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Scientific interventions to traditional medicine practices among the Idoma ethnic group in Ayele, Nasarawa local government area of Nasarawa State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Tradition is the transmission of customs or beliefs from generation to generation; custom is a traditional and widely accepted way of behaving or doing things specific to a particular society, place, or time while belief is an acceptance that something exists or is true, especially one without proof. The aim of the study is to lay out systematic customary nostrum practices among the Idoma ethnic group in Ayele, Nasarawa local government area, Nasarawa state, Nigeria and avail scientific interventions to enhance the practices. Epitomized and typified prevalent traditional medicinal practices sequences were investigated to determine how the healers arrive at etiology, symptoms, signs, pathologies, diagnoses and treatments as well as preventive measures using structured oral interview and useful data. Descriptive analysis was adopted. Results obtained included evaluation of the beliefs and traditional practices which were used to answer the specific objectives of the study. Relevant scientific interventions were also proposed. The research served as enhancements and modifications that can lead to major improvements in traditional medicine practices and the health of the people.

Keywords: Ayele, tradition, custom, belief, ethnicity, intervention

Introduction

The indigenous way of life of a people comprises of their mother tongue, beliefs, practices, traditions, ideas, gestures, cures, and foundations of ethnic, communal, or pious classifications [1-3]. This concept designates that native way of life interlaces with every facet of the total human conduit [1-3]. Discovering the mainspring of sicknesses in folk medicine encompasses a curiosity for delving into the genesis of a certain ailment in order to discover who or what caused it and why it was pompous to a specific individual or a group of people at a given time. This belief forms the linchpin of African traditional medicine [5-7]. Traditional medicine practices consider human race to be made up of two forms of existence: the spiritual and the physical realms. The traditional medical practitioners use their methods; whether explicit or not to address both the spiritual and physical aspects of sickness, whereas; conventional practitioners only address the physical aspects [5-7]. Diagnoses of the causes of diseases are achieved through spiritual methods; the scheme of using incantation, divination and enchantment to detect the causative agent of diseases [5-7]. Diseases originate from cultural beliefs that ailments are not mere probability but emerge from the actions of the person, social milieu, and the spirits of his/her ancestors in consonance with the disparity allying the person or group of people [8-10]. With indistinguishable reasoning, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization affirmed that customary means of diagnoses are efficacious and they are situated on the conjecture that sees man as inextricable from their gregarious, real, non-material, and extraterrestrial abode [8-10]. With this panorama, malady is observed and recognized as a prodigy that originates when a disparity influences the spiritual forces ruling peoples' state of wellness [8-10]. These spiritual powers differ from the highest powerful deity to the bijou creature. The rudimental conjecture in native medicine is that, there is a triad essence of humans: spiritual, physical, and intellectual; and so, the precognitive and curative slants should be fortified on this justification [8-10]. Conceding an individual's

sacred perturb is perceived as an indispensable persona of the patient's riveted medicine and is progressively seen as climacteric to primo patient healthcare [18, 9, 10, 11]. On this basis, traditional medical practitioners dig greatly into the whole process of the patient panoramically in order to scan him/her [11-13]. The traditional shamans are skillful to divulge concealed upsets which the specs of conventional practitioners cannot glimpse [11-13]. Religiosity is not contemplated in scientific tutelage or pedagogy [11-13]. In panorama of this, physicians do not view religious affairs as prime in their convention [11-13]. It is to be remotely accepted that, soothingly coached medical practitioners cannot assert distinct recognition or intuition into the non-secular circumstance of patients as it is with the traditional healers [12-14]. Tutoring medical personnel on how to handle myths is not a quintessential part of scientific training, yet proofs are appearing that patients are getting more anxious for the medics to also provide them with such mysteries [12-14]. The World Health Organisation reported in 2019 that in the United Kingdom, more than 40% of the conventional practitioners made some committal to unorthodox dugs [1, 3, 7-9, 13-14]. It is in this conjunction that African member states are heartened to ratify and absorb traditional medicine in their healthcare system [12-15]. Many religions e.g. Christianity and conventional scientists still shy away from these beliefs as some of them contemplate it to be demonism [1, 7, 14-16]. On this note, it becomes necessary to make known the indigenus patterns of diagnosis through this investigation, so as to tidy the enigma and naivety of people to traditional medicine practices [1, 7, 14-16]. The archive of the Idoma ethnic group in Nasarawa Local Government Area precedes the chronicle of Nasarawa State created 1st October, 1996 and the history of the Republic of Nigeria created 1960 [1, 4, 6, 15-17]. Oral custom and frolic is the principal techniques through which history has been passed in Idoma land and this is regarded as central cultural phenomenon [1, 4, 6, 15-17]. From a young epoch or aeon, Idoma children usually learn from their elder's recital, anecdote and tale of aged and are brought up around extended ménage, and ancestry which makes multitudinous resources accessible [1, 4, 6, 15-17]. When interrogated, Idomas generally will loftily tell you where they are from, and it is not atypical for Idoma to be able to recite at least four generations of their progenitors [1, 4, 6, 15-17]. Customarily, being unable to rejoiner the emblematic interrogation "Who is your father?" debarred one from salient roles and titles in Idoma land [1, 4, 6, 15-19]. Quite naturally, a number of villages trace origins to single ancestors; several Idoma groups trace their heritage to one common ancestor, considered the "father" of the different groups [1, 4, 6, 15-19]. According to traditional history, 'Iduh', the father of the Idoma had several children and each of them is established in different areas [1, 4, 6, 15-19]. Hence the expression: "Iduh the father of Idoma [1, 4, 6, 15-19]." The popular idea is that the Idoma are an ethno-linguistic group primarily found in the western areas of Benue State, Nigeria [1, 4, 6, 15-19]. This is because they are the second largest group in the state and occupy 9 Local Government Areas which include: Ado, Otukpo, Okpokwu, Oju, Ogbadibo, Ohimini and Agatu [1, 4, 6, 15-21]. Aside from the western parts of Benue, this tribe has settlements in other parts of the country, including Nasarawa, Enugu, Cross River and Kogi States [1, 4, 6, 15-21]. The men are obliged by tradition to pound yam for their wives, unlike other cultures where the woman is expected to

perform all culinary chores, the Idoma men are not always exempted [1, 4, 6, 15-21]. History shows that the traditional fabric known as 'Ili Ki Idoma' and which boldly distinguishes them, dates back to the reign of the second paramount ruler of the Idoma kingdom, late Ochi Idoma, His Royal Majesty; Abraham Ajene Okpabi [1-7, 9, 15-21]. The most famous traditional dance of the Idoma people is known as "Ogirinya" dance [1-4, 6-7, 9, 15-24]. It is a highly energetic dance that requires jumping at regular intervals on the toes in short periods of time [1-4, 6-7, 9, 15-24]. The Idoma people are known for their love of food, as there is an annual food festival in Ayele to celebrate women and the various traditional cuisines [1-4, 6-7, 9, 15-24]. Most popular among their delicacies is the "Okoho soup" which is made with the peculiar Okoho plant, bush meat and many other ingredients to be eaten with pounded yam [1-4, 6-7, 9, 15-26]. With the advent of Christianity, Islam, and other foreign religions, the traditional belief systems of most ethnic groups in the country has been influenced by western practices [1-4, 6-7, 9, 15-26]. However, a majority of the Idoma people still believe strongly in the "Alekwu" which is seen as the ancestral spirits- a link between the living and the dead [1-4, 6-7, 9, 15-26]. They host an annual 'Aje Alekwu' festival where traditional religious practitioner's commune and make sacrifices in the worship of their ancestors across the land [1-4, 6-7, 9, 15-26]. The Idomas have a strong attachment to the Alekwu-spirit of the ancestors which is believed to stand as an invisible watchdog of the family and communities while checkmating vices like adultery, theft and murder [1-10, 15-26]. While the marriage rites and customs of the Idoma people are not unlike that of the Igbos and some other south-eastern cultures, there are specific aspects that clearly distinguish their tradition [1-10, 15-26]. In some Idoma subcultures, the groom and his family have to present the bride with a rooster and some money on the marriage day after the bride price has already been paid [1-10, 15-26]. If she accepts, it is a sign of approval and disinterest if she rejects the gift [1-10, 15-26]. While there are no certain reasons to justify the need for a rooster, it remains an interesting part of the ceremony [1-10, 15-26]. The research focuses on the causes of diseases, methods of detecting signs and symptoms of diseases, system of diagnosing diseases and pathological investigations, treatment and preventive measures and practices among the Idoma ethnic group in Ayele, Nasarawa Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, Nigeria and avail scientific interventions to enhance the practices.

Materials and Methods

Study Design

Descriptive inquiries were performed among the Idoma clan of Ayele in Nasarawa Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, Nigeria in order to ascertain their traditional medicine practices such as etiologies, symptoms, signs, pathology, diagnoses and treatments of diseases as well as preventive measures [1-8].

Study Area

Ayele village was established by the Idoma tribe in 1830. It is a village in Loko district of Nasarawa local government area of Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Ayele is situated in a littoral area on the fringe of the Benue brook [1-7]. The leading ethnic group and the residents of Ayele village is the Idomas. As an agrarian settlement, farming, fishing, hunting, and trading are the vocations of these populate or

ethnic group [1-7]; with 99.99% of the citizenry as Christians and only about 0.01% are Pagans and Muslims [1-9]. It has an expanse of land of 176, 012 km² and a population of about 10, 611 people; with increased number of elderly (50-90 years) than the youngsters (20- 49 years) [1-9]. Ayele has only one Primary Healthcare centre with few primitive

facilities; making over 95% of the total population to depend on herbal remedies [1-7]. The bulk of the youngsters in Ayele have left for cities for education and white collar jobs, leaving the wealth of knowledge in traditional medicine with elders, who would soon be dead and the wealth of knowledge lost [1-7].



Source: Topographic data research centre, department of geography and planning, University of Jos, (2023)

Fig 1: Portray of Nasarawa Local Government Area revealing study site

Table 1: List of Villages in Loko District, Nasarawa Local Government Area by Postal Code

LGA	District/Area	Postal Code	Villages
Nasarawa	Loko	962103	Aguba; Aissa; Angewa; Ataga; Ayele; Aza; Bakono; Dora; Guto; Gwafa; Hamsin-Hamsin; Illa; Illshan-Kasa; Mai Yawa; Oshugun; Rafin Sita; Tunga; Uke; Zangon-Daji

Study Population

The survey comprised of elders, chiefs, farmers, hunters, fishermen and traditional medical practitioners or anyone recognised and accepted by the natives to have understanding on Idoma traditional medicine practices. The study site comprised of folks of ages ≥ 40 years and are inhabitants of the village for ≥ ten years.

Sample Size

The formula, $\alpha = \beta^2 \delta (1 - \delta) / Y^2$ was adopted for the illustrative proportion

Where

α = Estimated sample size

β = Typical estimate corresponding to the predilection or proclivity measure of confidence

Y = Misconception of lucidity or transparency

δ = folks with experiences on Idoma traditional medicine practices (95%).

Note: The non-informant’s rate (5%) bringing the closing representative size to 30 but 35 was assumed as the sample size for the study.

Oral Interview

The techniques used by the following scientists [1-5] were absorbed with modifications. A team of seven researchers from Idoma ethnic group who were sons and daughters of the soil and understood and spoke the tongue and were well acquainted with the way of life of the people were formed. We first approached the ‘OchiAyele’ who is the traditional leader of the customs of the people through the youth leader.

We introduced ourselves as sons and daughters of the community and guaranteed them that delicate information will be retained as confidential and that the research is not to lay bare the ethnic group to endanger them but would advance the tradition worldwide and conserve it for future generations so that it would not be lost. The king set up a team of 30 people including himself; the Royal Highness, leader of warriors, youths’ leader, traditional healers, elders (men and women), traditional worshippers and others that are well trained, recognized and accepted by the community to understand the tradition of the ethnic group. The team of 37 including the researchers met in the Royal palace to avoid any conflict of interest. Honorarium of 20 United State Dollars (USD 20); (N 1, 600) each for the 30 people with other gifts were provided to them through the king in conferring with the official recommended amounts for the rituals in Sofowora, 2008 [6]. Data compiled included the traditional methods of determining the causes of diseases, symptoms, signs, pathologic explorations, diagnoses, treatments and preventive measures. Artifacts published in English Language were also consulted in PubMed and Medline using keys and terms like Idoma and Ayele to avoid variations. Useful and handy information were compiled and used as results. The study lasted for 7 months (2023).

Results

Traditional Causes of Diseases

The causes of disease are frequently attributed to sorcery, wickedness, sacrilege, and offences committed by individuals against the spirits of their ancestors and gods.

Traditional Methods Describing Symptoms of Diseases

The sick-folks tell very little or nothing about their physical or mental features of diseases. It is the duty of the healers to use their various forms of divination such as seed throwing or cowries, bone throwing, mirrors, water inside calabash, palm reading, etc. to diagnose and predict the manifestations of diseases to their patients.

Traditional Procedures for Checking Signs of Abnormalities

The healers use their spiritual powers obtained from the gods and ancestors, and acquired experiences whether explicable or not to observe their patients for general abnormalities in posture, behaviour and breathing pattern.

Traditional Pathological Investigations of Diseases

Sensual characters such as eyes, nose, tongue, hand are used as primitive tools for pathological investigations. The shrine is used as the "laboratory" to consult with the ancestors and gods on results of their pathological investigations.

Traditional Diagnostic Investigations of diseases

The nature of ailments is identified through different means like recollection of the past deeds of the patients which can be extended to their ancestors for offences and taboos committed; witchcraft, sorcery and bad will from enemies.

Traditional Treatment

Concoctions, decoctions, infusions or macerations are prepared from plants or their parts, animal parts and mineral substances and used as cures for many diseases. Incisions on the body are used either to take away pain or as preventive measures against witches, wizards and evil folks. Hot baths with herbs are prescribed for fever or mothers that newly gave birth. Cold baths and the use of aphrodisiac herbs are prescribed for weak men or for invigoration. Ointments prepared from juices and oils of different plants are used to cure superficial burns. Heat from charcoal fire in small earthen pots containing dried aromatic herbs and animal parts is inhaled to ward off evil or for the cure of madness. Bone setters use their different skills with preparations from plants to manage swellings, dislocations and fractures. Traditional midwives use incantations and herbs to manage childbirths. Several incisions are made around the sites of bites or stings and herbal preparations are usually applied to cure scorpion, snake and other animals or insects' stings and bites. Herbs are used to take away whitlows and tooth pain.

Traditional Preventive Treatment

Preventive medicine is largely depended on the ability of girls and elderly women sweeping their surroundings every day in the morning to ward off ungodly night's transactions of evil spirits that could cause sicknesses in mortals. Regular sacrifices to gods and the spirits of ancestors is made as preventive measures against their wraths which is believed to cause epidemic diseases like small pox, chicken pox, measles, natural disasters and mysterious deaths. Customary prepared rings, amulets, waist bands, necklaces are often worn and incisions on the body are also made as cautionary measures against sicknesses, disasters and untimely deaths believed to be caused by evil spirits, foes, witches and wizards. Lastly, incantations are recited on regular or periodic bases in order to prevent incidence of mysterious

accidents and also to ward off evil and ill lucks from daily human activities.

Discussion and Scientific Interventions

Tradition is the transmission of customs or beliefs from generation to generation [1-3]. Custom is a traditional and widely accepted way of behaving or doing things specific to a particular society, place, or time [1-3]. Belief is an acceptance that something exists or is true, especially one without proof [1-4]. The Idoma ethnic group in Ayele can be made to understand that, in addition to the etiology of diseases they believed, scientific investigations using modern equipment can prove other causes of diseases to be due to bacteria, viruses, fungi, parasites and protozoa [13-17, 26]. They can be made to know that medical diagnostic test equipment such as stethoscope, blood pressure apparatus, X-ray machines, sonography machines, MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) scanners; CT scanners, etc. are available in modern hospitals to assist in the diagnoses of etiology of diseases [12-17, 19, 21, 24]. Traditional Medicine Practitioners should give time to their patients to speak on their observed symptoms, their duration and family history so as to guide in quality diagnoses and prescriptions [12-14, 17, 19, 21, 24]. They can be made to understand that pathological investigations can be accelerated using modern facilities such as laboratory equipment to conduct tests that guide approaches to treatments [12-14, 17, 19, 21, 24-26]. Furthermore, they can be made to know of better ways of treatments of different forms of diseases using methods such as, *in vitro* fertilization, chemotherapy, synthetic drug therapies, radiation therapy, immunotherapy, stem cell transplantation, blood transfusion, surgery and palliative care which only the modern clinics can provide [12-14, 17, 19, 21, 24-26]. In addition to hygiene, other disease-preventive measures such as routine vaccinations, blood pressure checking, diabetes screening, cholesterol tests, cancer screenings, Sexually Transmitted Infectious-disease (STI) screenings, mental health screening, immunization and well-child visits are available and can only be provided by modern healthcare delivery [12-14, 17, 19, 21, 24-25]. Aside the wild source of drug material collections, domestic cultivation method can be employed especially for plants that may soon go into extinction and those needed in large quantity due to the nature of the diseases they cure [12-14, 17, 19, 21, 24-26]. The herbalists can also collaborate with scientific centres or pharmaceutical industry for proper dosage regimen and formulation of some of the herbal products into tablets, capsules, syrups, ointments, suppositories, pessaries, emulsions, creams, etc. for better pharmacokinetics and conveniences for pediatrics, juveniles and geriatrics [12-14, 17, 19, 21, 24-26]. Finally, seminars and workshops on upgrades in traditional medicine practices can be organized and courses like diploma and degree in herbalism or traditional medicine can be made available for the healers [12-14, 17, 19, 21, 24-26].

Conclusion

This study has documented the traditional medicine practices of Idoma ethnic group in Ayele; Nasarawa Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Scientific interventions to the different traditional medicine practices in the ethnic group were proposed. This research could serve as enhancements and modifications that can lead to major improvements in traditional medicine practices and the health of the people.

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