



NEXUS OF LEADERSHIP, SOCIAL JUSTICE AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A CONTEXTUAL EXEGESIS OF PSALM 72 IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This article explores the nexus between leadership, social justice, and national development in Nigeria through the interpretive lens of Psalm 72. The Psalm, a biblical text traditionally attributed to King Solomon, portrays an ideal model of leadership grounded in righteousness, justice, and concern for the marginalized. By drawing parallels between the Psalm's vision of just governance and the realities of political leadership in Nigeria, the article highlights the ethical and spiritual dimensions of national development. It argues that the multifaceted and persistent endemic nature of corruption, derelictions of rural development and electoral irregularities amongst others factors that tendered correlated adverse impacts on national development in Nigeria stem largely from a deficit in justice-oriented leadership. The study employs a theological-ethical approach, integrating biblical exegesis with socio-political analysis, to propose that the principles of equity, compassion, and accountability outlined in Psalm 72 offer a transformative framework for governance. The article concludes by recommending a reorientation of leadership culture in Nigeria that prioritizes the needs of marginalized communities



and ensuring equal access to resources and opportunities; demonstrates integrity, accountability, and transparency in governance, promoting a culture of ethics and fairness, as well as addressing disparities and promoting inclusivity, amongst others as a pathway to sustainable national development.

Keywords: Leadership, social justice, national development, Psalm, Nigeria

Introduction

Though Psalms, undeniably, are typically and commonly designated as “the hymnbook of the temple” (Mowinckel 1962:32), or the prayer book of Israel in their cultic services of their monotheistic religion as well as in Christianity, the corpus also appears as a relevant compendium of wisdom for leadership, leadership ethics and etiquettes, moral values and ethics for Christian living, as well as worship and services to God and humanity (Coulter 2011:12). They also major thematically on the ethical responsibility of Israel as God’s people and the “moral and ethical transformation of persons and society” (Saliers, 1979:183). Specifically, wisdom and didactic, royal and messianic psalms can advocate illuminating theological viewpoints on leadership principles and qualities. For instance, Resane (2014:1) employs the shepherd metaphor in Psalm 23 to excerpt the shepherd model of leadership. Adamo (2018:1) interpreted Psalm 23 “africentrically” to explore the protective, provision, healing, caring, courage, and guidance roles of leaders in the ecclesiastical community and to call them to pursue the shepherd-leader model for the advancement and the effectiveness of the *mission Dei* in the world. Psalm 72 is also a typical example of the Psalms in this category.

Many scholars have derived varied rich leadership principles from Psalm 72 and adopted them to explore the necessity of moral values in leadership. For instance, Human (2002:674) employs its values to argue for establishing justice and peace in the societies by leaders in modern Africa. According to



Obiorah (2013:198), the petitioner in Psalm 72 delineated “features of good governance expected of every leader” and in Anambra State. Further, Friedman & Friedman (2009:45) adopts its inferences to cry against greed and leadership crisis in the United States and the world. Uzorma Dike studies justice and righteousness in the Psalm to correlate the virtue of integrity and national stability in Nigeria (2021:22). In the same vein, Essang, Essien, Olusakin and Equere (2024:85) explore the concept of justice in the psalm to propose for just leadership in Nigeria.

Nigeria, despite her rich resource endowment, has grappled with numerous socio-economic and political challenges since her independence. The multifaceted and persistent endemic nature of corruption, lack of transparency and the rule of law, insecurity, derelictions of rural development and electoral irregularities amongst other factors have correlated impacts on her low national development. The root cause of these low economic and development indices, injustices, inequality, and underdevelopment in Nigeria has been attributed by many scholars, to bad leadership and paucity of good governance in the country (Oko, 2023:57; Olusakin & Sibani, 2023:60; Essien, 2023:5, and Eyoh 2015:46). By adopting a simplified literary approach in biblical exegetical method, this study attempts to elucidate the nexus between good leadership and social justice in fostering national development in Nigeria in the light of leadership paradigms enshrined in Psalm 72.

Conceptual Clarification

Leadership

The term leadership receives diverse nuances of meaning due to its multidimensional nature. However, Barna (2003:23) defines it as the process of “mobilizing others toward a goal shared by the leader and followers.” Politically, leadership refers to the ruling political class that bears the responsibility of managing the affairs and resources of a nation as a political entity by setting and influencing policy



priorities affecting the nation such as Nigeria through different decision-making structures and institutions created for the orderly development of the nation (Nwambuko, 2021:442). This paper, therefore, delineates leadership as the ability to inspire, guide, motivate, and influence a group of people towards the accomplishment of common goals, through managerial skills as well as integrating the demands of the institution and the needs of individual members in a productive and individually fulfilling manners.

Social Justice

In our society, justice remains the most complex and contentious moral, social, political, and ethical issue due to its multidimensional nature. However, justice literally connotes fairness, uprightness, impartiality, equity, objectivity, righteousness, honesty, neutrality, and disinterestedness (Motloba, Makwakwa, & Machete, 2019:150). Drew (2023:21) avers that justice involves the just distribution of resources; fairness to human rights and equality of distribution of opportunities as well as seeking to uphold these principles of equality, fairness and righteousness in conflict resolution, right protection and promotion of peace and harmony within a community or society. In line with this, social justice is the view that everyone deserves equal political, economic, and social rights and opportunities in a given society. It connotes fairness and equality in distribution of resources, power, and obligations in the society to all people irrespective of ethnicity, race, age, gender, status, ability, sexual orientation and religious or spiritual affiliation (Ugbudu, 2020:70). This implies that in a social justice system, the government in power should be poised to eliminating barriers arising from race, sex, class, colour, creed, ethnicity, religion or nationality as well as generating an environment where every individual receives unreserved and unconstrained opportunity in a positive way with a view to developing individual physical and intellectual faculties.



National Development

Development, simply and generally denotes progress, dynamic, growth or advancement. According to Zakaria and Adedayo (2020:265), development connotes the process, or result of developing or state of gradual growth or advancement via a progressive change in social, economic, technological, scientific, political, and religious conditions resulting to an enhancement in the well beings of the citizens. In Nigeria context as a nation, we can speak of national development. National development is all encompassing process of improving the economic, social, political, and cultural well-being of a nation and its citizens (Adeolu, 2016:11). This infers that, development of any nation encapsulates such parameters as planned national economy; increase in agricultural production; harnessing industrial production; development of human resources; application of science and technology in production sector; provision of mass education; and the provisions of various facilities to meet the need and aspiration of disadvantaged, deprived and poorest of the poor segment of the population (Bayambang, 2023 n.p). It is considered as sustainable when “it is likely to achieve lasting satisfaction of human needs” with “improvement of the quality of life which includes good health, appropriate technologies, food, employment, self-reliance, clean water, shelter and electricity for all” (Oko and Koko 2024:106).

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts the Biblical Justice Theory and Ethical Leadership Theory. Christopher J.H. Wright's Biblical Justice Theory argues that biblical justice is “the dynamic relationship between God, humanity, and the created order, reflecting God's character and purposes.” It emphasizes God's justice as foundationally rooted in God's creation and covenantal relationships with humanity, highlighting His concern for the vulnerable, marginalized, and oppressed; thus, prioritizing restoration, reconciliation,



and healing over punitive measures. Thus, this theory stresses the significance of social justice, advocating for economic, social, and political equity (Wright, 2018:23). Nationally, Wright's theory highlights the need for restoration and reconciliation in Nigerian society; social justice as it resonates with Nigeria's struggle for equitable distribution of resources and opportunities; and importance of visionary leadership and good governance in Nigeria. Its focus on creation and covenant highlights the interconnectedness of human relationships and the environment. By applying Wright's Biblical Justice Theory, Nigeria can move towards a more just and equitable society, where governance and development prioritize the well-being of all citizens (Wright, 2004:120).

Ethical Leadership Theory was coined by Robert Brown, Linda Treviño and David Harrison. It is defined as leadership that is guided by respect for ethical beliefs and values and the dignity and rights of others. Ethical leadership involves leaders making decisions based on the right thing to do for the common good, not just based on what is best for themselves or for the bottom line. (Brown, Treviño & Harrison: 2005:134). The key ideologies of ethical leadership, according to Brown et al (2005:135), include respect (valuing others' skills and contributions), justice (ensuring fairness and equality in all situations), accountability (holding oneself accountable for actions and decisions), service (making decisions based on the greater good) honesty (transparent and truthful communication), and community (considering the needs of all stakeholders). In a nutshell, when leaders are ethically abiding, good governance will ensue; while in the nonexistence of ethical leadership, bad governance can flourish. These theories align with the principles in Psalm 72 that offers a framework for leaders to promote national development in Nigeria by prioritizing justice, integrity, inclusivity and sustainability.



Nexus Between Leadership, Social Justice, and Development

The nexus between leadership, justice, and development emphasizes that just and equitable leadership is crucial for effective and sustainable development, as it fosters trust, inclusivity, and empowers individuals to participate in shaping a better future. Sustainable development requires strong leadership to mobilize resources, address challenges, and create positive change. This includes setting visions, inspiring action, and creating an environment conducive to progress. Justice, encompassing fairness, equity, and the protection of human rights, is a critical foundation for sustainable development. Just leadership ensures that the benefits of development are shared equitably and that marginalized groups are not left behind (Gabriel, 2014:135)

Different leadership styles, displayed by a just leader have different impacts on justice and development. A transformational leadership may be more inclined to prioritize social justice, actively seeking to address inequalities and protect the welfare of individuals, while servant leadership focuses on fairness and justice to promote a supportive environment and reduce perceptions of political behaviors (Achor, 2022:12).

When leadership is rooted in justice, it can lead to stronger social cohesion and trust; a culture of fairness and respect that reduces conflict and builds a foundation for collaboration. Such leadership encourages empowered participation as well as more equitable outcomes. When individuals feel their voices are heard and their needs are addressed, they are more likely to participate in development efforts. Just leadership ensures that development efforts benefit all members of society, not just a select few. These in turn address injustices and promote equity which can lead to more sustainable and inclusive development (Udofia, 2020:154). In conclusion, the nexus between leadership, justice, and



development highlights that just and equitable leadership is not just a moral imperative but also a strategic necessity for achieving sustainable and inclusive development.

Overview of Nigerian Leadership Challenges Towards Development

Nigeria faces multifaceted development challenges posed by her leaders, in spite of series of development strategies put in place by successive governments all in attempts to generate national development. With the widespread corruption and mismanagement of resources, the country's development has been stalled significantly in all facets, good governance impaired, and the future of the country destroyed. Corruption and development are antithetical to each other; the two cannot cohabit. Nigerian is managed by corrupt leaders who have made the state an instrument of capital accumulation; public funds earmarked for social services like healthcare and education are diverted, resulting in inadequate infrastructure, limited access to basic amenities, and a low quality of life for many Nigerians (Oko, 2023:57; Eyoh, 2015:46)

Also, social injustice has become a major barricade to Nigeria development. In a social justice system, as explained by Peschke (1999), people are not “discriminated against, nor their welfare and well-being constrained or prejudiced on the basis of gender, sexuality, religion, political affiliations, age, race, belief, disability, location, social class, socioeconomic circumstances, or other characteristic of background or group membership”. However, Nigeria is heavily infested with injustice, exploitation, oppression, and subjugation of one people by others, and inequalities (Oko, 2023:51; Essien, 2023:10).

The leadership structure in Nigeria is also porous due to lack of accountability and transparency in the managements of public affairs in the nation. Favour, (2024:16) argues that there is a conspicuous lack of accountability and transparency in governance across national, state, and local levels. Proper



procedures are frequently sidestepped, resulting in financial misappropriation across various public sectors despite substantial budget allocations. The absence of openness and accountability fosters corruption while posing a significant obstacle to national development. In the view of Dike (2010:50), poor governance has resulted in consistent dereliction of rural areas in terms of development and access to basic services, poverty, contributing to rural-urban disparities and migration, and limited opportunities for rural dwellers. Electoral irregularities have become a pervasive issue in Nigerian politics, eroding ethical politics, and public trust and faith in the democratic process. Nigerian leaders have subverted popular will of the masses, destabilized citizens opinion and rights, disrupted legislative and executive processes of democratic ideals, eroded the legitimacy of the democratic political system, installed the culture of violence, and disrupted community bonds (Ekanem, Essien & Okon, 2022:1). Insecurity and violence in Nigeria, as another outcome of bad leadership, have worn new dresses ranging from insurgency, terrorism, communal conflicts, religious violence and extremist attacks. Its concomitant effects ranges from loss of lives and properties to hampering of development (Olusakin and Sibani, 2023:54).

Nigeria is also characterized with a significant portion of the its population living in multidimensional poverty. Olusakin and Essang (2024:276) submit that the extreme poverty in Nigeria has resulted in a lawless contemporary society, analogous to prophet Hosea's days, where truth, mercy, and knowledge of God were grossly lacking in the land (Hosea 4:1-2; KJV). According to them, such a perverted society is characterized by juvenile delinquencies, political upheavals, economic hardship, all forms of sexual perversion, ethnic conflict, violence, and abuse of religions. This is accompanied with all forms of immorality among Nigerian leaders. A moral person, according to Nana and Udom (2024:153), is altruistic in nature; a service-oriented person; not self-centered, but compassionate, benevolent,



considerate, and kind-heart to everyone that come his or her way. It is a commitment to the service for the sake of others. All these virtues epitomize good leadership and foster national development but they are grossly absent in Nigeria. In addition, inadequate economic policies, marked by overreliance on oil revenues and a lack of economic diversification, leave Nigeria susceptible to external shocks and economic instability (Udom, Olusakin & Essien, 2025:140).

Reading Psalms 72 for Leadership, Social Justice, and Development in Nigeria

Psalm 72, as accepted by many scholars, was written by King David for edification during the coronation of his successor, Solomon his son (Paul, 1972:351; Obiorah 2013:194; Human 2002:668). As an intercessory prayer, it emphasizes the supplication of the supplicant praying for justice and righteousness from God, so that the Israelite king may display these God-given virtues in ruling Israel. As opined by Ross (2013:532), Psalm 72 as a royal psalm, formed part of the royal liturgy either during the enthronement of the king, or at covenant renewal celebrations. As a royal psalm, it revolves around the king as its dominant figure; reflecting on both the responsibilities of the Israelite king as well as the significance emanating from his office. Its central theme, entreaty for the king as seen in every part of its stichs, strophes, and stanzas, is righteousness and justice in leadership for the peace and prosperity of the land. In addition, David prayed in Psalm 72 requesting God to bring about His rule on earth through the reign of the just and righteous king so that the entire nation would be blessed (Gaebelein 1992:347).

Contextually, Psalm 72 presents a compelling paradigm for social justice, good governance and sustainable development in Nigeria. In vs 1 of Psalm 72, justice and righteousness as the two divinely sourced and interrelated virtues are highlighted. “Your justice” (Hb, *mishpateka*) refers to the various



aspects of justice or different manifestation of nuances of justice (Obiorah, 2013:195) or “God’s gift to the king in making decisions along with the second virtue righteousness (Kaiser, 2009: 264). Righteousness (*tsedaqah*) refers to the state of being conformable to God’s law and with all that is good, excellent and maintenance of all that is in consonant with the word and will of Yahweh. It is also used for justice, right, uprightness, and equity (USB 2004). Fasuba (2020:151) posits that it implies taking a stand and doing the right thing or acting within the moral and ethical demands of the society such as assisting the poor, the oppressed, and telling the truth to vindicate the innocent and upholding the cause of justice. According to Robert D. Culver, (*TWOT*, 2:948–49), justice definitely involved the interplay between governing, rights, and judging, especially the “poor,” “afflicted,” “oppressed,” and the “needy,” who normally do not receive justice from the courts, but are to be treated equitably under this request to the divine throne. Thus, the supplicant inspiringly adds, “*May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice (vs 2)*. The ‘poor’ (עֲנִי, עֲנִי) as well as the ‘weak’ (עֲבֹיָה, עֲבֹיָה) are regarded as people who are ‘bowed down, and oppressed’ (Martin-Achard, 1997:931). The king, as God’s representative, is vested with the responsibility to administer God’s care for the poor, the weak, and the marginalised. Thus, the privilege of leadership includes the weighty responsibility to care for those who are the weakest in society (Essang et al, 2024:85).

This prayer item emphasizes justice-oriented and righteous leadership. These virtues emphasize leaders who demonstrate integrity, strengthen institutions, and promote transparency in governance and a culture of ethics and fairness; leaders who are accountable to the people. This forms the portrait of an accountable governance. Just leadership and good governance are *sine qua non* for addressing corruption and promoting transparency in Nigeria. Corruption is a key encumbrance to political stability and successful socio-economic development, as it breeds inequality and injustice, discourages



foreign investment and aid (Ugbudu, 2020:69). Transparent governance structures, accountable and righteous leadership are significant anti-corruption measures for fostering development in Nigeria (Olusakin, 2024:189)

Vss. 3 of the text, “*May the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness,*” implies the nexus between justice and righteousness and development. Prosperity (Hebrew, *shalom*) in verse 3a, usually equate peace and all-round well-being of the people. Thus, mountains figuratively, the land yields prosperity, material resources for the people, general sensation of security and adequate well-being of the citizen and foreigners when the governance is “in righteousness”- conformity to the laws of God. The supplication item in vs 4 of the text, signifies one of the denominators of social justice- justice for the poor and vulnerable. This royal role towards the poor is further reiterated in vss 12-14. These verses explicitly highlight the triple functions of a just king to include, defending the cause of the poor; giving deliverance to the needy and crushing their oppressors. The Hebrew word for the weak means the poor, the oppressed, the helpless, as opposed to “the strong” (May, 1994). Opposed to the poor is the oppressor (Hebrew, *‘ashaq*) sometimes rendered “those who hold other people down” or “those who take away other people's rights,” or “a person who derides others” or “one who eats on the backs of others,” signifying those who exploit others for their own advantage (Brown, Driver & Briggs, 1977). This is typical of Nigerian leaders, who take advantage of their positions of power to enrich themselves and their cronies at the expense of the masses. “To give deliverance (Hebrew, *yasha‘*) to the needy” means to snatch away them from the oppressor (UBS 2004).

The action of a good leader is expressed as “deliver” (Hb *natsal*), meaning “rescue”, the needy, (*‘ebyôn*), the one “who has no helper,” the poor (*‘ānî*)- a person overwhelmed by want or poverty and the third group, *’ēn ‘ozēn lô*, “one without helper.” The role of the king is to extricate



them from their deplorable situation. (Obiorah 2013:195). These are accompanied in v. 13, by other actions of a good king- *chuwc*, meaning “to look compassionately at,” “to spare and regard.” Compassionate feeling should be concluded in palpable action; hence the supplicant adds another action expected of a just leader, “deliverance, (*yš'*) meaning ‘to save’ or ‘rescue’ to the *nepeš* (here in plural *napšôt*) of the *'ebyônîm*.” The *napšôt* designates the life and soul with all the connotations of this term, of the person involved. The care of the weak and needy by the king is based on genuine compassion (Ross, 2013:538). In fact, in verse 14 we are told he redeems them from oppression (Hb, *tok* meaning “to tread under foot”) and violence (Hb, *ḥāmās*). The usage of this verb “redeem” includes the ideas of rescuing a relative from oppression, paying off his debts, avenging those who harm him, and ensuring that his lands and name are preserved; thus, it suggests that the king acts as a kinsman-redeemer for the needy. In fact, in verse 14 we are told he redeems them from oppression (Hb, *tok* meaning “to tread under foot”) and violence (Hb, *ḥāmās*). The usage of this verb “redeem” includes the ideas of rescuing a relative from oppression, paying off his debts, avenging those who harm him, and ensuring that his lands and name are preserved; thus, it suggests that the king acts as a kinsman-redeemer for the needy (Ross 2013:538).

Thus, the king is to protect the weak when the strong abuse them or prevent the strong from harming the weak (Kaiser, 2009: 264). The entreaty here stresses the leadership role of preventing the powerful people from exploiting the poor people or protecting the poor when the rich treat them badly. This denotes prioritizing the needs of marginalized communities and ensuring equal access to resources and opportunities. In terms of development and access to basic services, rural areas in Nigeria are facing consistent negligence resulting in rural-urban migration and disparities, poverty, and limited opportunities for rural dwellers. However, embracing diverse perspectives and involving marginalized



and rural communities in decision-making, promoting integrity and transparency, and strengthening institutions are expected to be vital aspects of Nigeria's governance and leadership evolution for national development (Ogbu, 2019:90).

These verses confirm the view of Essang et al, (2024:86) that an outstanding mark of a good leader is to save and preserve life, especially the life of persons with the social status of inability to help or defend themselves. Thus, the king in the text is unique among kings; he is moved with compassion for people in need and his compassion moves him to save the lives of the people in need; paying so much attention to those with the greatest needs. Here, the psalmist, according to Obiorah (2013:197), enunciates that good leadership, makes the defense of the less privileged of the society a top priority. He redeems their life because their blood is precious in his sight. In other words, preservation of human life takes precedence over any other royal act.

In the context of Nigeria development, these principles accentuate equity and inclusiveness. According to Ekundayo, (2017:156-157), this principle, is a significant principle of good governance theory, as it specifies the feeling of belongingness and ensuring of the protection of various groups especially the most susceptible to attack, the enrichment of their well-being and guarantee dignity of the human person, equal rights and freedom from any discrimination. To ensure development in Nigeria, this principle should be exhibited by addressing disparities and fostering inclusive participation, prioritizing the needs of marginalized communities by ensuring equal opportunities and access to education, healthcare, and social services, promoting democratic values, protecting human rights, ensuring free and fair elections (Nnablife, 2010:23)

Deductively, sustainable economic growth and human capital development is highlighted in the 6th verse of the text, *“May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the*



earth.” The two similes here highlight features of good governance. Obiorah (2013:196) posits that good governance is likened to the rain that falls on the mown field, and showers that water the earth. According to Dike (2021:24), “Godly leaders are like the refreshing rain that makes the land fruitful and beautiful so that even the newly mown fields will produce a second crop.” They are likened to the lamps that light the way (2 Sam. 21:17), the shield that protect (Psa.84:9; 89:16), and the very breath of life that sustain the people (Lam. 4:20). When the king provides the environment for the benchmarks of God’s kingdom to grow, the king’s good reign can be likened to the life-giving showers that provide sustainable economic growth and human capital development (DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson & Tanner, 2014: 578).

Vs. 7 of the text, “*In his days may righteousness flourish and peace abound, until the moon is no more,*” accentuates another vital leadership paradigms for fostering national development- lasting peace and security. This denotes that when a leader rules in righteousness and justice, peace and stability will surely ensue. Peace and security, collectively denotes a condition where individuals, regions, nations, organisations, institutions, and the world progress without any threat or insecurity. It is generally characterised by a domestically generally more stable, safe and secure environment, democratically governed society with respectful to human rights and dignity., Conflict of any form, obviously, not only creates threat and fear, but also hampers socio-economic, and political development. Kanu (2023:10) opines that whereas weak governance and unjust leadership results in instability, inter-ethnic conflicts, and insurgency, as manifested by several rivals’ groups in Nigeria, conversely only effective governance and just leadership can foster peace, law, and order, socio-political stability and security. According to (Dike 2021:26), the effect of justice and righteousness which were the vital elements of ancient Israel’s leadership resulted in stability and security in the land.



This infers that ensuring a secure and safe environment, promoting peaceful coexistence by addressing conflict are major determinants for national development in Nigeria. The verb “flourish” (*parach*) probably implies that the abundance of peace which will flourish “till the moon be no more,” a poetical synonym to “forever.” (UBS 2004). Lasting dominion and abundance give description to the consequential peace and prosperity that could be experienced. In the days of such king, the righteous always flourishes and abundance of peace is always enduring. This confirms the scripture, that “when the righteous is on the throne, the people rejoice.”(Proverbs 29:2); and that “righteousness exalts a nation” (Psalm 34:15)

The tenor of encouraging investments in human capital, infrastructure, and sustainable industries, ensuring long-term economic prosperity via just leadership and good governance is emphasized here. Just leadership, good and effective governance are vital devices for national economic development in Nigeria. Sound policies, transparent institutions, and competent leadership which are characteristics features of righteous social justice rule that attract investments, stimulate economic growth, and reduces poverty (Ekundayo, 2017:157).

Seybold (1990: 181) posits that vs 8, “*May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth,*” describes the range of the kingdom of this blessed and righteous king. The petitions in this section focus more on the extent of his kingdom as an expectation of the suppliant and the outcome of his just rule. In Nigerian context, building sustainable infrastructures from one region to the other enhances connectivity, and facilitates economic growth. According to World Bank (2020), infrastructural development encompasses the construction and maintenance of physical structures such as roads, bridges, airports, seaports, energy systems, and telecommunications across the nation. This aspect of development has the potential to attract foreign investment, boosts trade, and increases



economic productivity; generate jobs and stimulate economic activity. Access to basic infrastructure services like water, sanitation, and electricity enhances living standards, while developed infrastructure facilitates movement of goods, services, and people, integrating markets and communities. This model will result in the leader having *“dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.”*

Verses 10-11, *“May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles render him tribute, may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts. May all kings fall down before him, all nations give him service,”* accentuate partnerships and collaboration. They signify fostering local and international partnerships, leveraging resources and expertise to drive development. Partnership and collaboration for fostering national development in Nigeria can be in form of collaborations between government and private sector, inter-Governmental partnerships, Partnerships with non-profit organizations such as Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), or international partnerships i.e. collaborations with foreign governments, organizations, and donors (United Nations, 2020). They are essential aid in pooling resources, expertise, and knowledge, streamlined decision-making and implementation, stimulating investment, trade, and innovation (World Bank, 2020), promoting unity, trust, and cooperation among stakeholders and improving governance.

The final verses 15&16 presents prosperity as the consequence of righteous rule, not its motivation. The prosperity vocabulary-“abundance of grain” (פִּסַּת־בָּר, *pissat-bar*) and “fruit” (פְּרִי, *pĕrî*,) are classic covenant-blessing imagery (cf. Deuteronomy 28). The prayer formula “may prayer be made” (וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל, *wĕyitpallēl*) signifies enduring reliance on God, that negate royal dictatorship. The flourishing of the city (עִיר, *‘îr*,) “like grass of the earth” connotes total societal development. Biblically, prosperity divorced from righteousness leads to judgment (Amos 5), but here abundance testifies to God’s



approval of just leadership. Thus, in biblical theology, such prosperity authenticates just leadership under divine favor, contrasting sharply with wealth gained through oppression (Brueggemann, 2002:1235).

These imply that political legitimacy in contemporary Nigeria erodes when leaders perpetuate injustice, leading to distrust, social instability, and underdevelopment. Conversely, just leadership as confirmed by Ugbudu (2020:80), promotes political stability, citizen loyalty, and collective participation in governance which are indispensable components for sustainable development. Also, leaders who genuinely promote justice become a legacy in public memory. Sustainable development requires such long-term moral capital, because trust inspires civic participation, tax compliance, and peaceful cooperation. Thus, Psalm 72:15 suggests that Nigerian leaders should exemplify integrity, transparency, and people-centered policies; these virtues will naturally summon communal goodwill, cooperation, and social cohesion that drive long-term development. When leadership is just, cities flourish and rural communities thrive; fulfilling the psalm's vision of shared abundance. Psalm 72:16 therefore provides a theological critique of resource mismanagement, agricultural neglect, and policies that fail to ensure widespread ecological and economic flourishing in Nigeria.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Psalm 72 is historic as David intercedes for Solomon; it is prophetic with reference to another king (Christ,) and it also holds significance for leadership today. It teaches the portrait of just leadership. A leadership where God's kingdom and ways of justice and righteousness are to be the norms, prioritizing the defence and protection of the needy and the marginalized. This is the standard of God's leadership pattern; it worked in Abraham's time, in the time of the ancient kings of Israel, and it's relevant in the world today. The lessons in this pericope are just as relevant today as they present



numerous models for national development. These models include just and righteous leadership; justice for the poor and vulnerable; social justice and equality; peace and security; human capital and infrastructure development, sustainable economic growth as well as good governance and accountability. By evading the snares and lust for power, wealth and position that entrapped leaders in Nigeria, ruling with righteousness becomes the motivation, urging those in power to remain in the will of God, which, as history and the text demonstrate, provides abundant blessings and justice for God's people. Thus, the selected text presents compelling paradigms for just leadership that ensure sustainable development in any society. By embracing these principles, Nigerians can build a just and sustainable society, ensuring the well-being of all citizens and promoting a prosperous future.

Recommendation

1. Nigerian leadership structures should deliberately institutionalise justice, equity, and fairness in public policy formulation and implementation. Leadership recruitment, performance evaluation, and accountability mechanisms must prioritise justice as a measurable criterion rather than a moral abstraction.
2. Government budgets, social protection schemes, and development plans must prioritise poverty reduction, social inclusion, and protection of marginalised communities rather than elite accumulation.
3. Continuous ethical training, grounded in biblical ethics and social justice principles, for public office holders should be integrated into governance frameworks to counter corruption, patronage politics, and abuse of power.



4. Nigeria must strengthen institutions of accountability, including the judiciary, anti-corruption agencies, and legislative oversight bodies, ensuring that leaders are subject to the rule of law and transparent governance practices.
5. Faith-based institutions, especially churches, should reclaim their prophetic role as advocates of social justice rather than align with political patronage systems. They should engage in constructive civic advocacy, public enlightenment, and moral critique of unjust leadership practices.
6. Academic institutions, seminaries, and policy think tanks should foster interdisciplinary dialogue between theology, political science, and development studies to produce contextually relevant leadership models for Nigeria.

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A RELIGIO-CULTURAL STUDIES OF BONE-SETTING AND HEALING IN INI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The practice of traditional bonesetting (TBS) is a local medical technique that was either invented or adopted in Ibibioland to heal bone fractures or defects. Just like the literature on the practice of TBS and healing in Ibibioland is scanty. Thus, this study aims to analytically elucidate the cultural and religious dimensions in the practice of TBS and healing in Ibibioland. The scope of the study is delimited to the practice of TBS and healing in Ini Local Government Area (LGA) of Akwa Ibom State. This study employs qualitative research methodology while both primary and secondary sources are used to collect data. The collected data are interpreted with the use of historical and descriptive research approaches. Findings reveal that religious beliefs play a significant role in traditional bonesetting and healing practices. Following the functionalist theory, the study asserts that bonesetters and healers fulfill important social roles and responsibilities within the community. In conclusion, the religio-cultural practices of bonesetting and healing in Ini LGA reflect the rich cultural heritage, religious beliefs, and social dynamics. The study is significant to government agencies (Ministry of Health), traditional bonesetters, orthopedic medicine practitioners, researchers, and ethnographers, among others.

Keywords: Traditional Bone-setting (TBS), Healing, Ibibioland, Ini LGA,



Introduction

Before the advent of Western invention and civilization, every African society had stipulated ways of doing things, especially as it related to health. These ways are embedded in the culture and tradition of the people. Just like in every other aspect, there are traditional ways of treating the sick whenever there is the need to do so (Owumi, *et al.* 2013:47). Accordingly, Africans had their unique perception of issues of health, wholeness, illness and death (Ajima & Ubana, 2018:1).

However, culture which is closely related to the African religious system is the determinant of the African worldview about health. According to Ajima & Ubana (2018:1), what Africans believed to be the cause of disease and disharmony, how they approached the promotion of health and harmony, how they experienced and expressed illness pain and disorientation of being, what therapeutic solution they sought and the places they sought this therapy were all determined by their culture of which religion was an integral part. In other words, the African health system, which is integral to her cultural heritage, predated Western medicine. Cultural values cannot be extricated from the being of a traditional African (Udoh, *et al.* 2024).

As Nana (2018:120) has aptly affirmed, although the whole of Africa has currently been infiltrated by Western culture and systems, the fact remains that African age-old systems persist enduringly. In buttressing this point, Olusakin (2013) opines that despite the colonial influence on Africa, culture still remains an integral part of African life. Thus, the practice of bonesetting and healing in Ibibioland is one of the enduring old systems which predate western civilization that is Western. Lending his voice to the discourse, Agwata (2015:1) opines that bone-setting is a specialist aspect of African traditional medicine and culture, which involves the traditional fixing of fractured bones and dislocated joints. And for Ali *et al.* (2021:1), traditional bone setting has existed from time immemorial in most African communities and has formed part of African culture. Hence, the practice of bonesetting and healing is an integral part of the culture and religion of Ibibio people. This integration of religion and culture into the practice of bonesetting and healing in Ibibioland is what makes the practice unique. As Idang (2015:97) notes, the culture of a people is what marks them out distinctively from other human societies in the family of humanity. Here, Agwata (2015:17) comes in again to note that traditional bonesetting is a known medical procedure in African cultures.

In Ibibioland, just as it is applicable in the whole of Nigeria and many other developing countries, the treatment of diseases and injuries using traditional and cultural methods remain popular among the populace despite the availability of modern health care services (Onyemaechi, *et al.* 2020:1). In corroboration, Lawal and Musa affirm that traditional bonesetters (TBS) still play a significant role in the primary treatment of fractures in many developing countries (2022:52). In affirmation, Agwata (2015:18) posits that traditional care of diseases and afflictions remain popular despite civilization and the existence of modern health care services. According to him, the traditional bone setters perhaps more than any other group of traditional care-givers enjoy high patronage and confidence from people who cut across the different strata of society including the educated and the rich.

The practice of bonesetting was a local medical technology that was either invented or adopted in Ibibioland to cure or heal bone fractures or defects. For Maruyama *et al.* (2020:1), bone defects is



an important unsolved issue in orthopedics and related specialties. Qualitative research supports the view that road accidents are the leading causes of fracture in Nigeria (Owumi, et al. 2013:54). Elsewhere, Agwata (2015:2) asserted that fractures are caused by the application of stresses which exceed the limits of strength of bone. Violence and motor vehicle accidents are the commonest causes. Fractures which occur in a diseased bone can be said to be pathological.

Despite the availability of modern medicine, over 70% of the rural population in Nigeria still relies on the traditional bonesetting (TBS) for primary fracture care. The TBS appears to have met the needs of our communities for many centuries and existed long before the arrival of orthodox medicine. Each traditional bonesetter believes in the ability of his medications and traditional splints to heal fractures. Traditional bonesetting practices are well patronised by the community, and the indigenous people do not believe in failure of the TBS treatment, inability to get the desired result is blamed on other forces (Onuminya, 2004:652; Olusakin, 2014).

In Ibibioland, the practice of bonesetting and healing is not detached from the religious beliefs of the people. For Idang (2015:97), religion in African societies seems to be the fulcrum around which every activity revolves. In some instances, incantations are made on the affected area as a way of invoking the spirit of the ancestors for divine intervention and healing (Owumi, Taiwo and Olorunnisola, 2013:47). Hence the focus of this study is to critically and analytically adumbrate the place of religion and culture in the practice of traditional bonesetting and healing in Ibibioland with particular reference to the people of Ini Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State.

Bonesetting and Healing in Ini Local Government Area

Generally, in Africa where Ini happens to be a microcosm of the macrocosm, traditional healing entails a myriad of helpful beliefs and practices that originate within a culture or society which are designed to treat the people of afflictions and infirmities (White, 2015:1). Just as it is conceived in other parts of Africa, in Ini LGA ill health is conceptualized as whatever endangers life or deprives one the comfort of enjoying a better life. Therefore, healing in Ini LGA is the process of restoring an individual's life to its spiritual, social and mental well-being or fullness. It has to do with the harmony of the total human body. Thus, bonesetting in Ini Local Government Area (LGA) involves religious and cultural methods passed down through generations, often involving natural remedies, rituals, massages, and setting bones without surgical intervention. Healing is approached holistically, considering spiritual, physical, and social factors, with community involvement playing a significant role in the recovery process.

Origin and Practice of Bone Setting in Ini Local Government Area

The origin of bonesetting and healing in Ibibioland and Ini LGA cannot be traced in a hurry. The origin of traditional bone setting in Ibibioland dates back to antiquity. The practice is as old as the existence of the Ibibio people. Generally, the practice of bone setting is ancestral in nature and is passed on to the generations (Singh et al, 2013:20). Thus, the origin of bone setting in Ini LGA dates back to antiquity and is deeply rooted in the people's cultural and religious healing practices. Practitioners, often inheritors of knowledge within families or communities, employ techniques passed down through oral tradition and observation. These methods typically involve the use of natural materials, such as herbs and plant extracts, along with manual manipulation to realign bones and promote healing.



Community trust and belief in the efficacy of these practices play a crucial role in their continued use and acceptance. Mr F. Edet (personal communication on February 5, 2024).

E. Eyo (personal communication on 5th February 2025), asserted that the practice of bonesetting in Ini and in Ibibioland dates back to the very time the Ibibio people started engaging in hunting and agricultural related activities including bush clearing, climbing of trees, cutting down of trees, carrying heavy weight on the back, harvesting fruits, among other activities which had the potential of exposing them to hazardous situations. In the process of carrying out some of the above-listed activities, one was said to have accidentally gotten injured or got his bone fractured as a result. This position was further buttressed by F. Edet (personal communication on February 5, 2024) when he said that in order to bring restoration and normalcy to one's health, the ancient Ibibio people devised means for setting and healing the fractured bones.

The Acquisition of Bonesetting Skill in Ini Local Government Area

There are no documents to provide information on how the first set of Ini people and by extension Ibibio people devised the art of bonesetting and fared in their practices. Oral tradition claims that some Ini bonesetters who were proficient in the art went to seek for skills from their contemporaries neighbouring communities. Some were said to have perfected their practices through special processes such as revelation in the dream (Mr. C. Okokon, personal communication on February 12, 2024). Elsewhere, Eze et al (2022:5) aver that, practitioners of the craft jealously guard it as a family secret. Training is by oral transmission and is passed from one generation to another, as part of the ancestral heritage of the people. The practitioner's greatest act of preservation is teaching one of his sons or daughters some techniques, concluded by Eze *et al.* (2025). The training is passed from one generation to another through skills and experience acquired as part of an ancestral heritage. The training is not formal and not structured. There is no certification and anyone can actually claim to be a practitioner particularly in the big cities (Dada, et al. 2011:263). Thus, traditional bonesetting in Ini LGA is a family practice in just as it is in other developing cultures where they flourish. F. Edet, (personal communication on February 5, 2024), noted that through apprenticeship, it is possible for certain outsiders who show keen interest at an early age and are sometimes "ordained by the gods" *obot emana*, to learn the intricacies of the profession. Additionally, there may be informal training sessions or gatherings where practitioners share insights and refine their skills collectively. Records are kept orally and instructions are transmitted through verbal interaction and observation (Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019:89). Overall, the acquisition of bone setting skills in Ini LGA is a combination of practical experience, mentorship, and cultural immersion. Mr. C. Okokon (personal conversation on 12 February 12, 2024).

Diagnosis of Bone Fracture in Ini Local Government Area

According to O. Essien (personal communication on 14th January, 2024), the diagnosis of fracture in Ini LGA of Ibibioland, is based on physical assessment and experience of the traditional bonesetter. Pain, swelling, tenderness, limb shortening or deformity, presence of a gap between broken fragments, abnormal movement and loss of function of a limb following trauma are recognized as physical signs



of fracture (Onuminya, 2004:654). Generally, traditional bone setters (TBS) diagnose or use their palms and fingers to feel and access the type and extent of damage to broken bones without X-ray (Nwokeke et al, 2019:41).

On the basis of physical assessment, the traditional bonesetter describes a fracture as open or closed, displaced or undisplaced, single or multiple in relation to the part of the limb involved. They appreciate the danger associated with open fractures, but some of them claim that they have knowledge of herbs that can be used to heal the wound. Most TBSs attempt to treat the wound with herbs, and some employ the services of a nurse to manage the wound for them (Onuminya, 2004:654). The diagnostic procedures include enquiries into the cause of the injury, touching and feeling with the fingers to ascertain the nature and severity of the fracture. (Ali, *et al.* 2020:4).

Sometimes, the diagnosis of bone fractures in Ini LGA typically involves a combination of traditional and modern methods, depending on the preferences and resources available to the individual seeking treatment. Traditional bonesetters in Ini LGA often rely on their experience, knowledge of anatomy, and observation skills to diagnose bone fractures. They may palpate the injured area, assess for deformities or misalignment, and inquire about the circumstances of the injury. According to C. Okokon, (personal communication on 12th February, 2024), traditional healers may also use cultural or spiritual methods, such as divination or consultation with ancestral spirits, to aid in diagnosis. D. Mfonido, a medical doctor, noted during a personal conversation on January 23, 2024, that in some cases, there may be collaboration between traditional bonesetters and modern healthcare providers for the diagnosis of bone fractures. Patients may initially seek the expertise of a traditional healer for assessment, and if necessary, they may be referred to a medical facility for further evaluation and treatment.

Traditional Techniques of Bone Realignment in Ini LGA

According to Nwokeke et al (2019:42), the treatment procedure in traditional bone setting involves the use of splints made of wood, bamboo or rattan cane, which are usually bandaged around the fracture to immobilize the site, while herbal dressings and hot fomentations are also applied. Herbal cream application, native bamboo splinting, frequent pulling and massaging with or without scarification are applied and repeated at irregular intervals until the fracture heals; treatment is carried out while the patient is either sitting or lying down on a mat.

Mr. G. Udoh (personal communication on February 13, 2024), reported that, in Ini LGA, traditional techniques of bone realignment, practiced by traditional bonesetters, often involve manual manipulation and traction methods. These traditional techniques of bone realignment in Ini LGA are often passed down through generations and may vary in their specific application depending on the experience and expertise of the individual bonesetter. According to focused Group Discussion and Participant Observation, the following are some of the traditional techniques commonly used for bone realignment in Ini LGA:

1. **Manual Manipulation:** Traditional bonesetters use their hands to gently manipulate the fractured bone back into its proper alignment. This may involve applying pressure and



gradually maneuvering the bone into the correct position. The bonesetter may use their thumbs, fingers, or palms to exert controlled force on the bone, taking care to avoid further injury or discomfort to the patient.

2. **Traction:** Traction techniques involve pulling or stretching the injured limb to realign the fractured bone. This can be achieved manually by the bonesetter, who may apply gradual traction to the limb while stabilizing the surrounding tissues. Alternatively, devices such as ropes, cloth strips, or bamboo splints may be used to provide traction and assist in the realignment process.
3. **Herbal Compresses:** Some traditional bonesetters in Ini LGA may use herbal compresses or poultices applied to the injured area to help relax muscles, reduce swelling, and facilitate bone realignment. These compresses may contain herbs with anti-inflammatory or analgesic properties to aid in the healing process.
4. **Massage:** Massage techniques are employed to loosen tight muscles and improve blood circulation around the injured area, making it easier to realign the fractured bone. The bonesetter may use gentle kneading, stroking, or friction techniques to promote relaxation and mobility in the affected limb.
5. **Immobilization:** After realigning the fractured bone, traditional bonesetters typically immobilize the injured limb using splints, bandages, or other supportive devices to maintain proper alignment and prevent further injury during the healing process.

The different religious and cultural methods of bonesetting and healing employed by traditional bonesetters in Ibibioland (specifically, in Ini LGA) include but are not limited to the following:

1. **Use of Oil and Medical Herbs as Traditional Remedies for Pain Relief:** The use of oil and traditional herbal remedies play an important role in bonesetting in Ini LGA and other African



cultures since it forms part of primary health care for treatment of various medical conditions, including wounds (Gulumian, et al. 2018:1). In traditional bonesetting in Ini LGA (Local Government Area), M. Ekpenyong, (personal communication on January 23, 2024), reported that, herbs and oils are often utilized for their perceived medicinal properties. These substances may be applied topically or ingested orally as part of the treatment process to promote healing, reduce inflammation, and alleviate pain associated with bone injuries.

2. **Heat Therapy for Pain Relief:** Heat therapy also known as thermotherapy or thermal therapy – is the transfer of heat or thermal energy in and out of the human body especially at the joints, using towels, ice packs, wax, hot/warm water, steam, etc within a given temperature range. The objective is the expansion of blood capillaries and increased blood flow to the affected area for healing. The principle is the application of the heat or cold to change the cutaneous, intraarticular or core temperature of soft tissues to improve symptoms of certain conditions (Igwilllo & Clifford, 2020:87). Heat therapy, as reported by M. Ekpenyong (personal communication on January 23, 2024), is commonly employed in traditional bonesetting practices in Ini LGA for pain relief and promoting healing. This therapy involves the application of heat, often through hot packs, warm compresses, or heated herbs/oils, to the affected area. The heat helps to increase blood flow, relax muscles, and reduce stiffness, thereby easing pain and discomfort associated with bone injuries.
3. **Laying the bone-fractured patient to relax on a bamboo bench:** B. Silvanus (January 23, 2024: personal communication) notes that laying the bone-fractured patient to relax on a bamboo bench is a traditional practice in bonesetting in Ini LGA. The bamboo bench provides a firm yet flexible surface for the patient to rest, allowing the body to be supported while also enabling easy access



to the injured area for treatment. Additionally, the natural properties of bamboo may be believed to have therapeutic benefits in promoting relaxation and healing.

4. **Use of splints and bamboo stick:** Use of splints and bamboo stick or rattan cane or palm leaf axis with cotton thread or old cloth. This is wrapped tightly on the injured part and left in place for the first 2-3 days before intermittent release and possible treatment with herbs and massage. This release of the splint is however not uniformly practiced (Dada, et al, 2011:263). Splints and bamboo sticks are commonly used in traditional bonesetting practices in Ini LGA to immobilize and support fractured or injured bones. Splints are typically made from materials such as wood, bamboo, or even metal, and are used to hold the injured limb in place while it heals. Bamboo sticks may be incorporated into splints or used separately to provide additional support and stability to the injured area. These traditional methods aim to prevent further damage to the injured bone and surrounding tissues while promoting proper alignment and healing. This was reported by O. Essien, on January 14, 2024, during a personal communication.
5. **Massage and manual traction of the affected bone:** In massage therapy, a massage therapist rubs and kneads the soft tissues of your body. The soft tissues include muscle, connective tissue, tendons, ligaments and skin. The massage therapist varies the amount of pressure and movement (*Mayo Clinic Staff, 2023*). This may be done exclusively or in conjunction with the use of traditional splints and herb application. Fractures that fail to heal with the routine treatment of splinting and massaging may be given further traditional treatment by way of scarifications, sacrifices and incantations (Dada, et al. 2011:263). Massage and manual traction are integral components of traditional bonesetting in Ini LGA. G. Udoh (February 13, 2024: personal communication) opined that massage is often used to help relax muscles, improve blood



circulation, and reduce inflammation around the injured area. It can also help alleviate pain and discomfort associated with the bone injury. Manual traction involves gently pulling or stretching the injured limb or joint to realign the fractured bones or dislocated joints. This manual manipulation is performed with care and expertise to ensure proper alignment and to facilitate the healing process.

6. **Employment of orthodox medical Practices:** Mr. O. Essien (personal communication on January 14, 2024), admitted that in some cases, traditional bonesetters in Ini LGA may incorporate elements of orthodox medical practices into their treatments. This integration can vary depending on the individual bonesetter's knowledge, experience, and available resources. Examples of orthodox medical practices that may be employed include the use of sterile instruments, wound cleaning and dressing techniques, and referral to medical professionals for complex cases or complications. While traditional bonesetters often rely on indigenous knowledge and techniques, they may also recognize the value of modern medical interventions and collaborate with healthcare professionals when necessary to ensure the best possible outcomes for their patients.
7. **Use of Amulets (Talisman) for Spiritual Protection and Healing:** Amulets and talismans are simply physical objects that are believed to have powers to cause good things to happen and also have the power to lead to healing. They are also known as Lucky charms, protective totems (Darr-Hope, 2024). According to Owusu-Ansah (2012:477), the use of amulets is one of the common means by which African societies has addressed illness. Through the agency of amulets, the spiritual causes of sickness are appealed to, or confronted, to let go of afflictions (Johnathan, et al. 2024). In traditional bonesetting practices in Ini LGA, the use of amulets or talismans for spiritual protection and healing is not uncommon. These amulets are believed to possess spiritual powers



that can ward off evil spirits, promote healing, and provide protection to the patient during the treatment process. The specific types of amulets used and their perceived effects can vary widely depending on cultural beliefs and traditions passed down through generations. However, they are often worn or placed near the patient during treatment to imbue them with spiritual strength and assistance alongside the physical care provided by the bonesetter (Mr. M. Victor, personal communication on January 25, 2024).

8. **Application of Poultice:** According to O. Essien (personal communication on 14th January), in traditional bonesetting practices in Ini LGA, poultices are often used as a natural remedy to complement the treatment of bone injuries and promote healing. These poultices can be made from locally available herbs, plants, or other materials with medicinal properties. The poultice is typically prepared by crushing or grinding the chosen ingredients into a soft, moist paste. It is then applied directly to the affected area of the body, such as a fractured bone or a sprained joint, and covered with a clean cloth or bandage. The medicinal properties of the poultice ingredients are believed to penetrate the skin and provide relief from pain, reduce inflammation, and facilitate the healing process. Poultices may also be used to draw out toxins or promote circulation to the injured area. The specific ingredients used in poultices and their application methods may vary depending on local traditions, the availability of resources, and the expertise of the traditional healer. However, poultices are commonly employed as a natural and accessible form of treatment in traditional bonesetting practices in Ini LGA.

Rituals for Bone Healing and Restoration

According to Ekanem & Essien (2022:405), “ritual is at the center of many religions” and it is an agent of transformartion. In traditional bonesetting in Ini LGA, rituals for bone healing and restoration are often deeply rooted in cultural and spiritual beliefs. These rituals, according to M. Ekpenyong (personal



communication on 23rd January, 2024), may vary among different communities and traditional healers, but they generally involve practices aimed at promoting healing, restoring balance, and providing spiritual support to the patient. These rituals serve not only to address the physical injury but also to address the spiritual and emotional aspects of healing, promoting holistic well-being for the patient.

According to Focused Group Discussion and views from people in Ini LGA, the following are some of the common rituals involved in bone healing and restoration may include:

1. **Prayer and Invocation:** Incantations, prayers, pouring of libation, divinations and other traditional means are sometimes applied in treating bone fractures traditionally (Nwokeke et al, 2019:42). Traditional healers may recite prayers or invoke spiritual beings to seek assistance in the healing process and to bless the patient with strength and protection.
2. **Offering of Sacrifices:** Offerings such as food, herbs, or symbolic items may be presented to spirits or deities as a gesture of gratitude and to request their aid in the healing of the patient.
3. **Herbal Baths or Cleansing:** The patient may be bathed with water infused with healing herbs or undergo a cleansing ritual to purify the body and remove negative energies.
4. **Symbolic Gestures:** Traditional symbols or gestures may be used to signify the alignment and restoration of the fractured bone, reinforcing the belief in the healing power of the ritual.
5. **Community Support:** Family members and community members may gather to provide emotional support, prayers, and encouragement to the patient, fostering a sense of belonging and solidarity during the healing process.

Invocation of Traditional Spirits for Guidance and Assistance During Bone Setting

Healing in African culture is an inextricable component of African spirituality and traditional way of living (Olusakin, 2022). Ibibio people are deeply rooted in their spiritual beliefs and methods of traditional healing and therefore have an unwavering faith in healing through a traditional healer. Family and community members seek help from traditional healers who give home-grown medication such as herbs or ointments to calm a person and relieve a person who is experiencing physical or emotional pain. The use of animal bones, indigenous herbs and their elevated spiritual status has earned traditional healers' great reverence and they are seen as equivalent to the Supreme Being. Hence, when



faced with trauma, anxiety and depression, individuals and families turn first to traditional healers for help to transcend their difficulties (Singh & Bhagwan, 2020:409).

In traditional bonesetting practices in Ini LGA, the invocation of traditional spirits for guidance and assistance is sometimes incorporated into the healing process. Traditional healers may call upon ancestral spirits, nature spirits, or other spiritual entities believed to have healing powers and wisdom. The invocation is often performed through prayers, chants, or rituals aimed at establishing a connection with the spiritual realm and seeking assistance in diagnosing and treating bone injury. The belief is that these spirits possess knowledge of herbal remedies, healing techniques, and metaphysical insights that can aid in the healing process (Akpan, Ekanem and Oko, 2023:137). By invoking their presence and seeking their guidance, traditional bonesetters may enhance their ability to effectively treat the patient and facilitate the restoration of balance and harmony within the body (M. Ekpenyong, January 23, 2024: personal communication).

It's important to note that these practices are deeply rooted in cultural and spiritual beliefs and vary widely among different communities and traditional healers. They serve to provide not only physical healing but also spiritual support and emotional comfort to the patient and their loved ones during the process of bone-setting and recovery.

Challenges facing Traditional Bonesetting Practice in Ini LGA

In Ini LGA, traditional bonesetting and healing practices face various challenges and controversies. According to Focused group discussion and researcher's participant observation, the following are some of the many challenges and controversies of bonesetting in Ini LGA, Ibibioland:

1. **Lack of Regulation:** Traditional bonesetting is often practiced without formal regulation or oversight, leading to concerns about the competencies of practitioners. This can result in inconsistent treatment outcomes and potential risks to patients.
2. **Accessibility to Modern Healthcare:** Despite the prevalence of traditional bonesetting, access to modern healthcare services may be limited in some areas of Ini LGA. This can lead to delays in seeking medical treatment for complex fractures or complications, as patients may initially opt for traditional methods.
3. **Integration with Modern Medicine:** There is often a tension between traditional bonesetting practices and modern medical approaches. Some healthcare professionals view traditional bonesetting as outdated or ineffective, while traditional healers may perceive modern medicine as intrusive or dismissive of cultural beliefs (Ekanem, 2002).



4. **Safety Concerns:** Improper bone setting techniques or lack of hygienic practices may lead to complications such as infections, delayed healing, or further injury. Additionally, the use of unsterilized instruments or questionable substances in treatment can pose health risks to patients.
5. **Preservation of Traditional Knowledge:** With the influence of modernization and globalization, there is a risk of traditional bonesetting practices being lost or diluted over time. Efforts to preserve and transmit indigenous knowledge to future generations are crucial for maintaining cultural heritage and ensuring the continuity of effective healing practices.
6. **Complications:** Generally, the complications from traditional medicine include: severe itching, swollen legs, severe headache, constant vomiting. However, the complications that mostly arise from traditional bone setting include: infected open fractures, limb-length discrepancy, fracture with compartment syndrome, brachial plexus injury, gangrene of the affected limbs, posterior and anterior dislocations, delayed union, nonunion, mal-union, contractures, chronic osteomyelitis, mismanaged fractures, advanced bone tumors, ischemic limbs from tight tourniquet splints, limb shortening, irreducibility, paralysis, stiffness/ankylosis, osteoarthritis, sepsis and even death from tetanus and septicaemia (Nwokeke et al, 2019:42). The fear of these complications poses a great threat to traditional bonesetting in Ini LGA.

However, despite documented complications, criticisms and antagonism from orthodox medical practitioners, the practice and patronage of traditional bone setters (TBS) is extensive in Ini LGA, Ibibioland and in developing cultures. In addition, patronage of TBS has been increasing irrespective of age, education, gender, and economic status of bone fracture patients because the practice is believed to be rooted in the culture of the people.

Conclusion

Through the examination of religio-cultural practices of bonesetting and healing in Ini Local Government Area (LGA) of Ibibioland, it becomes evident that these practices are deeply rooted in the cultural fabric of the community and are influenced by religious beliefs, traditional customs, and social norms. The practice of bonesetting and healing has a long-standing history in Ibibioland, with roots



tracing back to traditional healing methods passed down through generations. These practices have evolved over time, adapting to changes in societal dynamics, healthcare systems, and religious influences. More so, religious beliefs play a significant role in bonesetting and healing practices, with many practitioners incorporating spiritual rituals, prayers, and invocations into their treatment methods. The belief in divine intervention and supernatural forces shapes the way bonesetters and healers approach diagnosis, treatment, and patient care. Thus, Bonesetters and healers fulfill important social roles and responsibilities within the community, serving as healthcare providers, spiritual advisors, and cultural custodians. They play a crucial role in addressing the healthcare needs of the population, particularly in rural areas where access to modern medical facilities may be limited.

Despite the successes of bonesetting and healing practices in Ini LGA, the practitioners face challenges such as stigma, regulation, and competition from modern healthcare systems. In conclusion, the religio-cultural practices of bonesetting and healing in Ini LGA reflect the rich cultural heritage, religious beliefs, and social dynamics of Ibibioland. By recognizing the importance of traditional knowledge, fostering collaboration between traditional healers and modern healthcare providers, and addressing challenges through supportive policies and interventions, the community can ensure the preservation and continued efficacy of these valuable healing traditions for generations to come.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- x. Collaboration and communication should be encouraged between traditional bonesetters and modern healthcare practitioners to ensure comprehensive healthcare delivery.
- xi. Documentation and preservation of traditional bonesetting and healing practices should be advocated in order to maintain cultural heritage and ensure their sustainability.
- xii. General regulations and standards in bonesetting and healing practices should be implemented to ensure the safety and efficacy of traditional healing practices, including training and certification for bonesetters.
- xiii. Community education and awareness programs within the community should be provided in order to promote understanding of traditional healing practices and their potential benefits and risks.
- xiv. Traditional clinical centres for fracture treatment, and acquisition of bonesetting and healing skills should be established at least in each LGA in Ibibioland in order to enhance accessibility.



xv. Further research into the efficacy and safety of traditional bonesetting techniques, including clinical trials and comparative studies with modern medical interventions should be encouraged and supported.

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Primary Sources

Name	Age	Occupation	Place of Interview	Date
M. Ekpenyong	45	Teacher	Ikpe Ikot Nkon, Ini LGA	January 23, 2024
O. Essien,	61	Bonesetter & Farmer	Ikot Ukpomg, Ini LGA	January 14, 2024
M. Victor	55	Civil Servant	Ikot Udo Asan, Ini LGA	January 25, 2024
G. Udoh,	67	Bonesetter & Trader	Nkana Ikpe, Ini LGA	February 13, 2024
D. Mfonido	59	Medical Doctor	Ikot Ikpe, Ini LGA	January 23, 2024
C. Okokon	75	Community Chief / Farmer	Nkana Ikpe, Ini LGA	February 12, 2024
F. Edet	48	Bonesetter	Odoro Ikpe, Ini LGA	February 5, 2014
E. Eyo	54	Bonesetter	Ikot Ikpe, Ini LGA	January 23, 2025



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