



DYNAMICS OF INDIGENOUS ORTHOPAEDIC MEDICINE IN CONTEMPORARY AKPANYA AREA OF IGALA LAND, NIGERIA

By

Godwin A.Vaaseh,PhD

Abstract

This study is concerned with the nature and dynamics of indigenous or traditional African medicine in contemporary Nigeria. It illuminates the multi-faceted and often neglected roles that African native ‘doctors’ have been playing in addressing the health challenges of the people since the pre-literate era. With a particular focus on the Akpanya community of Igala land, Kogi State, North Central Nigeria, this study reveals that more than half of the people of Akpanya community still have high preference for traditional medicines especially when it involves orthopedic related problems. The reasons for the high patronage of these medical practitioners are highlighted. They include first and foremost the effectiveness and shrewd expertise of the healers and their medicines (drugs), the unavailability of modern hospitals and trained orthodox doctors in Akpanya. As a result of this, this study reveals that most people with bone-related problems within Akpanya and its environs patronize traditional orthopedic medical practitioners because of their age-long mastery of the profession and its affordability(cheap nature/cost), especially in terms of medical charges, when compared with western or modern medicine which are exorbitant. The paper argues that, judging by the poor doctor-to-patient ratio in Nigeria, there is the urgent need to integrate the study of traditional African medical system into the modern medical syllabus of higher institutions and teaching hospitals in Nigeria as obtainable in other parts of the world to help address the poor health problems of Nigerians. Through this integration and collaboration, native or traditional doctors stand a better chance of been exposed to modern medical skills and thus empowered to even handle more complicated health problems. This paper examines the medical challenges of Akpanya community in the 21st century and advocates for urgent help from both government and Non-governmental organization. Descriptive approach to historical research is employed while oral interviews are used with a critical synthesis of written sources.

Introduction

The common saying that health is wealth is an incontrovertible fact. This aphorism underscores the immense significance attached to the health sector of every human society since the pre-literate era. In pre-colonial Africa and Nigeria in particular, the people developed an articulate and complex methods of treating common ailments and diseases within their local environment. Africans had, prior to the advent of European colonialism developed and transmitted functional and effective methods in the prevention, diagnosis and elimination of physical, mental, and social imbalance from one generation to another (Olaoye 2009:3). In fact, studies have shown that this is not only applicable to Africans or Nigerians. It is reported that over three quarters of the world population depend on traditional medicine to overcome their health challenges (WHO 1976). In Igala land, there were and are still, experienced traditional medical practitioners who treat ailments and disease like head ache, typhoid, dysentery, mental disorder, skin infections, entomological, gynecological and orthopedic disorders, to mention only a few, with the use indigenous plants, animals and mineral elements intertwined with native skills and wisdom .

In Akpanya area of Igala land, the use of indigenous medicine is as old as the history of the people. It has been the part and parcel of the peoples' socio-economic and cultural mien which has been ensuring their well-being even up to this twenty-first century competing favourably with orthodox medical practice(JDPC 2007) One of the aspects of indigenous medicine that is still attached much preference in Akpanya is traditional orthopedic medicine. This genre of medicine is also known as traditional bone setting. It is primarily concerned with the treatment, prevention, and management of all kinds of bone problems, ranging from fractures, to dislocations within any part of the body. The healers use plant parts like boiled and roasted roots, leaves, seeds and watery/ liquid parts of some special plants to treat the broken, lacerated or dislocated parts of the body. In some cases, animal parts are used while incantations and certain taboos are observed. They people's fear for amputation and pains associated with plaster of Paris, coupled with acute shortage of qualified orthodox surgeons, poor financial status, unavailability of hospitals and past track records of achievements of the native doctors in the management of complicated medical, especially bone problems account for the high preference of the traditional surgeons in Akpanya and Igala Land in general.

However, it is lamentable to note that in spite of the immense medical services been rendered by these traditional surgeons in Akpanya and Igala Land in general, they are still been

largely discriminated against by both government and members of the academically trained orthodox practitioners. They (native surgeons) are not recognized as been viable components cum stakeholders in issues of medical and health administration in Kogi State despite the acute shortage of medical personnel in the state. In fact, they are often intimidated and coerced by government agents to show their licenses and evidence of registration with government and other medical bodies. This study by highlighting the nature and dynamics of indigenous medicine in Akpanya argues that there is the urgent need for their modernization, integration and collaborations if the avalanches of health problems of rural communities in Nigeria are to be properly tackled. In this perspective, it recommends some measures for achieving and resolving these problems. This paper is divided into three sections. These include; the introduction which is on-going, conceptual and theoretical clarifications, nature and dynamics of indigenous medicine in Igala Land , Orthopedic Medicine in Contemporary Akpanya area of Igala Land, Challenges Facing Indigenous Medical practitioners in Akpanya and some way forward

Conceptual and Theoretical Clarifications

Conceptual and theoretical clarifications are important aspects of any research for several reasons; first, it provides an operational scope within which a term with divers meaning is used in a study. This helps in curtailing confusion and ambiguities in usage. Clarification of concepts and theoretical according to O.O.Okpeh, Jr., helps to engender logical flow of analysis in any academic research (Okpeh 2007). It is in perspective that terms like indigenous medicine, orthopedics and health are clarified in this paper.

Indigenous Medicine: according to R.A.Olaoye, indigenous medicine refers to all the traditional methods of treating ailments and diseases to ensure social, mental, and psycho-physical and general well-being of an individual or group of individuals within a given geographical environment. This is also popularly called African Traditional Medicine. This kind of medical practice is rooted native wisdom and skills (Olaoye 2009). Local plants and animals are its main constituents. E.C. Raphael citing the World Health Organization (WHO) conceptualizes indigenous medicine “as the sum total of all the knowledge and practice, whether explicable or inexplicable used in the diagnosis, prevention and elimination of physical, mental

or social imbalance and relying exclusively on practical experience and observation handed from generation to generation”(Ekanyuwa 2011). the utilization of indigenous African medicine predates the emergence of orthodox medicine in Africa. It rooted in the people’s culture. Little wonder, Abubakar sees it as the cultural gem in various communities around the world which cut across different specialty like; herbal medicine, traditional birth attendance, traditional surgery, traditional medical integrated marketing, traditional psychiatrics and traditional occultism(Abubakar et’al 2007) Indigenous or traditional medicine in this paper mean all the various means and method of prevention, administration and management of ailments and diseases based on native skills and wisdom which is passed from one generation to another generation in Africa. It makes use of plants and animal parts and certain incantation to stimulate healings in any part of the human body germane and imperative for the economic, social and politico-cultural well-being of the people.

Orthopedic: This is a branch of medicine that deals with bone related diseases, infections and management(Ejima 2012). It is a specialty concerned with bone disorder arising from accidents or injuries. In the context of this paper, the term orthopedic is used to mean the African traditional medical ways of treating bone problems like fractures and other bodily severe dislocation.

Health: the concept of health is multifaceted and evolutionary in nature. The WHO defines health as a complete physical, social, mental or psychological well-being of an individual or group of persons and not just the absences of diseases(WHO 1976, Etobe 2009). Health is also defined as the extent to which an individual or group is able on one hand to realize aspirations and satisfy needs, and on the other hand, to change or cope with the dynamics in the environment. To Tuckett cited in Eteng Ikpi and Utebe Eteng, health is the actualization of inherent and acquired human potentials through goals directed behavior, competent self-care and satisfying relationship with others while adjustment are made as needed to maintain structural integrity with the environment. This makes health an all encompassing issue that cut-across physical, to social, economic and cultural milieu(Etobe 2009) Health therefore connotes the absence of diseases or other challenges that threaten ones’ state of physical, mental or socio-economic well being.

Functionalism: functionalism is a theory best suited for analyzing social problems like medical/ health issues in the society. Linked to Emile Durkheim, functionalism states that a social organization is made up of different social elements or parts (Talcot 1952). Thus, for a society to function properly, all component parts must work together as a united whole . According to Yusuf, ‘functionalism is the relationship between the various social institutions with emphasis on the contribution of each institution to the maintenance of the whole system’ (Yusuf 2006). Within the focus or context of this paper, the theory implies that for Nigeria and Akpanya society in particular to overcome its numerous health challenges, both the orthodox and traditional medical practitioners must be properly integrated into the national health system to engender overall medical health care delivery services in the country especially in rural communities.

The Nature of Indigenous Medical Practice in Igala land

Indigenous medical practice in Nigeria and other parts of Africa pre dates the introduction of western orthodox medicine. This is because it has been part and parcel of the people cultural worldview and thus, been the only alternative to curtailing ailments and diseases from one generation to another generation. In different parts of Igala, people have used herbs of plant and animal parts to cure diseases. R.A. Olaoye observed that indigenous medical science is hydra-headed, in that it exists in different forms. In herbal form, indigenous medicine can be used as curative and preventive therapy. In powdered form, it can be used to treat ailments and applied to achieve an end which could be good or bad. In form of concoction, indigenous medical science can be applied to address issues like family planning, pregnancy, childbirth, ill-health and, infant mortality(Olaoye 2009) Consequent upon this, common ailments like head ache, typhoid, rheumatism, fever, sickle cell anemia, madness, skin rashes, dandruffs, accidental cuts, erectile, and other problems were cured by indigenous medical practitioners(Nwadiora 2007)

Men and Women were (and are still) engaged in this profession. Administration of drugs was carried out after adequate prognosis of the signs and symptoms of an ailment has been obtained. Thus, they (native doctors) often ask questions as to when and how a given health disorder began including what kinds of food or drink such a patient had eaten. This is much

similar to case profile usually obtained by western orthodox medical practitioner before proper diagnosis starts(WHO 1976)

Plant parts like leaves, roots, bark, flowers, liquids obtained from plants are used. Apart from this, animal parts like feathers, peck, gizzard, liver, intestines or the blood could be used. The animals used vary not according to the problem but as the healer might want. Among the Igala, goat, fowl, tortoise, lizard, birds, wall gecko, fish, parts of lion, leopard, antelopes, just to mention but a few constitute a major component of the people pharmacopeia (Otshadare 2009). These plants and animals could be sundry, cooked, roasted, chewed or pounded. Prior to administration of drugs, certain incantation maybe made with the use of kola nuts or alligator pepper(Otshadare 2009) Proper treatment involves drinking of boiled leaves, root or bark. This could be taken cold or hot depending on the nature of the ailment or disease. Also, some could be massaged and robbed on the body or through incision. In this case, locally extracted palm kernel oil is grinded with the roasted or pounded condiments and adequately mixed before been taken. In some situations, the patient may be instructed to lick such drug gradually. In fact, administration and treatment can be carried out through hanging of the medicine or drug in certain region of the body. Some of these parts include; the neck, around the waist, leg, or in form of ear ring or nee ring. Besides, rituals and taboos maybe observed. The essence of observing certain rituals and taboos while on medication or treatment in traditional Igala society is to ensure potency and quick recovery(Olaoye 2009, Ejima 2012). It is also believed among the Igala that ailments and diseases are caused by evil spirits manifest through the handiwork of evil people or through witches and wizards. Consequently, a native doctor will healed a witch or wizard inflicted ailment or diseases by preparing those medicines that are anti-witch or wizard. In order to ensure rapid healing, the patient must thus adhere strictly to the instructions and advice of the native doctor.

Traditional Orthopedic Medicine in Contemporary Akpanya

Orthopedic is a specialty in traditional medicine(Ejima 2012). Bone setters existed in virtually all communities with a very high level of success in the management of fractures and sprains. This

is perhaps one area of medicine where the traditional model was preferred to the orthodox by a significant proportion of the populace. The handling of fractures even of a compound nature was wonderful but unacknowledged contribution to medical science. Not only were fractures effectively managed, even lacerated and punctured flesh was treated. In fatal cases, secondary infection could be prevented or managed. Fractures that failed to heal properly were reset to enhance symmetry and mobility of limbs(Olaoye 2009).

Traditional orthopedic practice is widespread among the Igala and, in Akpanya community, in particular. Akpanya is a rural border community in present day Igalamela/Odolu Local Government Area of Kogi state, North Central Nigeria. It shares common borders with Unadu and Itchi Igbo Nsukka communities. It takes about 45 minutes drive from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka campus (UNN). With a population of about eight thousand people, the community has no hospital. Only two ill-equipped primary health care clinics established by the local government council exist at Agbedo and Eba, sadly too, these clinics lack sufficient manpower to even handle major and even minor health challenges. As a result, private individuals with vent for profits have established clinics at Agbokete, Amaka, and Ajaobi, this is in addition to a poorly equipped dispensary at Oji-Akpanya, which is owned and managed by the Catholic Church Parish of Akpanya, Idah Dioceses. This unsavory scenario has made Traditional orthopedic homes the first point of call whenever major bone or other medical problems occur. One striking features of traditional medicines in Akpanya is it high acceptability and preponderant prevalence. Hardly is there any barrier to it utilization. Both educated and uneducated, Christians and Muslims and Traditional African worshipers patronize them greatly² Different traditional bone setters exist at different parts of the community(Audu Adejoh 2014). For instance, there are traditional orthopedic medical practitioners at Eba, Ojuwo- Ubele, Amaka, Odumogwu, and Oji-Akpanya, to mention but a few. However, out of these zones, the traditional orthopedic doctor at Eba, Mr John Ameh is the most popular and thus a major focus/reference point of this study. The choice of his selection was based on his ability to keep records of past treatment including copious pictures of patients healed and his minimal level of education. Apart from these, He has also, been in the profession for over twenty years.

Traditional orthopedic medicine is Akpanya as in other part of Igala land predates the emergence of orthodox orthopedic practices(Ejima 2012). It was a genre of medicine that

provided (and still provides) immediate basic health care services to people especially those who have severe case of fractures or dislocation. The causes of these bone problems in Akpanya are multi-faceted. These includes; accidents especially, those arising from people who fall from tall palm, cocoa nut, and kola nut trees or other economic trees like *ivirgia*(Ugba) or *prosopis Africana*(Okpeye) trees(Ejiga Sylvanus 2014). Some are dislocation arising from wrestling competition or during fighting. With the emergence of British colonialism which further spurred the use of bicycles and later motor cycles and cars, the cases of orthopedic problems increased in Akpanya.. Coupled with these are the contemporary and incessant cases of fracture and dislocations suffered by footballers during intra or inter school football competitions and also during major annual football tournaments in Akpanya usually held during Easter or Christmas festivals. These causative factors have remained the primary causes of contemporary orthopedic problems in Akpanya.

The precise origin of Traditional medical orthopedics in Akpanya is unknown. This is due to the absence of literature. However, some traditional orthopedic practitioners in Akpanya, claimed to have inherited the skills from their parents who in turn had inherited from their great grandparents several generations ago³². Apart from this genre of practitioners, some acquired the skills through apprenticeship. In all, the practice of traditional orthopedic medicine in Akpanya is of great antiquity. It is imperative to note that traditional orthopedic medicine in Akpanya has undergone and still undergoing series of changes. Thus, there exist changes and continuities. These changes are as a result of westernization. Generally, the practices of traditional medicines in this community involve the use of boiled leaves and roasted bark of certain plants . While Modern aluminum pot is used for boiling of herbs, traditional pot is used for roasting and storing of grinded oil-rich condiments(John 2014). The water from the boiled herbs is used for pressing the fractured or dislocated part or parts of the body of a particular patient. After pressing with hot water, the affected part is gently massaged or robbed with the grind oil-rich condiments extracted from the roasted or pounded bark or roots(Audu Adejoh 2014). Common plants used include *Ebe*, *Ilie*, *Ache*, *Atam Anyiwo*, and others which some of them refused to disclose. The pot, mortar and pestle used are different from that use for domestic services. Animal parts are mixed with powdery herbs through pounding and grinding. In two of the centers visited, they confirmed that in some severe cases of fracture or dislocation, a cock or hen's leg will be deliberately fractured or dislocated by the healer. Through this, the patient recovery and progress

of healing is directly linked to that of the hen or cock. As the deliberately injured animal recuperates so also does the patient.

Furthermore, the process of treatment of patients is almost similar with others in contemporary Nigerian communities. Though with some differences, basically due to dichotomy in cultures among ethnic groups in Nigeria. The mode of administration and treatment is similar to that described by OS Ejima, According to Ejima (2012:17)the pattern of treatments involve

Direct contact with the injured part of the body while diagnosis is by observation which involves running the fingers through the body surface and applying pressure on the injured part. The fractured bone is set raw without the use of any pain relieve or anesthetics. When the bone is set the traditional medicine (herbal cream) is robbed over the area. Splint is applied and bandage is used to hold it in place... baton for ceiling were cut into sizes and placed round the injured part. Bandage is used to hold the pieces of baton in place.. the splint or pieces of baton are removed everyday to check for faults in the setting of the bone. If the setting was found to be in place, hot water will be applied to the injured part, the herbal cream is then applied and the splint or baton is again retied to the injured part. This is done on daily basis until the fracture is healed.. the checking and pressing with hot water is done every other day while the use of herbal cream and tying back is the same. In some cases, the hot water used must be the extract or filtrates of the herbal preparations.. the injured parts are placed by fire or life charcoals to keep the area warm. Similarly, in all centers visited, patients were allowed to use modern medicine in addition to the herbal

According to John, he invites orthodox health personnel and patent medicine sellers (popularly known as chemists) to provide some modern medical treatments to patients who have severe case of bone disorders. They help in suturing and providing anti-biotic drugs and other pain relievers to patients(John 2014). It is interesting to note that the author of this article can attest to this fact as he was injected by a chemist in Mr. John's house in year 2005 when he suffered severe fracture while playing football during an evening game exercise at community secondary school, Akpanya. Injection lasted for a few days and was administered twice a day-morning and evening. In some cases, involving injuries on the hand, a small string or robe was tied to the neck of the patient and the fractured or dislocated hand fixated and held by the robe.

Challenges facing Indigenous Orthopedic Medical Practitioners in Akpanya and the Way Forward

Traditional medicines and medical practitioners in contemporary Nigeria and Akpanya community in particular are befuddled with coteries of teething challenges which are regrettably man-made ³⁹. Some of these include, government neglect, antagonism cum hostility from orthodox doctors who never see anything good from "Egypt" (local healers), institutional failures, and economic and socially-induced problems.

The Nigeria governments at Federal, State and Local Government levels have not made sincere pragmatic commitments towards the development of Traditional Medicines. They ruling elites have high preference for orthodox medicine which they often seek abroad. Daily news reports on Nigerians travelling to the United States of America (USA) and other European, and Asian countries abound. Sadly, India and China which had integrated traditional medicine into its national health care delivery system have become medical tourist destinations for many rich Nigerians. Unfortunately, some have died in the process while many had been subjected to dehumanizing treatment. For instance, former president Umar Musa Yardua died in a Saudi hospital while many state governors and senators have died in foreign hospitals too. It is on record that Government officials and policy makers often make unrealistic promises to native doctors in Nigeria. The native doctors in Akpanya in particular, are discriminated against and marginalized. Before they can operate in any part of Akpanya, they are mandated to register with the government (Sunday Egu, 2014) Failure to register attracts severe penalties which range from immediate arrest, fine or legal prosecution. According to Sunday Egwu, a native doctor in Igbudu area of Akpanya, Prior to his registration with Government, Most often, government law enforcement agencies like the Police and other health task force intimidated and coerced him all in a bid to show his work permit (a paper that depicts evidence of government approval). The fee is high and renewable annually. This unsavory situation has affected negatively, the growth and development of traditional orthopedic practitioners in Akpanya.

Closely related to the above is the non-integration of Traditional medicine and orthopedics in particular, into the national health care delivery system in Nigeria. The federal ministry of health in Nigeria has not established a single government owned traditional hospital in Nigeria. More worrisome is the fact the traditional medical experts that abound in many parts of the country has no place in the scheme of things/ affairs in health management in Nigeria. One would suggest that a department dedicated to local traditional medical expert should be

established in all the federal and state, and local government hospitals in Nigeria. The current excellent medical experiences in India and china have confirmed the viability of these native doctors. In the same vein, the national university commission should design and re-design the existing medical syllabus used in universities in Nigeria to reflect or create a place for indigenous medicine.

Another major problem militating against indigenous medical practice in Akpanya is the lack of interest in the profession by the youth. The youth in Akpanya including some children of the native bone setters are not interested in learning the profession; instead they prefer migrating to cities or furthering their studies outside their parent's profession. In this regard, a re-orientation of the youth nationally is germane and imperative.

Conclusion

Africans, since the pre-literate era have been highly innovative and creative. Their innovativeness and shrewd ingenuity cut across different strata of life. In the area of medicine, traditional African societies developed diverse means and methods of treating different ailments and diseases. This was done through the use of plants, animals and other mineral elements. Through this process, common health problems like head ache, fever, typhoid, virginal, erectile, mental, eye or skin disorders were tackled. Others include; respiratory, orthopedic, cardiovascular or gastro-intestine problem to mention but a few.

This study focused on the contemporary nature and dynamics of orthopedic medical practice in Akpanya. It argues that the traditional bone setters are playing immense roles in addressing the health challenges of this rural community. This is made possible by the confidence the people have in them as a result of their past tack records of healings. The paper makes a case for the integration of these native doctors into the nature health scheme in the country by exposing those to further advanced trainings. This is primarily because of the absence of hospitals and inadequacy of trained orthodox medical doctors in Akpanya.

References

Abubakar, M.S. et'al (2007) the Perception and Practice of Traditional Medicine in treatment of Cancers and inflammation by the Hausa and Fulani Tribes of Northern Nigeria” *Journal of Ethno pharmacology*

Audu Adejoh, Oral Interview, Akpanya, Farmer and Indigenous medical practitioner, Akpanya, 100+, 15/8/2014

Djukanovic, V and Mach E.P,eds, *Alternative Approaches for Meeting Basic Health Needs in Developing Countries*, WHO; Geneva

Ejima O.S,(2012) Traditional Bone Setting Among the Igala People of Kogi State, Nigeria, *International Journal of Basic and Applied Science*

Ekeanyanwu, C.R, (2011) Traditional Medicine in Nigeria: Current Status and the Future” *Research Journal of Pharmacology*, 5(6)

Etobe E.I. and Etobe U.E, (2009) “Empowering the African Traditional Healers for Effective Holistic Health Care Delivery in Nigeria” *International Journal of Science and Research*.

John, Ameh, Oral interview, native Orthopedic medical practitioner, Ijagodo, Akpanya, 12/8/2014, 50+

WHO Regional Office for Africa(1976) *African Traditional Medicine* Technical Report, No. 1 Brazzaville

Nwanuzoma, A.B. and Dappa, M.S.(2012) Ethnobotanical Studies of Port Harcourt Metropolis, Nigeria, *American Journal of Research Communication*

Nwadiora, H.C, et'al (2007) Medicinal Herbs Used for Managing Some Common Ailments Among Esan people of Edo State, Nigeria” *Pakistan Journal of Nutrition* 6(5)

Olaoye, R.A.,(2009), “Introduction” in Olaoye, R.A, (ed,) *Indigenous Science and Technology in Nigeria* Ibadan: Kraft Publishers

Otshadare, O.T., (2009) “Treatment of Mental Illness Among the Owe People” in Olaoye, R.A., (ed) *Indigenous Science and Technology...*,

Sunday Egwu, Native Medical Practitioner, Igbudu, Akpanya, 19/10/2014, 57+

Yusuf, N. (2006) "Traditional Medicine and Health Care and Delivery System in Nigeria" Ilorin
Journal of History,(2) 6