by using the parts of plants and animal products in Nigeria. The natives are in favour of traditional medicine in curing their health problems related to mental illness and drug addiction. Mental and drug abuse-related illnesses in some cultures are believed to be as a result of spiritual and family misfortune and only traditional healers have a solution. The study investigates the role of traditional healers in curing illnesses of local communities and drug addicts. An interview schedule was employed to collect data from mentally sick patients and focus group discussion was conducted with traditional healers to elicit the information. The present study revealed that the traditional health healers were well accepted by the communities. Hence, it is recommended that the integration of traditional healers in the conventional health care system in Nigeria is useful to make society healthier.

INTRODUCTION

Traditional healing is widely accepted in many communities worldwide. Before the advent of the British colonialism in Nigeria, there already existed traditional medicine practitioners who were consulted to cure various types of illnesses in the country (Winkelman 2001). Even though the Nigerian health system has adopted orthodox medical care in the country's health system, but still traditional healers are widely consulted for treatment of diseases such as the ones believed to be as a result of evil spirit attacks that are not easily curable by modern medicine in both rural and urban areas of Africa (Isola 2013). World Health Organization (2019) reported that roughly 80 percent of black African people use traditional medicine for primary health care. In Zimbabwe, 80 percent of the inhabitants' resort to traditional medicine when the treatment using modern orthodox medicine fails

the patients turned to traditional healers for remedy of their illnesses. The perception was that such illness is natural and therefore, only traditional healer can cure natural ailments (Kajawu et al. 2016) and similarly the same observation was made in Jagawa State of Nigeria in this study. This shows that the activities of traditional healers are very much acceptable in many cultures in the country. In Nigeria like in most African countries, traditional healers are the integral part of traditional institutions and communities. They are consulted to decide in the case of outbreak of epidemic diseases that are unknown to the community, they are the ones to be contacted in drug-related cases and the case of mental illness. As stated by Durga Rao and Singh (2017), the traditional healers were assumed to having supernatural powers for curing all kinds of sickness, especially in rural communities where people are still not comfortable with hospitals especially among the less educated. For instance, among Eggon people of Nasarawa State in Nigeria, there exists a traditional healing center located in form of a shrine where all kind of incurable diseases are cured by a traditional healer called Baba Alakyo. Baba Ajili who claimed to use supernatural powers to cure all kind of diseases especially those that cannot be treated using modern medicine are treated by him using traditional healing process (Utsua 2020). People

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prepare traditional medicine especially in the treatment of psychosomatic illnesses which are believed to be caused by the evil spirit and can only be cured through supernatural means and only traditional healers possess that supernatural power to cure that ailments (Durga Rao et al. 2006). Drug dependence is perceived as an ailment of spirit; therefore, those seeking the therapy have to consult spiritual and faith-based traditional healers for rehabilitation. Diagnosis and treatment of neuropsychiatric and drug-induced psychoses vary according to the culture of the given community. At these traditional healing centers, inmates were given various treatments to cure their illnesses based on the conditions and needs of each patient. The traditional healers determine the category of ailment and decide how it can be treated (Mbwayo et al. 2013). Most of the traditional healers are religiously inclined and they use their religious belief system to cure their patients. It would be a way forward to treat mental illness and mental disorders of drug addiction by using religious beliefs and practices. A study by Frame (2003) reveals that 88 percent of the global populations follow one kind of religious belief or the other, therefore, treatment of mental illnesses and drug abuse cases using religious and traditional healing practices can be easily accepted as a feasible solution to mental health issues.

A developing country like Nigeria can hardly do without the services of traditional healers going by the level of government funding allocated to the mental health sector annually which is grossly insufficient, there is a specific budget line for mental health, however, in 2006 it was estimated at 3.3 percent of the country's health budget (Agboola et al. 2018). The services of the traditional healers are much needed in Jigawa State where there is no drug de-addiction centre. Despite the eminent importance of the traditional healing centers in Nigeria, the practice has been accused by civil and human rights organisations for human rights violations during the treatment process. Human Rights Watch (2019) reported that thousands of mentally sick patients were locked and chained in different rehabilitation centers across Nigeria. The inmates suffer from inhuman and degrading treatments in most of these centers including government-owned rehabilitation centres and neu-

ropsychiatric hospitals, faith center both Muslim and Christian healing centers. This necessitated the government to order for the closure of these centers. Unfortunately, as no alternative solution was provided by either the Nigerian Government or the human rights organisations, the patients were left at the mercy of God. This study investigates the effectiveness of the services rendered by the traditional healers and the reason why people adopt traditional healing process and their acceptance of the traditional healers in the treatment of substance abuse-related illnesses and other health disorders in Hadejia Emirate of Jigawa State in Nigeria.

Objectives

- The objectives of the present study are:
- ◆ To examine the role of the traditional healers in curing the mental illness
 - ◆ To discuss the role of traditional healers in curing substance abuse disorders

METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted in Yalwa Village Traditional Healing Center of Hadejia Emirate Jigawa State in Nigeria owned and managed by the traditional healer for over 70 years as he claims to have inherited it from his deceased father for the treatment of substance abuse patients and those affected from the evil spirits and other mental disorders. The healer is called *Malam Mai Aljannu*, means A Man who works with spirits or a friend of spirits. Mix method was adopted and respondents were purposively selected for collection of data. A sample of 55 mentally sick persons was covered and Mini-International Neuropsychiatric Interview (MINI-PLUS) was used to interview the patients, MINI-plus is a small structured interview schedule developed by Sheehan et al. (1998) in the USA and Europe. In-depth interviews were conducted with 5 traditional healers and a Focus Group Discussion was conducted with local traditional healers to elicit information about healing practices and curative measures for the mental illness and disorder of substance abuse in Jigawa State of Nigeria.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Quantitative Data

Table 1 shows that the majority (80%) of the clients were males and the remaining 20 percent of the clients were females. With regard to age, 36 percent of the clients were between the age range of 38-42 years, 27 percent were within 33-37 years, 18 percent were within the age of 28-32 years, 11 percent were between 23-27 years and those clients whose ages range between 18-22 years constituted 7 percent. Additionally, the marital status of the respondents shows that the majority (42%) of the clients were divorced, 36 percent were single and the remaining 22 percent were married. Regarding the educational

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents (N=55)

Characteristics	Number	Percentage
<i>Sex/Gender</i>		
Male	44	80
Female	11	20
<i>Age (in years)</i>		
18-22	4	7
23-27	6	11
28-32	10	18
33-37	15	27
38-42	20	36
<i>Marital Status</i>		
Married	12	22
Single	20	36
Divorced	23	42
<i>Educational Level</i>		
Primary	2	4
Secondary	2	4
Islamic education	31	56
No education	20	36
<i>Occupational Status</i>		
Farmer	20	36
Government work	1	2
Business	5	9
Private work	10	18
No job	19	35
<i>Monthly Income</i>		
≤ 9,000	2	4
9001 -14,000	10	18
14,001-19,000	5	9
19,001-24,000	15	27
24,001-29,000	5	9
29,001-34,000	7	14
34,001-39,000	3	5
39,001-44,000	3	5
44,001 and above	5	9

level of clients, more than half (56%) have none formal Islamic education, 36 percent were illiterates and 4 percent completed primary and secondary respectively. With regard to occupation, 36 percent were farmers, 35 percent were jobless. Furthermore, 18 percent of the clients were in private sector which included carpentry, blacksmith, hard labor, bricklaying, and lorry driving. 9 percent of them were involved in various business activities such as butchery, poultry, and grocery. Regarding the monthly income, majority (27%) of the clients earned 20,001-24,000-Naira, 18 percent earned 10,001-14,000 Naira, 14 percent received 30,001-34,000 Naira and 9 percent reported 15,001-19,000, 25,001-29,000 and 45,001-49,000 Naira respectively. And 5 percent reported 35,001-39,000 Naira and 40,001-44,000 Naira respectively and the remaining 4 percent reported 5,001-9,000 Naira.

Table 2 shows the reasons for visiting the healing center. Majority (60%) of the clients reported that they visited the healing center for medication to get rid of their illnesses and the remaining 40 percent reported that they visited for both medication and learning Islamic education at the healing center since the traditional healer teaches informal Islamic knowledge.

Table 2: Reasons for visiting traditional health healing center (N=55)

Reason	Frequency	Percentage
Medication	33	60
Learning Islamic Education	2	4
Medication and Learning	20	36

Table 3 indicates the causes of mental disorder of the inmates which necessitated their referral to the healing center. Forty-five percent got affected with illness due to substance abuse, 28 percent were due to spiritual problems and 10

Table 3: Causes of illness (N=55)

Causes	Frequency	Percentage
Mental disorder due to spiritual illness	15	28
Mental disorder due to drug abuse	25	45
Mental disorder due to witchcraft	5	9
Mental disorder due to charming	10	18

percent reported that they were charmed by those who were into rivalry relationship in their daily activities and the remaining 9 percent reported witchcrafts. They believed that only traditional healers could rescue their situations.

From Table 4, it is observed that 27 percent of clients suffered from depression due to drug abuse and madness or severe mental disorders respectively. 18 percent suffered from an attack of the evil spirits. 18 percent reported anxiety due to drug abuse and general mental disorders due to both drug abuse and evil spirit attack respectively. And the remaining 9 percent reported that they got affected by mild mental disorders caused by only evil spirits attack. Regarding client satisfaction on traditional health services rendered by healers, about 95 percent of clients were satisfied with the treatment and healing process rendered by the traditional healers and the remaining 5 percent reported not satisfied with the services rendered by the traditional healers.

Table 4: Types of illness healed by the traditional healer (N=55)

Type of illness	Frequency	Percentage
Drug addiction due to depression	15	27
Mild mental disorder due to spirit attack	5	9
Severe mental disorder due to spirit attack	15	27
Drug addiction due to anxiety reaction	10	18
General mental disorders due to drug addiction and spirit attack	10	18

Qualitative Data

The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was conducted with 5 traditional health healers to identify the type of mental disorders of their clients. It is observed that the type of medication they were receiving for treatment of their addiction, the clients were given traditional solutions that were made up of roots and fibers of plants and shrubs. There is also an Islamic medicine which is prepared from the verse of the Holy Qur'an. The traditional healer recites a verse of the Holy Qur'an and those who can neither read nor write, are taught how to read and write in

Arabic as part of healing practice. Regarding their satisfaction before and after medication, the entire inmates of the center appreciated the treatment they were given and believed to have enjoyed and benefited from the medicine. One respondent who was there as a result of drug abuse narrated in local language as *kafin akawani nan inna cikin wani yanayi bana iya gane dare da rana amma yanzu Alhamdulillah inna iya kirga kwanaki bakwai na sati* (before my family brought me here, my condition was terrible, I was unable to differentiate between day and night. But now I can recognise even 7 days of the week). Concerning the type of drug, he took which led to his mental illness he narrated that he took a lot of concentrated *Zakami* (*Datura Stramonium*), *Zakami* is a local plant mostly grown in the bush. The drug addicts boil the leaves and seeds of this plant and then take the concentrated concussion. The client further reported *bayan Nasha Zakami sai gabadaya na haukace har nafara tafiya tsirara daganan nafara dukam mutane. Wannan yayi sanadiyar rabuwarmu da Matata ban sami saukiba saida yan'uwana suka kawoni nan* (when I drank this concussion, I ran mad, I move naked and even started harming my family members, my wife had to run back to her parents' home and leave me alone until my family rescue my life and brought me to this healing centre).

Treatment of Mental Disorders by the Traditional Healers

The technique adopted for the cure of mentally retarded patients varied according to the severity and the symptom of the sickness. According to the head of the center, they, first of all, started with Qur'an recitation to determine if the cause of the ailment is an evil spirit attack, the sick person will show a sign, and then they keep reciting until the evil spirit leaves the client. They are given herbs both in liquid and powdered form by the healer, applied on the body of client and the clients are given this liquid form for internal use and powder is given for inhalation. There were 3 large traditional pots full of liquid herbs in the rehabilitation center that were given to the clients as per the symptoms. If they discover the illness was as a result of black magic, then the healers visit the client at

his home and perform recitation to heal the illness of the client.

Payment for Treatment

The traditional healers do not specify the consultancy fee and they feel that it is a service to society to make clients healthier through indigenous practices in the name of God, though the families of clients pay them in the form of cash or kind to the healers as a token of love. The families present a goat or chicken and even foodstuff to healers in kind form. Secondly, after recovering from mental illness, the clients work in the farmland of traditional healers before leaving for their homes. The mentally ill persons are fed by the Yalwa (Traditional Healing Center) during the treatment. The healers maintain this centre on the basis of offerings from the client families, local communities after harvesting crops, religious charities as part of Zakat (Islamic Legal Charity). Rajpramukh (2005) mentioned that the Shaman never requests payment of the services rendered to the patient, only voluntary offerings are accepted.

The socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents show that males are the majority both among the traditional healers and clients. Similar observations were made by Asuzu et al. (2019) and Baratti-Mayer et al. (2019). The age of the clients shows that more than half (63%) are between the ages of 33-42 years. Divorce rate is high due to their health conditions which necessitated the divorce because of their mental illness, which cannot cater to the responsibilities and burdens attached to the matrimonial home. The majority of the clients were illiterates and had no formal education except Islamic education and 36 percent could neither read nor write even in Arabic. Majority of the clients perceived that their mental illnesses cannot be cured in the modern medical centers except in traditional healing centres. The same was found by Durga Rao and Singh (2017). Durga Rao (2019) state that the traditional healers are well respected because of the supernatural powers they possess in healing the incurable diseases. This is because of the value attached to the center performing dual functions- healing and Islamic teaching. The type of mental retardation clients was suffering from were disorders associated with drug abuse, most-

ly depression, anxiety disorders, and psychoses and spiritual illnesses. The traditional healer who owns the center is called *Malam Mai Al-jannu* (A man who work with spirits or a friend of spirits) as he treats the complicated illnesses believed to be related to the evil spirits. He talks to them and asks them to leave his clients. In the northern Andaman Islands, the traditional healer is named *Oko-jumu*, means a man who speaks with spirits from a dream. He talks with the spirit through a dream or physically in the bush where he performs his healing work (Rajpramukh 2005). The present study revealed that the majority of the respondents and the entire traditional healers believed that their illnesses were due to drug abuse. An observation is made by Akol et al. (2018) that the client's illnesses are due to non-spiritual and non-social causes and drug abuse is the main cause of the client's mental disorders. The healers were found applying dual methods for the treatment of their clients, both herbal medicine and Islamic types of medication are practised in healing mental illness. Similar studies were conducted in Ghana by Ae-Ngibise et al. (2010) and Read (2019) and they found that the traditional healers applying dual healing process both faith healing and parts of animal and plant products for curing mental disorders. The clients show their satisfaction with the treatment given by the traditional healer. It is evident that clients do patronise and prepare traditional healing than conventional medicine for obvious reasons that services rendered by the traditional healers are affordable and mostly free.

CONCLUSION

The present study has examined the roles, importance, and patronage of traditional medicine healers in curing mentally sick persons suffering from various mental illnesses. The findings showed that there were more male than female patients in the traditional healing center and the majority was between the age group of between 33 years and 42 years, farming is their main occupation and a sizable number of unemployed were among the clients. Majority of the clients were divorced and a sizable number single. The high rate of divorced cases may not be unconnected to the problem associated with the mental retardation which appears to be a serious issue to cope with; this may necessitate the couple to demand a divorce. The major mental

health defects were depression, psychoses, neuroses, and the major causes of mental disorders were due to drug abuse and evil spirit attacks. The traditional healers used dual methods, both herbal and religious practices, to heal the clients. It is noticed that traditional medicine is affordable, especially for low-income poor clients as compared to orthodox modern conventional Medicare. Their services are mostly either free or affordable to bear, and their clients are housed and fed by the traditional healers almost for free. But the families of clients, local communities and donors offer something, either kind form or cash, to these centers for their maintenance as a charity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

An observation is made that the local communities are in favor of traditional health healing practices than modern Medicare for mental illness-related issues. Therefore, it is recommended that helpful practices may be encouraged to harmonize community health. The traditional health healers may also be involved in a modern Medicare system to strengthen the mental health programs and de-addiction programs in Nigeria. Further research is recommended to address the unattended mental health issues with reference to drug abuse and the role of traditional health healers in community medicine.

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