

SIGNIFICANCE OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS MEDICINES TO FAMILY WELL-BEING AND NIGERIAN ECONOMIC UPLIFT

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Abstract: African Traditional Religious Medicines are the traditional medicines of Africans that have stood the test of time and have been used to cure numerous diseases before the advent of Europeans to Africa. The medicines coincide with the religious beliefs and practices of Africa as Africans believe that the physical and the spiritual work together, which have made them believe that any physical illness that afflicts any member or members of a family has spiritual connotation and must be fought both spiritually and physically. In African religious setting, diseases are not contagious, but caused by malignant spirits, that is why more emphasis is placed on traditional medicines as some of these herbalists cure illnesses through spiritual means as well as physical. Though African traditional medicines have been relegated for Orthodox or modern medicine as some people including the government perceive them as primitive and unsearched, many people still perceive them as the last resort when confronted with incurable diseases like stroke, hypertension, diabetes, viral and stubborn bacterial diseases like staphylococcus auras, syphilis, gonorrhea, et cetera. These phytochemicals produced by plants are used to cure diseases that have defied modern medicines. The chemicals can be found in plants' leaves, stems and roots which the herbalists use to cure illnesses as these can be blended singly or with other items and given to patients or even squeezed, boiled or infused and drunk by patients. Two theories were used for the research namely Symbolic-Interaction Analysis and Structural-Change Theory. The method used was participant observation. It is recommended among others that government should sponsor herbalists in producing these traditional medicines by building factories where these medicines are produced and modernized as in form of capsules and tablets and sold to other countries to improve the economy. Government should also help in sponsoring researches on the efficacy of traditional medicines.

INTRODUCTION

African Traditional Medicines have been in use since time immemorial. Africans had been solely dependent on them before the intrusion of Europeans into Africa, but the introduction of Orthodox medicines has relegated the traditional medicines to the background as many Africans have embraced the orthodox medicines as being efficacious and have passed series of tests to prove their reliability and potency. Though African Traditional medicines have not undergone series of researches to approve their effectiveness as well as acceptable dosage, but substantial number of Africans relies on their curability of many diseases regardless of unproven laboratory tests. The question one needs to ask is: Are these traditional medicines really working as perceived? Many people have testified concerning the success of these medicines as regards their curative abilities. They are used for the treatment of such diseases as diabetes, malaria, typhoid, syphilis, gonorrhea, staphylococcus, candidacies, hypertension, toothache, headache to mention only a few. Some families do not joke with them as both old and young take them for preventive and curative purposes. In the African setting, diseases have no threat of contagion, but are attributed to malevolent spirits., for this reason, the medicine men cure diseases through physical and spiritual means as they ward off the spirits or pacify them and administer medicines to their patients.

Conceptual Clarification

Traditional Medicine

Traditional medicine refers to health practices, approaches, knowledge and beliefs incorporating plants, animal and mineral based medicines, spiritual therapies, manual techniques and exercises, applied singularly or

in combination to treat, diagnose and prevent illnesses or maintain well-being (Fokunang, et al, 2011). Traditional medicine as defined by the World Health Organization, is the sum total of the knowledge, skills, and practices based on the theories, beliefs, and experiences indigenous to different culture, whether explicable or not, used in the maintenance of health as well as in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement, or treatment of physical and mental illness (Che & Andrae-Marobela, 2017).

For the researchers, traditional medicine is a conglomeration of herbs – be it leaves, roots or bark – and practices attached to effect healing.

Family Well-being

As stated by Hall (2021), family well-being includes the safety, health, and financial stability of all family members. Well-being is not just the absence of disease or illness. It is a complex combination if a person's physical, mental, emotional, and social health factors. Wellbeing is strongly linked to happiness and life satisfaction (Better Health Channel, 2022). African Traditional Medicine contributes significantly in maintenance of good health. The citizens may not spend so much money, time and other resources in conventional hospitals. It then promotes longevity and productivity and wellbeing of the citizens.

Economic Uplift/Development

Economic uplift is the process in which an economy grows or changes and becomes more advanced, especially when both economic and social conditions are improved. Also it is a term used to describe concerted actions taken for the purpose of economic progress within a specific area. African Traditional Medicine helps the family to maintain good health, thus promoting productivity thereby uplifting the nation's economy.

Phytochemicals

Any of various bioactive chemical compounds found in plants, as antioxidants, that are considered to be beneficial to human health. Phytochemicals are substances produced mainly by plants, and these substances have biological activity. In the pharmaceutical industry, plants represent the main source to obtain various active ingredients (Mendoza & Silva, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

Two theories back up this work. They are Symbolic Interaction Analysis/Theory and Structural Change Theory.

Symbolic Interaction Analysis/Theory or Symbolic Interactionism

This is a sociological theory. It states that the society has accepted that there exists health and illness. The integrationists are interested in how people see the meaning and what causes illness (Lumen, n.d.). Symbolic integrationists look at what health and illness mean in a society and how this meaning is constructed (Course Hero, 2023). In relation to the work, Africans are aware that diseases or illnesses are not communicable, but have spiritual causes, that is, why the physical and spiritual aspects of healing are taken into consideration to actualize healing.

Structural Change Theory

This is a theory of economic growth. The theory refers to dramatic shift in the way a country, industry or market operates, usually brought on by major economic developments.... Structural change is often sparked by technological innovation, new economic developments, global shifts in the pools of capital and labor, changes in resource availability, changes in supply and demand of resources, and changes in the political landscape (Ganti, 2021). In relation to the work, the government should support African Traditional medicines by establishing factories where the medicines are modernized in form of capsules and tablets and exported.

Exportation of these medicines will help improve the economy.

Challenges of African Tradition Medicine

There are some challenges that Traditional medicine has to overcome so as to achieve its objectives.

Firstly, the acceptance of western religion, education, urbanization, globalization phenomena in Africa is unfavorably affecting traditional medicine. According to Krings (2005), "introduction of western culture into the rural parts of Africa more particularly Nigeria has had a great part of Negative impact on the roles of traditional medicine as western Education, Christianity and increased collaboration with global community became an important part of the communities, customs, tradition and taboo have been affected and in most case uninhibited completely". Teshome-Bahim (2006) noted that the process of development has greatly impacted on the use of traditional medicine both in rural and urban communities as well.

Another challenge vital to traditional medicine is the reported cases of fake healers and healing, though this is not restricted to Traditional medical practice alone. Ebomoyi (2009) reported that the healers could be rendering beneficial services to a large population, it might be a common place to encounter quacks and amid the associated unemployment, there is a marked increase in the ranks of traditional leaders, among whom there are, inopportunely, quite a number of impostors.

African Traditional medicine is often noted with sorcery and black magic. African Traditional medicine is from earlier times to date often associated with sorcery and black magic which practices are banned by law in Nigeria hence is illegal. It is illegal to promote, practice or possess sorcery articles, this means that it is only for the beneficial use of Traditional Medicine

that is lawful and legally permissible not its harmful use for evil or malicious use.

Stiff Competition with Foreign Traditional Medicine

According to Ebu, et al (2021) African Traditional medicine airs stiff competition with foreign traditional medicine. Unlike African Traditional medicines which are seen as archaic, basic and lacking governmental acknowledgment and support, its counter from the Asia continent (particularly India and Chinese Traditional medicine) which are more developed and enjoy government support in terms of proper recognition and even financial support (including research and subsidy), hence are more competitive than African Traditional Medicine. Eagerness of African Traditional medicine to disclose medical secrets and knowledge unlike their Conventional medical counterpart, the African traditional medical practitioners are not mindful about intellectual property protection, and are in the spirit of African liberality or absolute ignorance eager to disclose their traditional knowledge and the key medical secrets of practice and medicine. The readiness to disclose medical secrets and knowledge ferments breach of intellectual property of African Traditional medicine.

The Malevolent use of African Traditional Medicine

While African traditional medicine is used for useful purposes such as treatment of diseases and ailments, in most sub-Sahara Africa is reputed for malicious uses such as use in witchcraft, sorcery, casting of evil spells, and curse ordeals. This is not only regressive but undesirable. It is important for a critical traditional cultural legacy such as traditional medicine, traditional medicinal knowledge are employed for generous purposes only and not malicious purposes such as those listed above such use causes harm, suffering and misery to

the victims, hence needs to be discouraged, illegal in all its known form (Nixon, 2022).

Significance of African Traditional Medicines to Family Well-Being and Nigerian Economic Uplift

Little or no Pathogenic Resistance to Traditional Formulations

Due to the fact that many herbal recipes are usually poly-herbal formulations, it is very difficult for any parasite or pathogen to develop resistance. This is quite unlike the conventional medicine. According to the plasmodium spp (responsible for causing malaria fever) is now resistant to chloroquine therapy, thus other therapies had to be developed.

Illness with no Pharmaceutical Remedy

Presently, there are several illnesses that Orthodox medicine has no clue on their cure, but which Traditional medicine is providing effective cure. A very good example is pile. The recommendation of orthodox medical practice for anyone having pile is to undergo hemorrhoidectomy (cutting of the haemorrhoids). However, Traditional medicine has treatments for it using herbal formulations. The same goes for insanity and seizure, barrenness, mental disorder, to which orthodox medicine provides only a soothing measure.

Accessibility

In Nigeria only few people have access to some form of modern health care facility and most of these facilities are concentrated in urban areas. Related literature shows that only few people in Nigerians and other African have access to conventional medical care leaving the remaining population to look elsewhere, notably African traditional medicine.

The Place, Power and Efficacy of Incantations, Rituals and Sacrifices

According to Ajala, et al (2019), ritual rites are common in Traditional medicine especially in the treatment of complex and spiritual ailments such as barrenness, mental disorder, stroke,

leprosy and consistent ill-luck or calamity or poverty despite diligence. TM believes in pacification through sacrifices and rituals. There is also a strong belief in the power of words if spoken correctly, in the correct place at the correct time.

Trance

According to Ajala, et al (2019, p.120), Traditional medicine practitioners possessing this ability enter into the realm of the spirit through a trance/daydeam as soon as a patient arrives or when people come to consult them on ancestral problem. This ability is used by traditional medicine practitioners not only to identify an illness, but also to prescribe an appropriate treatment for it. In some cases, the practitioners can actually link with spirits in their trances. Through the practitioner, the spirit narrates what is wrong, as well as the sacrifices necessary to appease the gods.

Significance of African Traditional Medicines to Family Well-Being

Traditional medicine has significantly impacted on the lives of the people, especially in the rural areas where access to Orthodox medicine is minimal. Aside lack of access, the high cost of Orthodox medicine makes traditional medicine attractive.

Another reason for the popularity of traditional medicine is attributed to availability, low cost, accessibility, alignment with the patients' religious and cultural values, perceived safety and efficacy, as against the inadequacy and inaccessibility of orthodox medical health care services to the people. This implies that without the availability of Africa Traditional medicine to families who are incapable of procuring Conventional medicine or travel abroad for proper and adequate medical attention they would die and invariably it would affect the society as the population would be reduced. African Traditional medicine has played important role in the live of greater percentage

of Nigerians who rely on the use of traditional medicine in curing their health challenges.

Significance of African Tradition Medicines to Economic Uplift

African Traditional medicines have potency of curing many diseases such as stroke, hypertension, diabetes, cough, venereal diseases just to mention but a few. Some of these common diseases are not properly taken care of by Conventional medicines, but African Traditional medicines give comprehensive treatment depending on one's body constitution. It is said health is wealth. Healthy individuals are productive.

Some of these herbs can generate money for the country when sold outside the country after having been refined to meet international standard as the Conventional medicines. If the government tries as much as possible to build hospitals for traditional medicine practitioners, it would go a long way to ease unemployment and generate money as people would troop in to the hospitals, thereby accruing money for the government which in turn could be used to develop the health sector and other sectors.

Traditional medicines as alternative medicines are less expensive than Conventional medicines. For this reason the poor masses can afford them. They are also accessible to the masses as some of them are planted in their residences.

Some African Traditional Plants and their Health Benefits Based on the Researchers' Experiences

1. **Bryophyllum pinnatum (Cathedral Bells or Miracle Leaf):** It is a potent plant that cures stomach ulcer and when blended with onion reduces hypertension. It is also good for the treatment of cough when slightly dried on fire, squeezed into a tablespoon and a little salt added and taken by the patient.
2. **Breynia disticha (Snowbush):** It is a plant that cures headache.

3. **Pseuderanthemum latifolium (Bird-of-Paradise Plant):** It is a plant that gives blood after being boiled and the water drunk.
4. **Acer nigrum (Black Maple):** This plant is used to treat toothache. It is chewed and allowed to stay for fifteen minutes in the mouth before it is spat out and the patient rinses their mouth. This process is repeated two times a day.
5. **Hoya Odorata (Fragrant Wax Plant):** It is used for the treatment of diabetes when cooked as vegetable and spooned into the mouth.
6. **Medicago Sativa (Alfalfa):** This plant is used to treat diabetes as it reduces sugar. It also reduces cholesterol. It can be chewed or infused in hot water for the treatment of these health problems.
7. **Azadirachta indica (Neem Leaves or Dongoyaro as called in Nigeria):** It is also known as Wonder Leaf and it is used in combination with lemongrass to cure malaria. The two leaves are boiled for this purpose.
8. **Moringa oleifera:** This plant reduces high blood sugar and High Blood Pressure when chewed or infused in hot water. The leaves increase body weight, while the seeds reduce body weight.

Future of African Traditional Medicine (ATM)

As envisaged, African Government sponsoring African Traditional Medicine Practitioners, since they are one of the key healthcare providers in rural areas, will help to achieve Universal Health Care (UHC) goal of ensuring that all the people especially in rural areas have access to healthcare services. Growing (2014); Mmamoshedi and Mothibe (2019) reported that approximately 60% and 80% of the people respectively in Sub-Sahara Africa live in rural areas where conventional healthcare services

are scarce. Similarly, Zhang (2018), Nlooto (2014), Asiimwe (2015), Mandizadza, Chavunuka and Chapter (2015) stated that ATM is more accessible, affordable and accepted to local populations and have the potential to contribute greatly to UHC.

The researchers postulate that integrating traditional medicine into the pyramid of national health-care systems in Africa through the development of technical guidelines, particularly in the field of herbal medicines will improve healthcare services to large extent. This can be achieved by providing traditional healers with befitting technology to ensure proper patient management. Traditional Medicine practitioners could be trained and equipped with modern technology that will help to contribute to the surveillance of epidemics and pandemics. Their integration into the formal health-care system will both assist overall care provision, as well as increase quality control of traditional healer activities, the same way it is done with conventional health professional. Integration of ATM into the national health systems will encourage attested Traditional Health Practitioners (THPs) to join forces with the government leading to technical and financial support for the Traditional health practitioners (THPs).

Nolna, Nton, Mbarga and Mbainda (2020); Nompumelelo, Gomo, Gqaleni, and Ngcobo, (2019); WHO (2015, 2019); Stothard (2019) reported that Tropical neglected diseases are examined/analyzed and managed well by traditional healers e.g. Buruli ulcer, human Africa trypanosomiasis (sleeping sickness), and snake bites etc., in Cameroon including COVID-19, Blandford, Wesson, Amalberti, AlHazme & Allwihan (2020). Tchuileu (2021) states that COVID-19 had brought opportunity for recognition of African Traditional Medicine in the world.

Envisaging Africa fostering collaboration with Traditional medicine practitioners and Conventional medicine practitioners, this will help foster cooperation between Traditional medicine practitioners (TMPs) and Conventional medicine practitioners (CMPs). This can be achieved through collaboration, critical thinking, joint capacity building and knowledge sharing workshops for both TMPs and CMPs. Such approach will provide opportunities for understanding across practice orientations; facilitate collaborative exchanges on the categorization of various diseases, diagnosis, and treatment and management procedures. The collaboration will enhance mutual respect for both cadres of health practitioners; reduce health workers' skepticism and increase appreciation and development of ATM.

The official registration of Traditional medicine practitioners will reduce sales of fake herbal drugs in rural areas. By this measure, only certified Traditional Herbal Practitioners (THPs) will be permitted to sell their products. It will also enhance trust and credibility of ATM practitioners.

Conclusion

African Traditional Medicine (ATM) has stood the test of time and it has been proved effective in curing numerous tropical diseases. ATM emphasizes on both physical and spiritual wellbeing as well as disease management. It concerns itself with African traditional and religious beliefs. As such, most people see ATM as the last resort, especially when challenged with incurable diseases e.g. stroke, hypertension, diabetes, HIV among others. Therefore, it is accessed by the majority of the citizens.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

1. Government should sponsor Traditional medicine practitioners in producing these

traditional medicines by building factories where these medicines are produced and modernized as in form of capsules and tablets and sold to other countries to improve the economy.

2. Government should also help in sponsoring researches on the efficacy of traditional medicines.
3. ATM practitioners should be integrated into the national health-care with efficient technology by encouraging them in their research and development studies.
4. The Government should protect ATM from stiff competitions from foreign traditional medicines by not allowing Foreign Traditional medicines to be sold in Africa without license.
1. ATM practitioners should be protected by giving them property right protection by not allowing those without license to practice.
2. Government should foster collaboration between ATM practitioners and conventional Medicine Practitioners through seminars workshops and team work to enable them develop spirit of group work, critical thinking and problem-solving skills.
3. African Traditional medicine practitioners should be ready to collaborate with conventional medicine practitioners in order to boost the health sector.

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APPENDICES















