

The Influence of Traditional Medicine on Healthcare Delivery System in Ibibioland

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Abstract

Traditional medicine is a cultural heritage, serving majority of the people in Ibibioland. Although, it has come a long way from the times of our ancestors, not much significant progress on its development and utilization had taken place due to colonial suppression on one hand, foreign religions in particular, lack of patriotism and political will of our government, and then on the other hand, the carefree attitude of most Ibibio medical scientist of all categories. It traditional medicine exhibits great merits and its value can be exploited for the health system. This work adopts phenomenological approach in taking the subject matter. Traditional medicine has its potency and prospect, since it is the first choice healthcare that is available to the rural populace and that the government should bring it into the mainstream of healthcare system for sustainable development of the rural dwellers, and by so doing, it will go a long way to alleviate the problem of the people especially those in the rural setting.

Keywords. Traditional Medicine, Healthcare Delivery System

Introduction

Traditional medicine, as a major African socio-cultural heritage, which obviously has been in existence for several hundreds of years, was once believed to be primitive and was viewed erroneously especially by missionaries and the colonialists (Elujoba, 2006). However, today the traditional medicine has been brought into focus for meeting the goal of a wider coverage of primary healthcare delivery, not only in Ibibioland but also to various communities in Akwa Ibom State. In Ibibioland, "traditional medicine is the first choice of healthcare treatment for at least majority of her people who suffer high fever and other common ailments" (Ukpong, 2009). It is highly acceptable and patronized by the Ibibio.

"Ibibio ancestors claimed to have been well informed by God Almighty in their times on the doctrines, theory and practices of traditional healthcare, they achieved immense success in many fields" (Williams, 1994). They did very well especially in healing, maintaining good health, longevity in the society and promoting social well-being, producing efficacious medicine for prevention and protection of the physical and the spiritual wellbeing of the people. Their research was based on the prevailing circumstances and available materials. Today, Ibibio ancestors are still remembered for their legacies which make them become great in

traditional medicine. There is a strong believe in ancestors veneration (Oko,2019:69). Traditional medicine had been practiced across the world in diversity. We have our own ways and methods handed down to us from generation to generation which too was entrenched in the use of herbs, roots, barks, animal parts, organic and inorganic matters. By necessity of civilization we were forced to accept foreign religion which as a solvent diluted the practice, it never meant dropping it.

Ekong (2005), defined” traditional medicine as the sum total of knowledge or practice whether explicable or inexplicable used in diagnosing, preventing or eliminating a physical, mental or social diseases which may rely exclusively on past experience or observations handed down from generation to generation, whether verbal or in writing”.

In Ibibioland, traditional medicine has developed in various communities in response to the health needs of the people. There is a common saying that says "*se iquot ayem idia, Abasi Isikongo ke eyong eto*" meaning" what the toad wants to eat, God will not put on the tree top". Even if such need of the toad develops or grows in space, they will surely come to the ground, if they are to satisfy the needs of the toad. Many communities have therefore, since creation, developed various traditional systems using locally available resources for the alleviation of her health problems. The development of traditional medicine in Ibibio has led to various healers, the various healing methods, strategies and medicine and remedies now known. Most of the people in the rural areas do not have access to orthodox medicine and it is estimated that majority of the populace still prefer to solve their health problems consulting traditional healers. Where access to orthodox medicine exist the rising cost of importer medications and other commodities used for medicine have posed a big problem. Besides, many rural communities have great faith in traditional medicine, particularly the inexplicable aspects as they believe that it is the wisdom of their forefathers which also recognize their socio-cultural and religious background. In my observation, recent reports show that more people in Ibibioland have embraced traditional medicine, there is abundant justification for the use of herbs by the various traditional healers. This paper applies a phenomenological approach in taking the work, and this method will help to develop human consciousness and self awareness. The purpose of this paper is to identify various ways by which traditional medicine could thrive in the face of rapid social change.

Ibibio Traditional Medicine

The Ibibio rendition of medicine is "ibok," like most Ibibio words, is an ambiguous concept with varied meanings depending on the context. It can mean orthodox medicine, herbs,

juju and so on depending on the usage. "Ibok" also applies whether as creative, preventive, harmful or as prophylactics. In this work, 'Ibok' will be used to cover all these. Offiong. (1991), argued that "ibok" as used by the Ibibio is an approximation of the word "magic" which is defined as, "supernatural devices employed by man to achieve his end with the help of spirits and gods or attempt by man through the aid of the gods and spirits to tap and control the supernatural resources of the universe for his personal benefit".

"Ibok in this case is used to control impersonal forces and supernatural beings. This dynamism is affected through ritual actions of incantation (that is, calling on the deities and ancestors to aid in the art), prayers, worship and sacrifice. "Ibok" can be classified into two broad types: medical (curative) and magical. The magical "Ibok" is subdivided into benevolent or benign and malevolent magic is referred to as "Ifot" (Sorcerer) and "Ifot" (Witch), while the causative medicine is performed by "Mbia Ibok"(Traditional doctors or healers or herbalists). In some cases, the "Abia Ibok" practices both malevolent and benevolent medicine (they protect, cure and can equally kill or harm). So, "Ibok can be used positively to cure and heal and also negatively to harm or kill. Whether in negative or positive practices, "both involve the ritual manipulation of objects such as concoction of various supernatural endowed objects, the use of word formulae and a reliance upon a wide variety of actions, such as dancing, fasting, deep breath, hypnosis, and other techniques intended to affect normal physiological and psychological functioning as a means of increasing the operator's magical powers".

The above description of "Ibok" actually brings it in close affinity with religion and magic, but cannot be identified with either religion or magic as Offiong (1991) does. Magic, for instance, places greater emphasis on manipulation rather than in supplication as a means of controlling the supernatural. Religion on the other hand, aims at supernatural control through a request in a form of such rituals as prayers and sacrifice directed at the supernatural beings whose response is determined by its own independent will. But considering the formalistic nature of magic, consisting a variety of ritual methods whereby events can be automatically influenced by supernatural means (Lessa & Voght, 1958). It is not plausible to identify "Ibok" with magic. Moreso, as the Ibibio vehemently repudiate the idea by the expression that "magic" Idoho "Ibok" (Magic is not Medicine). Magic is believed to be intrinsically a tricky art that is essentially manipulative.

"Ibok" on the other hand is a serious affair with existential implication and importance, hence the reference and deification of 'Abia Ibok' (Medicine man) among the Ibibio. It does appear more pertinent to identify 'Ibok Ibibio' with religion especially giving the pervading influences of religion on all aspects of Ibibio life and giving its supplicatory character.

Ibibio Traditional Medicine and its Potency

In Ibibio communities, traditional medicine has demonstrated its contribution to the reduction of excessive mortality, morbidity and disability due to diseases such as Malaria, tuberculosis, sickle cell anemia, diabetes, jaundice, measles, diarrhea and mental disorder. Traditional medicine reduces poverty by increasing the economic well-being of communities and developing health systems by increasing the health coverage of the people. Ibibio people have used traditional medicine to combat the diseases affecting the health of their families since time immemorial. Since it was the only form of medicine used for the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of social, mental and physical illnesses. It is accessible, acceptable and affordable by the majority of the populace. Today, majority of the population living in Ibibio communities use traditional medicine since it is very affordable and the only source of hope for the management and treatment of some priority diseases. Anyanwu (2008), opined that 'perhaps, the most important element of development in the traditional society is the traditional medicine with the advent of modern medicine, the influence of traditional medicine was not extinguished, rather all are complemented by the other'. He further elaborated thus;

For certain illnesses that are not treated by the use of Modern medicine, he traditional medicine are used as an Alternative. To buttress the laudable contribution of the traditional Medicine in the healthcare system, the World Health Organization (WHO), recognized the potential of African traditional medicine, When in 1974, it passed into law a resolution to exploit herbal Medicine and this would help the goal of health for all.

The use of traditional medicine with modern medicine is evident and the result on the improved health care is very glaring. Oluwabamide (2003), opined that "the early men lived in harmony with their environments." This entailed the use of herbs to enhance their health. He further said that different climatic and topographic conditions all over the country gave rise to different vegetations, leading to the use of different traditional herbs to treat similar ailment in different parts of Nigeria. In contemporary Nigeria today, there is no doubt about the efficacy of traditional medicine. In fact, traditional medicine has continued to appeal to the people in spite of the availability of western medicine. Ailments which orthodox medical practitioners are not able to handle are sometimes taken to traditional medicine practitioners who provide lasting solutions. It is pertinent to state categorically that, majority of Nigerians still lives in rural areas and not in urban centers and it is the traditional healing method that has adequately catered for the majority of the rural population. Nana (2010), opined that "to the majority of the rural dwellers, trado-medicine is all in all and has not failed them in any cases". In fact,

judging from the current Nigerian beliefs and practices relating to illness the majority of Nigerian in the urban centers still relies heavily on the potency of the traditional healers in spite of the proximity of hospitals. Lateef Jakande, a one-time governor of Lagos State, in the address he delivered during the inauguration of the board of traditional medicine in April 11, 1980, indicates that 60% of babies born in Lagos State are delivered outside the hospital and maternity homes. He emphasized that most of these were probably delivered by traditional doctors or midwives (Adetola and Akinyemi 1982).

Although some of the traditional healers traced their power and sources of healings to spiritual entities, the bulk of the traditional healers make use of bones of animals, herbs, leaves, roots, seeds, fruits, and barks of various plants. Traditional medicine thus, has contributive potentialities because concoctions made out of these plants and animals have both therapeutic and potentialities. For example modern medicine can take advantages of the therapeutic and anti-therapeutic of any research conducted in the medical plant culture by the country. This apart, the country will gain immensely on foreign exchange preservation on drugs, preserving the plants, animals and materials that are of medical value expanding the horizon of employment as well as reducing the "out of stock" syndrome in our hospital (Nana, 2010).

Ways that Traditional Medicine Thrive in Ibibioland in the Face of Rapid Social Change

Various reasons have been given in favor of the patronage of traditional medicine; investigation carried out really confirms that people's beliefs in trado-medicine cannot be over emphasize. People visit trado-medicine practitioners when they seek to know the cause of their illness and those responsible for it. In view of the fact that the traditional healer is capable of mentioning the cause of sickness, patients who have suffered persistent attack from a particular ailment would definitely want to know their fate. This is what doctors in specialist hospitals cannot tell in some cases, especially for witchcraft-induced illness. According to Mume (1982), "the patient does not consider the "illness" as something to be cured or controlled but as something to be understood and acknowledged.

According to Isu (1998), the story is evidently clear of a woman who got married in 1982. "The couples we're like intoxicated, always exploring new ways to enrich their love life." They agreed that making babies will add new spices to their life but pregnancy could not come easily, after six years of a blissful marriage not being able to conceive became a nightmare for her and she went to the hospital, but was to no avail. A friend took her to a traditional medicine man, the herbalist prescribed some herbs and she took them. Three months after, she became pregnant and delivered a bouncing baby boy. She exclaimed "we return bemused to our familiar

life, but nothing was the same again." Beyond the cloudy spectrum of skepticism that beclouds traditional medicine, the truth is that an appreciative dawn of increased patronage is hovering today. Why not? With the bewildering ailments that plague mankind, defying orthodox solution, medical situations like barrenness, male infertility and herpes have been handled by traditional medical practitioners. According to professor Olikoye Ramsome Kuti (pioneer Newspaper,1998), in an interview with BBC in 1991, "as at now, many communities have only traditional healers to look after them. Traditional medicine thrives where scientific medicine has not established itself". Since traditional medicine is still patronized by a large population, there is a great number of people who described themselves as traditional medicine practitioners and those who describe themselves as such include, traditional birth attendants, bone-setters, herbalists, mystical healers and Oracle diviners.

The art of traditional medicine has continued to exist even in the face of rapid social, scientific development and modernization. This is no doubt, unconnected with the fact that it is efficacious. Its patronage has survived because it is part of the culture of the people. It is therefore, a way of life which has resisted alien influences because of the faith of the people in it. In fact, traditional medicine has continued to appeal to the majority of people both educated and uneducated, rich and poor alike, despite the availability of Western or orthodox medicine. This is as a result of the fact that traditional healers give more attention to their clients; this lead to their success and increasing patronage According to Etim (2005):

Despite the restriction and difficulties imposed on Traditional Medicine, as a result of the introduction of Western Orthodox medicine, traditional medicine practitioners have continued to uphold the dignity of their profession. They have also continued to enjoy the patronage of every Segment of the society- both high and low income earners in every sector of the society.

In another development, Nana (2010), affirmed that "traditional practitioners seem to cater for certain health needs of patients in Mbiabong cultural milieu in which Western orthodox medicine falls shorts of expectation." In some big cities like Lagos, Abuja, Kaduna, Kano, Asaba and Port Harcourt where Western orthodox medicine facilities are available within easy reach of inhabitants, a large percentage of the people still visits traditional practitioners or have traditional medicine secretly brought to them when they are in the hospitals. The point here is that there are some areas of proficiency where traditional medicine have leverage over orthodox medicine, therefore, to a majority of the rural dwellers, trado-medicine is all in all and has not failed them. In fact, judging from the current Nigerian life's and practices relating to illness, a good number of Nigerians in the urban centers still rely

heavily on traditional healers despite the proximity of large teaching hospitals. Most patients also see the personal attention of the healer in a fairly familiar environment as something that gives them a greater sense of security. They are of the opinion that the attention they receive in most trado-medical centers is absent in government hospitals, where there are too many patients for just a handful of medical practitioners. Also, patients who are believed to have breached one taboo or another prefer traditional treatment. Here the traditional doctor is able to name the cause of the illness and what must be done to appease the offended deities or ancestors. Uyanga (1977), confirmed one salient point about traditional healing by stating that, "an important element in the curing process of traditional doctors is the act of knowing what is wrong with the patient".

Practitioners of Traditional Healthcare Delivery in Ibibioland

a) Traditional birth attendants (TBAs), (Mbiauman). Traditional pediatricians, obstetricians and massagers.

These people are a set of traditional medical practitioners, mostly women. They attend to babies and children with health problems such as Malaria, stomachache, teeth problem and convulsion. They are specialists in herbs, they also give herbs to make teething easier for babies, they are seen to be kind, good, sensitive and treat other children as there are theirs. Those in this group are highly respected in the communities.

The birth attendant helps the pregnant women in delivering their children. Their services are mainly utilized in the rural areas and are likened to the midwives in orthodox medicine. They give herbs to the pregnant woman during pregnancy to aid safe deliveries, help during labour or delivery, and they give herbs to the mother and child after delivery. The TBA's continue to monitor and care for the new babies and mothers until they are sure they can survive on their own. The massagers help the pregnant women to position their babies well in the womb. They use their hands to turn breached babies for safe delivery.

b) Traditional Gynecologists: Traditional Gynecology is the branch of traditional medicine that is concerned with conditions and diseases specific to women. These native doctors treat women with gynecological problems such as menstrual disorder, miscarriages and also problems related to pregnancy. They give soft herbs to make the babies of most pregnant women light and to aid the removal of excess water. This is why oedema (excess of hid in the body tissue) was rare among the pregnant women in the olden days in Ibibioland. They also give herbs to reduce the size of the fetus in the womb. This is to eliminate problems and to make the babies come out easily during delivery. Herbs are also

given to widen pelvic bones of women with narrow pelvis so as to enhance natural delivery instead of the caesarean section (CS). Also the gynecologists have techniques of turning babies that are not in the right positions.

- c) **Traditional Orthopedic Doctors (Tod)/ Bone Setters:** This act is a community medicine and like divination and herbal practice, runs in family lineages and handed down from generation to generation. They are set to native doctors that repair broken bones that were damaged during accident. Bones are repaired by using different means, ranging from rituals to physical packaging of broken legs. In this acts of healing, magical, religious inclination and physical healing are merged together to achieve good results. There is something magical about the power of a bone setters and mode of healing is inexplicably by orthodox medicine. Some patients' legs that would have to be amputated in orthodox hospitals are being healed perfectly by the traditional bone setters and such patients are now able to make use of their broken legs. The healing process is not necessarily a learning process but a gift which is believed to be held by a common deity worshipped by the lineage. The deity gives it to anyone that is worthy among members of the family. They are not supposed to charge exorbitant fees for their services. The act has supernatural bearings. For instance, in treating a patient, a chicken's leg will be packaged alongside the patient's leg and as the chicken's broken leg(s) starts healing up, so also the patient's broken part(s). (Nana, 2010)
- d) **Herbalist:** (Abia Ibok): They are native doctors who heal with herbs. Herbs used to cure ailments could be in form of fresh or dry leave, barks, roots, seeds and stems of medicinal plants which could be in powder, liquid or concoctions. They have the general knowledge of the herbs and they know the good and bad ones, their functions, where they can be found, their preparations and working. In Ibibioland, symptoms of the disease are used by the herbalist to diagnose the cause of illness and to give appropriate medication. Apart from their knowledge on plants, they also know the activity period and special characteristics of plants, where and when to pluck them. It is also pertinent to state here that, in Ibibioland, some leaves can be plucked at midnight so as to be potent and active and some concoctions must not touch the ground. Native doctors are both diviners and herbalists while some are just herbalists without having the ability to see.
- e) **Diviner** (ibiaidiong). They diagnose the cause of illness and proffer to give solution through thE spirit of divination. They have the means of looking into the hidden parts of the universe to tell the cause of illness and give solution to the problems. Some of them do this by the use of cowry shells by throwing them on the ground to discern the cause of the problem. Divination is the body of knowledge which Ibibio society has developed over the

years. To be a diviner in the olden days in Ibibioland was mostly a gratuitous gift from the gods but it could also be through a learning process. In the Ibibio traditional setting, if a person is sick, herbs around the house is first given and the patient is being carefully watched for improvement for some times. If the condition does not improve, he or she will be taken to the diviner who, through using white basin with clean water will probe into knowing the cause of the problems and also the solution. In some instances, the diviners may conclude that the ancestor of the sick person is angry because he had not appeased them for a long time. As part of the solution, the native doctor may prescribe a sacrifice to be offered to appease the ancestors, which may be the inform of animals of gift items as items of sacrifice. The diviner will also prescribe where the sacrifice will be kept which could be T-Junction or at the river banks. The diviner may also diagnose the illness as poison, herbs, as solutions, will be given to the patients to either vomit the poison, remove the damages caused by the poison or to heal the sick person.

Conclusion:

It is an undeniable fact that traditional medicine, from the foregoing exists in its uniqueness and identifies. The unfortunate disregard of traditional medicine as merely fetish, devilish, cultic and barbaric is rather unfortunate but inevitable given the religious coloration of traditional medicine thought and practices. But this is not peculiar to the Ibibio, as similar influences are evident in the medical practices of other ethnic groups without being disregarded with disdain. With the effect of colonization, it is understandable why some people regard anything that does not suit the western perception and typologies as untenable. This paper has therefore provided a philosophical basis of traditional medicine and highlighted the fact that the logic of explanation often results in the context and the culture of the people. Given these facts, it is illogical to think of traditional medical practices as useless and to crucify traditional thought and practices on the alter of stereotypes just because they do not fit into the accepted “paradigm” of explanation.

With these findings and empirical examples of proving the potency of traditional medicine, it will be illogical for anybody to conclude that traditional medicine will not be useful if developed. It can be more useful and also stands the test of time, although there is no doubt that traditional healing system has some limitations but its genuine or positive aspects have been confirmed to be as effective as the orthodox ones. The existent practices in the traditional healing techniques recognize the place of God in the whole question of healing. This is a beautiful tradition; efforts should be made to get hold of the scientific aspects of the traditional

medical treatment before those who are versed with them die and are buried with their expert knowledge. We should also bear in mind that the traditional attitude of the people towards healing will continue to exercise its influence on our people.

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