

African Traditional Medicine and Orthodox Medicine in Conflict in Nigeria: An Evaluation

By

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Abstract

Medicine is generally known as the study, diagnosing, preventing and eliminating or treatment of disease. Treatment of diseases has been received from the generation of our earliest fathers. Before what is universally understood today as orthodox medicine, there has been a means of diagnosing and treatment of diseases in different parts of the world known as traditional medicine. It is believed by majority that the orthodox medicine is a derivation and refined manner of the earlier traditional medicine. However, the orthodox medicine wholly depends on the scientific biological or physiological diagnosis of every disease while in traditional medicine all aspects of human person are diagnosed since it is believed traditionally that some diseases are of spiritual basis and it was believed that a person's sin can be the source or cause of his or her sickness. Leprosy in the Jewish tradition is an example. As such, in the view of some authors, African traditional beliefs consider the human being as being made up of physical, spiritual, moral, and social aspects. The functioning of these four aspects in harmony signified good health, while if any aspect should be out of balance, it signified sickness. Thus, the treatment of an ill person involves not only aiding his/her physical being but may also involve the spiritual, moral, and social components of his/her being as well. The research employed primary and secondary methods and it has proved that there are some diseases that defied the scientific diagnoses; also there are some diseases that demand the scientific diagnoses for its discovery and proper treatment. The focus of this research centres on the African Traditional Religion medicine and orthodox medicine to find out the reason for the conflict between the duo and the possible solution. As such, this research tries to mediate on the conflicts between African traditional medicine and orthodox medicine, showing the importance of their integration for a healthier society.

Keywords: African traditional religion, African traditional medicine, orthodox medicine, disease, conflict.

Introduction

The practice of medicine is one of the most important aspects of societal and human well being. Thus, medical practitioners, be they orthodox or traditional, are seen as playing a very important role in the society. Therefore, the importance of medicine in the society cannot be overlooked. Before universal culture contact and civilisation there has been different ways of diagnosing, discovering, preventing, and treating sicknesses and various diseases in different traditions and cultures in the world. Civilisation has brought a form generally or probably the universal pattern of diagnoses, prevention and treatment of diseases. This civilisation did not, however, eliminate the traditional ways of health care of the whole world including Africa. Therefore, despite the presumed general ways of practicing medicine known as orthodox, African traditional culture still values the old unique though improved ways of practicing medicine in African traditional religion. In view of this, there seems to be a conflict between the African traditional religion medicine and the orthodox medicine.

Orthodox medicine is the form of diagnoses and treatment that has been scientifically inspected and approved and is believed to have been universally accepted way of dealing with diseases or sicknesses. On the other hand, African traditional medicine is viewed (though not universally verified and not universally accepted) as a combination of knowledge and practice of diagnoses and prevention or treatment of diseases or sicknesses. Just as the student of medicine are taught how to diagnose, prevent, and/or treat diseases in the medical schools so also it is believed that African traditional religious medicine is handed over to the present medicine men and women from their ancestors and could also be handed over to others from one generation to another based on the past experience, observations, in form of oral stories and sometimes directly endowed spiritually by the ancestors through the Supreme Being. In this case, while orthodox medicine rely on scientific diagnoses for the discovery and treatment of every disease, African traditional religious medicine diagnose disease from various angles such as; spiritually, physically, morally, socially, and even psychologically to be able to determine the real cause of the sickness because in African traditional religious

understanding, it is believed that every physical disease has moral, spiritual, and social implications. Due to this point of divergence between African traditional religion medicine and orthodox medicine and their practices, there have been conflicts existing between them. This research, however, tends to unravel those conflicts between these medical practices and suggest possible point of co-existence and dialogue between the two.

Definition of key concepts

African traditional religion: Though religion emanates from culture but when it has been handed down through many generations, it becomes traditional. According to Onyewuchi (2022), “The word ‘traditional’ means indigenous, that which is original or foundationally handed down from generation to generation, upheld and practiced by ... [the people]” (p8). Like Hinduism and Judaism which are the traditional religions of the Indians and the Jews respectively, African traditional religion is the indigenous religion of the African before the advent of other religions, mainly the missionaries of Christianity and Islam. So,

When we speak of African traditional religion, we mean the indigenous religious beliefs and practices of the Africans. It is the religion which resulted from the sustaining faith held by the ancestors of the present Africans, and which is being practiced today in various forms and various shades and intensities by a large number of Africans (Onyewuchi, 2022, p8).

In his definition of African traditional religion, Nweke (2017) said that “It is the way Africans worship their God” (p12). According to Ekwunife (1990), African traditional religion is

Those institutionalized beliefs and practices of indigenous Religion of African which are rooted in the past African religious culture, transmitted to the present by successive African forbearers mainly through oral traditions (myths and folklores, songs and dances, liturgies, rituals, proverbs, pithy sayings and names), sacred specialists and persons, sacred space and objects and religious work of art; a religion which is slowly but constantly updated by each generation in the light of new experiences through the dialectical processes of continuities and discontinuities (p.1).

Ugwu (2014) supports the view of Ekwunife when he said that African traditional religion is to be considered as a realistically and accurately absolute or merely as various tentacles, elements and expressions of reality (p.7). It is not surprising to hear Awolalu and Dopamu (1979) say that African traditional religion though has no written scripture but its doctrines are all over the peoples' myths and folklores, in songs and dances and in their proverbial sayings for those who care to see and read(p.26). The same view is supported by Omoregbe (1993) when he described African traditional religion as a living religion which is handed down from one generation to another even though it does not have written scripture as Hinduism and Judaism do (pp.151-152). From the foregoing we can justifiably say that African traditional religion is the religious elements and practices of the Africans that resulted from their ancient cultures through which they relate with Supreme Being which was handed to the present generation from the generation of the ancestors. African traditional religion in its belief system accepts the fact that there is always interconnectedness of the physical and spirit worlds. As such any sickness is believed to have spiritual connection.

African Traditional Medicine: African Traditional medicine comprises ways of treating, preserving, and/or promoting health before the existence of orthodox healthcare World Health Organization (WHO) (2000). The WHO (1978) defines traditional medicine as the sum total of knowledge and practices, whether explicable or not, used in the diagnosis, prevention, and elimination of physical, mental, and social imbalance, relying exclusively on practical experience and observation handed down from generation to generation, whether verbally or in writing. African traditional medicine includes a range of health practices that incorporate plants, animals, vegetables (mineral-based medicines), spiritual/faith healing, and exercise applied solely or in combination to promote or maintain wellbeing as well as treat, diagnose, or prevent ailments (WHO, 2002.). According to Gyasi, Gyasi, Poku, Boateng, Amoah, Mumin, and Obodai, (2017) African traditional medicine comprises the use of medicinal plants and faith/spiritual

healing. However, according to Ampomah, Malau-Aduli, Seidu, Malau-Aduli, and Emeto, (2021) African traditional medicine refers to products such as medicinal plants, barks, and roots, whether processed or not, that are used for curative purposes.

Orthodox: Orthodox can be understood from two different contexts. On the one hand, orthodox can be understood from the sense of being traditional or original. In this sense, African traditional religion can be seen as orthodox based on its traditionality. But for the sake of the context in which we understand orthodox in this work we should go by the second context which defined orthodox as a generally accepted behaviour or beliefs or universally approved way of doing something. So, orthodox in the context of this work refers to generally accepted ways or patterns of doing something so that when we speak of orthodox medicine it can be clearly understood that we are speaking of the patterns and manners of practising and administering of the medicine and treatment of illnesses that are universally accepted by the general public and all religions in the contemporary society, including some members of African traditional religion.

Medicine: Medicine can be seen from different meanings. As a field of study, medicine is a branch of study in the university within which medical doctors and other healthcare professionals (such as nurses, pharmacists, and therapists) treat symptoms and diseases using drugs, radiation, or surgery. According to Biggers (2018) Medicine is the field of health and healing. It includes nurses, doctors, and various specialists. It covers diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of disease, medical research, and many other aspects of health. Medicine aims to promote and maintain health and wellbeing. In the African traditional religious understanding, medicine can be seen as the substance or liquid someone can take or drink to prevent or cure disease. It can also generally be understood as the study of diseases/sicknesses and injuries and how to prevent and/or treat them.

Disease: Disease refers to a sickness or injury that is being suffered

by people or animal which requires treatment. It is a medical challenges or problems that affected an animal or human being which demands a medical professional's attention. According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English, "Disease is used to talk about more severe physical medical problems especially those that affect the organs. In traditional Africa, disease refers to any ailment, whether spiritual, physical or mental, that a person suffers.

Diagnosis: Diagnosis is a form of check carried out by medical practitioner on a patient to understand the kind of sickness or disease the patient is suffering from and treatment it requires. According to Brazier (2020), in diagnoses "Doctors take tissue samples or biopsies from people who may have cancer or other illnesses and send the samples to a lab, where a histologist can analyze them."

Treatment: Treatment can be understood from two perspectives. One treatment can from the angle of the way a person related to another on an occasion or an event. Or the way a case or a particular issue was handled. But in our context here, treatment is the act of taking care of a patient and the curing of the diseases he/she is suffering from. In this sense therefore, treatment can be seen as the provision, coordination or management of health care and related issues by health practitioner(s) which includes coordination or management of health care by medical practitioners.

Conflict: Conflict refers to the crisis that exists between two things. It can be seen as a serious disagreement or a protracted argument. It is also a sign of being incompatible or at variance. Conflict is a clash between two things or persons. According to Juneja (2015) "Conflict is defined as a clash between individuals arising out of a difference in thought process, attitudes, understanding, interests, requirements and even sometimes perceptions."

Understanding the Practice of African Traditional Religion Medicine

African traditional religion medicine is understood as the contribution of knowledge and practice used in diagnosing, discovering, preventing and treating diseases in African traditional setting. In African traditional religion, life is sacred and life is the beginning of wealth. As such, "... life is valued more than everything else, they follow the due process as prescribed in order to maintain standard of their living as well as engaging in some medical practices to promote their health for a better living" (Onyewuchi, 2022 p.30). In African traditional societies, the use of traditional medicine in the treatment of the disease that has defied scientific comprehension is very vital.

According to Helwig (2010), African traditional medicine is a holistic discipline involving indigenous herbalism and African spirituality, typically involving diviners, midwives herbalist, and witch doctors. It consists of health knowledge, skills and practices based on indigenous African beliefs and experiences which uses animal, herbs, leaves or mineral based medicine and spiritual or psychological therapies to diagnose, prevent and/or treat physical mental sicknesses and for the general maintenance of wellbeing of the people. Remedies and popular knowledge of herbs, leaves and other medicinal substances make up the large portion of the African traditional medicine. In the same way, its knowledge and methods of administration and treatment are mostly family inheritance and are usually passed on orally from parent(s) to child or children and/or to the extended family members as the case may be. In such case every family or kindred that are known to possess the knowledge of traditional African medicine and healing guard it jealously.

However, any family that possesses the knowledge of medicine in African traditional religion are usually specialists in a particular area or field. That is why sometimes a person who believes that he/she has a call to be medical practitioner in African traditional religion is permitted to receive training from the family or old person who has been in the field for a very long time for proper directions. The custodians or the practitioners of African medicine generally known as 'medicine men or women' were held in high

esteem in their communities because they are believed to be powerful in healing and dealing with protracted sicknesses. However, each medicine man or woman is called and addressed or known with names indicating or signifying the type of medicine he/she uses and practises on or specialised in.

Tella (1979) also confirmed that African traditional medicine has many components which include herbal medicine, therapeutic fasting and dieting, hydrotherapy, radiant healing therapy, venesection, surgery and bone setting, spinal manipulation and massage, psychotherapy, psychiatry and preventive medicine. Yet every practitioner is an authority in his/her field and he/she makes referral when it not within his/herspecialism.

African Traditional Religion Health Practitioners and their Beliefs

According to Onyewuchi (2022), the practice of the African traditional religion health practitioners is mostly based on past experience and observations handed down from generation to generation either orally, frequently in form of stories or as a natural gift received spiritually from the ancestors. African traditional health practitioners consider human person as being made up of physical (bodily), spiritual, moral and aspects and as such believe that the harmonious functioning of these aspects human person signifies good health. This implies that every disease in the African traditional belief has physical, moral, spiritual and social attachment. That is why Onwuanibe (1979) believes that sickness in the African traditional religious belief does not happen by chance. For him, “nobody becomes sick without sufficient reason” (p.25).

Therefore, the treatment of a sick person involves not just aiding his/her physical ailment alone but also the spiritual, moral and social components of his/her being. African traditional religious medicine is a holistic discipline involving all the various indigenous medicine/health specialists. Every traditional medicine man or woman is taken to be specialist in his/her area. That is why Onyewuchi (2022) said it clear that Practitioners of traditional African medicine ...cure various and diverse conditions such as cancer, psychiatric disorders, high blood pressure, cholera, most

venereal diseases, epilepsy, asthma, eczema, fever, depression and healing of wounds and burns” (p.2). Thus, in African traditional religion there are different types of traditional health practitioners which include;

Diviners; In African traditional religious belief, people search for the diviners to discover what their problems are and the type of sickness they are suffering and the actual cause of the sickness. According to Parrinder (1968) a diviner also known as soothsayer is a specialist in the diagnoses of diseases to discover the root cause of the sickness and the solution to the problems by means of inspiration or manipulation of objects through various techniques. Onyewuchi (2022) on the same note said that “Diviners treat illness primarily through facilitating the direct intervention of the spiritual world. If an illness is believed to be caused by inappropriate behaviour on the part of the patient, a remedy or cure for the illness can only come through spiritual intervention” (p.34). It is the duty of the diviners to diagnose a patient to know the type and the root cause or source of the disease that has befall the patient. After the diagnoses, the patient will be sent to the herbalist for proper medication through administering of medicine and the treatment of the disease.

Fortune tellers; In African traditional religion, fortune tellers serve as psychologists and counsellors. They are consulted when for their wealth of wisdom when a case of a patient’s sickness is to be traced to his/her family or generational background. They are reputed for diagnosing and giving solutions to not just mental and psychological problems of patients but also their spiritual related sicknesses.

Herbalists; The herbalists are the healers and the specialists in administering medicine and the treatment of diseases. According to Onyewuchi (2022) “Healers are reputed to have professional knowledge of illness (pathology) ... and pharmacology (roots, barks, leaves, and herbs. Some of them are also reputed to diagnose and treat ... (p2). The herbalists go into the bush to fetch the medicine and come back home to prepare the medicine according

to the direction of the spirit as it would be suitable for the illness they intend to treat. According to Onyewuchi (2022):

An herbalist is a person who has an in-depth knowledge of herbs and their virtue, and how to prepare, and administer them correctly. He is a person who is familiar with the workings of the natural laws which are inseparable from the laws of health; he obeys these laws and cooperates with them in all that he does for wellbeing of his clients ... An herbalist is however, the therapist who uses medicinal plants in their organic and unprocessed or unrefined state to treat human mental and physical disorders. He also employs other natural systems of healing in his practice (pp.36-37).

It is germane to say therefore that the traditional herbalists or herbal doctors popularly called *dibia mknologwu na mkpa-akwukwo* in Igbo language, are the professionals in administering and the treatment of diseases in African traditional religion. They prepare medicines from herbs: leaves, roots and bark of a tree and other leaves sometimes mixed with some parts of animal for effective treatment of ailment.

Bone setters (Orthopaedics): In African traditional religion medical practice there are professional orthopaedists. The orthopaedists are those who are specialists in bone setting and fracture or bone related injury treatment. The African traditional religion orthopaedists are professionals in the fracture and bone setting to the point that they do not think about amputation of any human part no matter how bad it may seem. Rather, if the fracture in the bone is very bad, the orthopaedists may decide not to touch the patient but uses an animal, mostly chicken to do the setting of the bone. In Nigeria for example it can arguably say that the traditional orthopaedists handle more severe cases of fracture than the orthodox orthopaedists but the confusion which sometimes triggers the conflict between African traditional religion medicine and orthodox medicine is the use of the broken leg of a hen to set the broken bone of human being. This mystery still makes the traditional medical practitioners look fetish.

Midwives; In African traditional religion, the midwives are mainly female medical practitioners or healers. "...female healers tend to treat primarily women and children, and may serve as traditional birth attendants (midwives)" (Onyewuchi 2022, p.34).

Dibia Agwu (Psychiatrist): This is a specialist in the treatment of mental illness. They are African Traditional Religion psychiatrists. These set of practitioners are known to practice when they must have passed through a professional for some years to be able to discern the spirit that is involved in a particular mental illness so as to know the exact treatment that it requires.

Understanding the Practice of Orthodox Medicine

As we have observed earlier, orthodox medicine is a system in which medical doctors and other healthcare professionals (such as nurses, pharmacists, cardiologists, psychiatrists, gynaecologists, surgeons, and therapists,) treat symptoms and diseases using drugs, radiation, or surgery. It also called conventional medicine, mainstream medicine, and Western medicine. It involvesthe study of the physical structure of the body called anatomy. According to Brazier (2020), Anatomy generally is the study, identification and description of the structures of living things. It is a branch of biology and medicine that study the structures of the human body. People who study anatomy study the body, how it is made up, and how it works.Orthodox medicine is thus understood as the means or manner of treatment or cure for diseases that is believed to have been certified and accepted generally by the public. There are various branches of orthodox medicine. As the branches differ in practice, so the practitioner differ in the provision of the service. However, we shall present the main branches of orthodox medicine.

Main Branches of Medicine

The following are the main branches of medicine: Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Paediatrics, Internal Medicine, Surgery and Psychiatry.

Obstetrics and Gynaecology: This involves the study about the

body system of women. According to Ufere (2012, p.33) “Obstetrics is the study and care of the pregnant woman and her attendant problems till delivery. The doctor who specialise in this study is called an Obstetrician. [On the other hand] Gynaecology is the study of the problems of a non-pregnant woman that as to do with her ovaries, fallopian tubes, uterus, cervix, vagina and the vulva. The doctor who specialise in this study is called Gynaecologist.”

Paediatrics: This is comprises of the study and identification of the disease in children. Ufere (2012) described paediatrics as “... the study of the disease of children. The doctor who specialise in this study is called a paediatrician” (p.33).

Internal Medicine: This involves the study body system of the adults and the identification of the diseases in their system. Ufere (2012) avers that internal medicine is the study of the diseases of the adults and the doctors in this branch of medicine are known as physicians. This branch of medicine according to Ufere is divided into eight units which include neurology which is the study of the brain whose specialist is called a neurologist, respiratory medicine which studies the diseases in the respiratory tract, cardiology which studies the heart and its diseases whose specialist is called a cardiologist, nephrology which is concerned with study of the diseases of the kidney and the physician who specialise in this unit is called a nephrologist. There are also the gastroenterologists who specialise in the study and cure of the diseases of the gastrointestinal tract, haemantologists who specialise in the study and the treatment of the diseases in the blood, the dermatology whose area of specialisation is the study the treatment of the skin diseases and the endocrinologists who specialise in the study and identification of the diseases of the endocrine glands.

Surgery: This involves the study of human tissue and bones and other body system and how to operate on them. In the description of Ufere (2012), “This branch of medicine involves the openingup of tissues or organs to remove an identified problem. It is commonly referred to as, ‘Operation’” (p.35).Those in this area of

medicine are known as surgeons. According to Biggers (2018) surgeons may carry out surgical procedures to remove or replace diseased tissue or organs, or they may use surgery to remove tissue for biopsy. Sometimes, they remove unwanted tissue and then send it for diagnosis. In orthodox medical practice, it is believed that surgical procedures are necessary for diagnosing and treating some types of disease, malformation, and injury. They use instrumental and manual means rather than medication. There are various units in the branch of surgery but the well known ones include the Neurosurgeons who are believed to be experts in the brain surgery, the Cardiac surgeons who are believed to be specialists on the operation of the heart, the Ophthalmologists and the Otorhinolaryngologists who specialise on the operation on the ear, nose and throat and the eyes respectively, and the Orthopaedic surgeons who specialises on the operation and the setting of bones.

Psychiatry: This is one of the branches of orthodox medicine which studies and treats human mental illness. According to Howard (2023). “Psychiatry is the branch of medicine focused on the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of mental, emotional and behavioural disorders.” Thus, as a medical doctor, a psychiatric specialises in mental health including substance use disorders. Psychiatrists are therefore qualified doctors to assess both the mental and physical aspects of psychological problems. Because they are physicians, psychiatrists perform full range of medical laboratory and psychological tests which, combined with discussions with patients, help provide a picture of a patient’s physical and mental.

Orthodox Medicine Health Practitioners and their Beliefs

From the above study, we can observe the various branches or areas of the orthodox medicine and their unit with different specialisations. Each field has its expert who specialises in a particular area. In that sense, the orthodox medicine practitioners believe that the orthodox medicine is the best means of diagnoses and treatment of diseases based on its believed specialisations. For example, the orthodox medicine practitioners believe that unlike the African Traditional Religion medicine which is believed to be

trial and error in diagnoses and treatment, orthodox medicine has different areas that study the diagnoses of diseases and the administration of medicine (drugs) such as, Pathology which involves the study of disease. A pathologist often works in a laboratory, where they do tests usually on a sample of blood, urine, or body tissue to help diagnose diseases and conditions. Radiology which is the study of the use of X-rays and scanning equipment during the diagnostic procedure, and sometimes as part of treatment, too and Pharmacology which is the study of pharmaceutical medications, or drugs, where they come from, how they work, how the body responds to them, and what they consist of.

Since it is believed that each health practitioner in the field of orthodox medicine is a specialist in his or her area, it is therefore believed that every disease is to be traced and identified through technical diagnoses, by tests, X-rays, and scanning. Each disease for the orthodox medicine health practitioners has its signs and symptoms and its sources or causes. However, some diseases have similar signs and symptoms but different causes. Unlike the African traditional medicine health practitioners who believe that sicknesses connote the spiritual and physical aspect of human being, the orthodox medicine health practitioners do not believe that disease has any spiritual attachment. Rather, each sickness or disease is diagnosed based on its physical signs and symptoms.

Conflict between African traditional religion Medicine and Orthodox Medicine

The conflict between the African traditional religion medicine and the orthodox medicine has been a perennial one. The conflict has lingered for decades, awaiting resolution. Firstly “traditional African medicine with its belief that illness is not derived from chance occurrences, but through spiritual or social imbalance, differs greatly from western [orthodox] medicine which is technically and analytically based” (Onyewuchi, 2022:2). In African tradition religion, Onyewuchi (2022) still insists that “Diagnosis is reached through spiritual means and treatment is prescribed usually consisting of herbal remedy that has not only healing abilities, but symbolic and spiritual significance” (p2).

Secondly, there are misconceptions about the concepts of African traditional religion medicine in African countries and even among the African people. An average African youth in the contemporary society, both those in Diaspora and some within Africa develop the idea of the African traditional religion medicine from either movie or stories where the African traditional medicine is relegated as nothing and a thing without values and as such it is portrayed as evil and diabolic and fetish things that should be done away with as a primitive practice while the orthodox medicine is promoted, featured and advertised as better and is placed over the traditional medicine. Thirdly, the orthodox medicine is seen as certified and universally approved pattern of diagnosing, preventing and treating ill-health while the African traditional religion medicine is an uncertified and non-approved primitive pattern of diagnoses, prevention and healing. This is because in African traditional religion medical practice, according to Omonzejele (2003) diagnoses is usually based on spiritual explanation. And when the cause of sickness is resorted to spiritual explanation it becomes mystery and mystical to those who believe in the orthodox medicine which is based on analytical and technical explanation and as such it lacks evidence that is in accordance to the basic epistemological understanding for the cure of illness even when the therapy is effective.

Also, it is believed that the African traditional religion health practitioners are not well trained before practicing in their field while the orthodox health practitioners are believed to spend years in training before they qualify for practice. It is also believed that the administration of the African traditional medicine has no dosage like the orthodox medicine administration has and as such it is believed that the African traditional medicine can cause damage in the human system.

Finally, in the orthodox medicine and its practice, scientific explanation is believed to be usually provided on how to administer treatment and how a particular drug works with body chemistry while the methods and procedures of trial of new drugs before its proper use on human being in African traditional religion medical practice is understood as unstable and scientifically unapproved. In that case, Onyewuchi (2022) argues that one cannot expect the west

and non-Africans to adapt to any kind of cure advances in medicine by African traditionalist without adequate explanation. Adekannbi (2018) also reported that African traditional medical practitioners in south-western Nigeria also complained about the presumed superiority of orthodox medical practitioners. Some of the participants asserted that the orthodox practitioners oppress them with their uniforms and try to make them look inferior.

In Hillenbrand (2006) (cited in Adekannbi, 2018) study involving 17 traditional medical practitioners from the capital city of Yaounde, Cameroun, one of the participants asserted that while a few orthodox medical practitioners in the country openly supported traditional medicine and even acquired some of the knowledge, most of the orthodox practitioners ignored or criticised traditional medicine. Putting it bluntly, the participant said that there is a superiority complex among the conventional doctors. They do not believe, or don't want to believe, that traditional medicine has any real value.

Why the Conflict?

It is worthy of note that the fact that the orthodox medicine is seen as certified and generally accepted does not imply that everyone believed in it. There is need to understand that there are still many African traditionalists who have vowed never to go to English hospital or take any medicine that is not traditional (that is, made of natural roots, herbs, leaves, and bark). Majority of Yoruba, Hausa, Fulani, and some Igbo people of Nigeria are example of such. In fact, Adefolaju (2014) revealed that about seventy per cent (70%) of the population still patronise traditional health practitioners in rural Nigeria. Thus, the call to embrace an alien and completely opposed healthcare delivery system became very challenging.

It is very important to understand the reason or the possible cause of the conflict between African traditional religion medicine and the orthodox medicine. It is good to note here that before the advent of the missionaries and the Europeans in the African continent, each *dibia* as they are generally known and addressed in Igbo language, that is a medicine practitioner is known for the particular sickness he treats or his or her specialty in the prevention, treatment or curing of a particular disease. Onyewuchi

(2022) noted that

The custodians or practitioners of traditional medicine were held in very high esteem in their culture and generally in the ancient world, they were regarded as 'medicine men'. However, they are called different names according to the community where they practice or according to the type of medicine in which they specialised (p.32).

Earlier in those periods, the doctors mentioned above, work only on their areas of specialisation without going beyond his or her boundary. When a particular medicine man or woman notices that the sickness or ailment that was brought to his or her domain is not within his or her specialisation, he or she makes reference; the patient would be directed to the specialist on the disease. But things became mixed up with the white man's interpretations of the African traditional religion medicine without any distinction. In the time of the Europeans,

There is no distinction between the actual medical practitioner (healer, herbalist, orthopaedist and even the psychiatrist) from the fortune-teller, the seer, the shaman, or even the interpreters of events in the past. The fortune-tellers and spiritual interpreters and healers are generally known as 'Dibia'...(Apeh, 2017, p.38).

However, due to the general name of the medical practitioners in some parts of African, in Igbo for example, the Europeans seem to understand them as one and the same thing. But, though they have the general name "Dibia" the specialty of each "Dibia" is attached to it when he or she is addressed. For example, in Igbo traditional religion herbalists are called *Dibia m kpologwu na mkpa-kwukwo*, that is the doctors or medicine men who heal or treat sickness with leaves, root, and bark. Others were also differentiated in the same manner.

The conflict between African traditional medicine and the orthodox medicine resulted from the misconception of the Europeans about the differences between herbalists, diviners or seers, bone setters and the rest of the medical practitioners as they have one general name. Also, there are misconceptions about the concept of African traditional medicine in African countries today even among some Africans because of belief system and the failure

of the Europeans and some converted Africans into Christianity and Islam to understand practice of medicine in African traditional religion as needful even when most them fall back to it without question when their case becomes very critical.

It is believed by the Europeans and the African converts that the practice of medicine in African traditional religion is trial and error; that it has no specific and specialised techniques and technologies and personnel for discovering and treating diseases. In the view of Adekannbi (2018) the conflict was attributed to the negative perception of traditional medicine by orthodox practitioners and the failure of government to give traditional medicine its due recognition. This was reportedly responsible for the lack of interest by children of traditional medical practitioners to acquire traditional medical knowledge. Adefolaju (2011) (cited in Adekannbi, 2018) similarly stated that:

Traditional medicine practice in Nigeria, however, faces greater challenges in the hands of government officials who look at it with disdain and disrespect. This is a carry-over from the colonialists who 'needed' to uproot this traditional medical practice for their own medical system to thrive and therefore portrayed the former as nothing more than witchcraft and fetish. Their successor, the Nigerian elite, despite the cultural background, was not better as the Western propaganda had been infused to smear the historical and the indigenous health care system. This is manifested in the Nigeria government's reluctance to accord medicine its primate position in the health care delivery system (p. 102).

The sources of the conflict that exist between African traditional medical practitioners and orthodox medical practitioners are enormous. We only mentioned but few of them here.

An Evaluation

In the beginning of this work, it was mentioned that every society in their ancient times and rural areas have their traditional ways of preventing and treating diseases. However, orthodox medicine is believed to be the certified way of study, diagnosing and treating of diseases. Some scholars like Adefolaju (2014) thus think that in Nigeria, it is due to ignorance, poverty, illiteracy, socio-cultural

beliefs, and limited access to modern healthcare services that many Nigerians prefer seeking the services of traditional healthcare practitioners to the Orthodox medicine practitioners. Yet, he ironically clearly accepted the fact that the traditional healthcare practitioners are very popular in the Nigerian society and that they are known to perform various forms of care to people which includes spiritual healing, 'surgical' treatment, and use of herbal mixtures. But when we go to the Western part of Nigeria, it can be observed greatly that they prefer the African traditional medicine and its health practitioners to the orthodox medicine and its health practitioners, not because of ignorance, poverty nor non-accessibility of the orthodox medicine, but because of their belief and the workability of the traditional medicine. In various parts of Nigeria, there are many wealthy men and woman who have refused to accept the administration of the orthodox medicine on the ground that it a mixture of chemical and that it will have after effect. But the traditional medicine for them is natural leaves and herbs.

The issue now is whether to believe Adefolaju (2014) who is of the view that in Nigeria, quite a lot of people prefer seeking the services of the traditional medical practitioners to the orthodox medical practitioners. Some of the main reasons why this is so are because: the African traditional medical practitioners are more accessible than the orthodox medical practitioners; and the charges paid to African traditional medical practitioners are cheaper than that of the orthodox medical practitioners. Or do we accept the fact that Nigeria, as part of Africans as spiritually oriented people still believe more on spiritually based illness and to the fact that the traditional practitioners treat their clients through the use of herbal medicines, spiritual healing, and traditional surgeries? Still, do we accept the assertion of Jidong., Bailey, Sodi., Gibson, Sawadogo, Ikhile, Musoke, Madhombiro, & Mbah, (2021) who are of the view that cultural beliefs and traditions of the people are integral to understanding indigenous health conditions and traditional healing?

Nevertheless, we can follow the attestation of Osawu (2021) that the “intrusion” of modern medicine into Africa’s health care services has created a competitive environment with the indigenous

medical service. The competitiveness and complementarity which exist between the orthodox and native medicines in contemporary Africa have in many ways provided better health services to Africans. It has continued to receive increasing acceptance in Nigeria and among many other African nations despite the ground breaking improvements recorded in the field of orthodox medicine. Evidence of this is a wide proof of its efficacy by its practitioners and patronisers and the recent call by the African Union to give priority to research on African traditional medicine.

Osagwu (2012) is of the view that the conflict between African traditional medicine and orthodox medicine is not really detrimental as thought. Rather it brought about competitiveness which seems to have promoted the African traditional medicine. He believes that this conflict has given room for in-depth research and study in African traditional medicine. African traditional medicine through its conflict with orthodox medicine has made immense contributions in the Nigerian health care delivery. Thus, considering the dependence of majority of rural dwellers on African traditional medical practitioners, it could be expected that there should be a good level of working relationship or collaboration between African traditional health practitioners and orthodox practitioners. However, studies have reported divergent views with some stating a low level of collaboration (Adekannbi, 2018).

Recommendation

There is need for the co-existence of African traditional religion medicine and the orthodox medicine for a better healthy society. This is because research has proved that there are some sicknesses or diseases that could not be ascertained by orthodox medicine through scientific and analytical diagnoses, yet the patient was critically ill. But it was ascertained through traditional diagnoses of the African traditional religion medical practitioners and was treated wholly. In that case, we can arguably say that there are some sicknesses or diseases that are beyond scientific understanding. However, discovery in African traditional society has shown that such sicknesses or diseases can only be attended to by the African traditional religious medical practitioners.

In Nigeria for example, it is well known fact that orthopaedic cases are best handled by African traditional religious surgeons known as bone setters. For instance, most cases of legs and arms that were supposed to be amputated by the orthodox medicine practitioners were rescued by the African traditional surgeons with ease. Most times the treatment and settings of some of the bones has spiritual undertone which is beyond ordinary human understanding and defies every scientific explanation. For example, there was a woman in Anambra state Nigeria (precisely in Ifite Dunu, in Dunukofia Local Government Area) widely known as Okuoba. Okuoba was an African traditional surgeon (bone setter) by profession. She does not cure any other type of sickness except bone setting. She therefore deals with serious cases of broken bones abandoned or have been designated for amputation by orthodox medicine practitioners. Sometimes, when the case was too critical she does not touch the patient rather she brings a chicken and breaks its legs and begin the treatment of the patient with setting of the broken legs of the chicken which would at the end yield a positive result. This is where it is very difficult for science to come in. That is why Onyewuchi (2022) complains that, although such acts have been witnessed severally to have worked in different bone setting places "... but the connection between the broken leg of hen and the treatment of a patient with a broken leg is quite difficult to explain" (p3). In the same manner, Nwoko (2009) reported that

In recent times there have been debates among health professionals on the desirability of integrating traditional health practices into orthodox medicine. This thinking was influenced by the resistance of some ailments to the orthodox healing methods as well as the proven efficacy of traditional healing processes in the treatment of some ailments (p.36).

This points to the key role of the African traditional medical practitioners in the health care system in Nigeria. It is therefore suggested that there is need for the integration of African traditional medicine in the general health care system in Nigeria. This requires that African traditional medicine is included in the country's national drug policy; providers and products are

registered and regulated; African traditional therapies to be made available at hospitals and clinics (both public and private); treatment with African traditional medicine is reimbursed under health insurance; relevant research is undertaken; and education in African traditional medicine is available (Adekannbi, 2018).

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