



## HEALTH AND PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF TRADITIONAL RITES AND RITUAL PRACTICES IN NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

Traditional rites and practices are replete in most African communities. Rituals during rites of passage, circumcision, widowhood, initiation etc are now perceived inimical and repugnant to health. Although these rites and practices were initiated to enhance quality of life, the practicability and benefits of majority of these rituals have become obsolete and inimical to health and psyche in recent times. Although various researches have documented the processes and benefits of these traditional ritual practices, few have examined its health and psychological implications on individuals. Thus, this research examined the health and psychological implications of traditional rites and practices in Nigeria with special focus in some selected communities in Delta State. Explanation of core variables hinged on functionalist and social change theory. A total of 400 respondents were co-opted in the study. Respondents' eligibility and inclusiveness revolved around age and residency. Data was gathered using questionnaire and in-depth interview. Data was analyzed using simple percentage and chi-square. Data revealed that the rich cultural ritual practices were initiated to enhance longevity and as well maintain peaceful co-existence, but its relevance have become repugnant and inimical to health in modern time. The long-time effects cause psychological problems for victims. Thus, the study recommends that indigenous practices whose rites and rituals pose as threat to health be eradicated.

**Word count: 215**

**Key words:** Traditional rituals, health and psychological implication, inimical and repugnant

### **Introduction**

Traditional rites and practices are replete in most African communities. Ritual practices during rites of passage, circumcision, widowhood, initiation etc are now perceived as inimical and repugnant to health in recent time. Although these rites and practices were initiated to enhance quality of life, its practicability and benefits have become obsolete and inimical to health and psyche due to its debilitating health challenges in recent times.

Many victims of harmful traditional practices suffer sexual and reproductive health consequences including painful sex, forced and unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, traumatic fistula, emotional breakdown, depression, sexually transmitted infections including HIV, and even death are readily available evidence of the repugnant nature of the ritual practices. Despite these problems, many communities continue to enforce these ritual practices.

In the past, the existence of ritual practices such as widowhood rituals were predicated on its relevance of protecting the children and also retaining the wife that was legally entrusted to the family (Ikenyei & Akpotor 2020). But in recent time, it is fraught with many challenges.



Although the practices are watered down by modern norms, in the past, a woman is made to seat in an ash ridden and dirty environment preferably corner of the house to mourn her late husband. In some cases where there is accusation or evidence of funny act from the wife which led to the demise of the husband, she is compelled to drink the water used in washing the dead corpse of the late husband. In most cases, she is mandated to cry out loudly to show reverence for the late husband and to alert the community of the pains of losing a dear husband.

In many Nigeria communities, it is not new that some women are given to marriage (re-marriage) to other male members within the family of a deceased husband. In this process, many women have contracted or rather infested their partners with communicable diseases. This does not only violate the human right of the victim but is endemic and injurious to the health of the woman.

The research is significant and contributes to the body of knowledge on the relevance of some ritual practices in recent time. The research will enlighten the general public that majority of the erstwhile ritual practices are often times inimical to health thereby leading to human rights violations. Its implication in relation to health and social relationship and psychological wellbeing will enlighten the people of the danger of the repugnant rites and subsequently proffer ways of averting it. It improves literature availability in the area of traditional rites and practices and its implication on health, psyche and human rights. It makes available data on implications of health implication of traditional practices as there appear to be little or no empirical studies in this regard as at the time of this research.

It elaborates the context of human rights violations in relation to coercive or compulsory rituals. It clarifies the place of ritual practices and its roles with special reference to how it violates human rights in Warri, Delta State. It investigates the acceptance of traditional human rights norms vis-à-vis violations. It highlights the need to enshrine human rights and corporate responsibility in agreement treatise between Nigerian government and its constituent units/entities-communities.

### **Literature Review**

Majority of the African traditional rituals are replete with many contradictions. Although many of the rites were adequate and beneficial in the past, presently some of the ritual practices have become obsolete and majority diagnosed as inimical and repugnant. From the study carried out by (Ikenyei 2017) it was revealed by 79% respondents that, most ritual practices such as widow inheritance practices and circumcision has affected many victims negatively (Ikenyei 2017). It effects are negatively viewed to be source of trauma and worst still a means of contracting diseases. Further reports revealed that many contracted diseases Such HIV, Hepatitis, etc. Through wife inheritance and incision of majority of the community members in Africa with the same razor has led to contraction of infection from affected persons. Violation of human right through forceful enforcement of most of these practice makes life unbearably hard; this imparts adversely on health, their psych and general social wellbeing (Ikenyei and Amaechi 2020). This finding is in tandem with the findings of Ikenyei (2023), whose research findings revealed that, inimical cultural practice inflict health challenges on victim and as well violate their human right.

A total of 67% reports revealed that compulsory enforcement of inimical practices induces many health challenges ranging from psychosomatic dissonance to anxiety, psychometric disturbances, and psychosis, insomnia and delusion, suspicion paranoia, depression, high-blood-pressure, hypertension, disorientation and stroke. They become complacent; those who



seek redress are embattled with difficult terrain (Ikenyei (2017). As such, victims become stoic and unpatriotic; often exhibiting unwholesome behaviors to community norms

### **The Psychological Implications of Inimical Ritual Practices on Community Members**

For psychological *consequences of inimical ritual practices*: in a study conducted by Ikenyei (2023) revealed that, 85% of the participants reported that some traditional ritual practices predispose victims to aggressive behavioral exigencies. This coincides with the findings of Anon, (2013) and Ikenyei, (2022). To the respondents, out of frustration, victim becomes aggressive and that most victims experience confusion and lack of direction; they become disoriented and disorganized (Ikenyei, (2022). Consequently, “victims out of disorientation, frustration and disorganization, suffers psychosomatic disturbances. This disturbance which often takes the form of cognitive dissonance turns the reasoning faculty of the victim's head up”. The victims lose consciousness in their environment. The victim loses touch with reality of the world around them. Loss of respect for human rights does not only affect the individuals, but it also impacts on all other sectors in the community” (Ikenyei 2017). This “breeds an unpatriotic spirit in the minds of the citizens. This is in tandem to Weber’s action theory. Actions, according to Weber and Marshall, are modelled by personal, group or structural interests. These interests (struggle for limited resource) push the offender to violate its victim. Consequently, victims live with loss of hope and expectation. They just live each day as it comes. They lose ambitions and spike of life with which they started their lives”. “Over a long period of time, this creates fear and high blood pressure” Ikenyei (2023). A total of 7.3% respondents reported that loss of confidence and depression on citizens. This coincides with the findings of Ikenyei (2023).

With their lives not secured community member loses self-esteem and self-worth.

### **Effects of traditional ritual practice on Development**

Those who are emotionally disturbed often do not do well productively. This affects economic growth negatively.

### **Theoretical Framework**

*Theory of Change* is essentially a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired *change* is expected to happen in a particular context. A theory is a body of abstract ideas that are used to explain a phenomenon, a situation and a problem. Theories of change are abstract ideas or propositions that are used to explain alterations in social phenomenon. There are three main theories of social change: evolutionary, functionalist, and conflict. The evolutionary theory of social change gained prominence in the 19th century. Sociologists latched on to Darwin's theory of evolution, applying it to society. According to Darwin, society as well as individual evolves. They transform from crude to refined state. Thus, in recent time, societies have evolved from the crude way sustaining marriages and protecting the wife and children of the deceased. Today, husbands write their will to protect the interest of the wife and children. The question of property grabbing and re-marriage to another family member becomes unnecessary. The modern wake in the existence of many of disease and the transmission of deadly diseases by keeping multiple partners abhors the ritual involved in widowhood and leverage marriage.

On the other hand, conflict theorists such as Karl Marx and Engels see a seed of destruction within the ritual practices. They believe that most ritual practices are classed centric. The down trodden class in society is left at the mercy of the rich. For example, in a situation, a wife is not in good relationship with the family members of the late husband, she is made to go through



the worst maltreatment and other unhealthy experiences just to get back at her. She is exploited and most often alienated from the family meetings and stripped off of her life time struggles which she managed to build with her late husband. She is seen as a cartel to be inherited and used; a subservient servant who is relegated to the background. The death of her husband opens doors for unhealthy treatment and suffering for the widow.

Despite the views of the conflict theorists, functionalists such as Talcot Parson and Emile Durkheim see the ritual practice as functional and inherently good. They believe that a woman is soft and cannot handle tasks handled by men in marriage. Therefore, functionalists are of the views that rituals practices are good and necessary for society to function properly. To them, every society has indigenous belief system. They also have norms and these norms are most often embellished in rituals that are peculiar to their community (Ikenyei & Lawal 2019). These basic pre-requisite rituals are according to functionalist present and ever green. For example, no matter how a community evolves and no matter the crises, a family member always over sees the affairs of the entire family. This duty and care cover all the wives and children found in that family.

In essence, the three theories when applied to this study, shows that, for the survival of a health community, there is inherent need for traditional ritual practices that are not repugnant to health. The obvious fact in the conflicting and contradictory and inimical nature of some rituals call for a need for re-evaluation and improvement. In conclusion, there is no community without inbuilt norms and values. These are cased in the different ritual practices. Those that are good be revived, strengthened and rejuvenated why the inimical and repugnant ones be expunged.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In many societies, there are norms and values that guide individual behaviour. Most of these norms and values are encased and cascaded in ritual practices. Although in recent years many rituals practices appear harmful, they were useful in the past. This research x-rayed the past and present to explicate the nexus between ancient rituals practices and the modern realities and practices. According to Ikenyei (2021), many victims of harmful traditional practices suffer sexual and reproductive health consequences including painful sex, forced and unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, traumatic fistula, emotional breakdown, depression, sexually transmitted infections including HIV, and even death are readily available evidence of the repugnant nature of the ritual practices. Most victims of these practices suffer psychological problems such as hallucination, dementia and schizophrenia (Ikenyei & Lawal 2019). Despite these problems, many communities continue to enforce these ritual practices. The modern happenings do not support some of the ritual practices. Although many researches reviewed the beauty and benefits of traditional ritual practices, few examined it health and psychological implications. Hence, this paper examined the health and psychological implications of traditional rites and ritual practices in selected communities in Delta state.

### **Methods**

The study is exploratory and descriptive using cross sectional design to study the health and psychological implications of traditional rites in some selected communities in Delta state. It highlighted the harmful aspect of the ritual practices in recent time within the selected communities, human right violation, alienation and exploitation as well as abandonment. Across sectional design is adopted because data was collected from different respondents with



heterogeneous but similar socio-demographic characteristics at a single point in time. A robust data that explained the plight of victims under research was carried out in January, 2024.

### **Study Area**

Warri is “located in Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Its state capital is Asaba. “About one third of the land area which is located in wetland contains the third largest mangrove swamp forest in the world. Warri with numerous traditional rites and practices was selected as the research area in the Niger Delta region. Choosing this community was due to the high level of allegiance to traditional practices. More also, the region was chosen due to the effects the traditional rites have on victims” (Ikenyei 2023)

The "city Warri has a unique history that has not been documented well enough by historians. The name Warri was applicable to the part now called Delta State under the colony and protectorate of Southern Nigeria. Its boundary in the North east was Nsukwa/Iseagu creek near Kwale and Aboh, Forcados River in the South east and Jaieson creek in the South west. This was later changed to Delta province". Warri is one of the major hubs of petroleum activities and businesses in the Southern Nigeria. “It is a commercial city of Delta State and the city is one of the cosmopolitan cities in southern Nigeria comprising those who originally are the indigene of the city. They are the Itsekiri, Urhobo and Ijaw people. Warri is predominantly Christian with a mixture of numerous African traditional religions like most of the Southern Nigeria. Although there are varieties of dialects, the common language in the region is Urhobo language. The city is known nationwide for its unique Pidgin English” (Ikenyei 2016).

Choosing Warri as the research setting was born out of the peculiar challenges which beset the region due to the adverse effects these acclaimed rites and repugnant effects on victims. Thus, the research setting was considered appropriate because of the inimical effects it have on victims which destroys life and peaceful co- existence in the area. Erstwhile communities which lived in harmony have been torn apart by adhering to these practices. Some use it as a tool to punish acclaimed enemies or haters. The crises are further worsened by modern researches which highlighted the ills of erstwhile traditional practices.

### **Study Population**

The total study population for Warri according to population census of 2006 was 311,970 (2006 National Population Census). Never the less, the 2022 projection was estimated to be 210,189 (2022 National Population projection). Out of this population, 400 respondents were sampled across the selected communities in Warri. The study population included household heads, community leaders, chiefs, market women, youths and farmers, religious leaders and health professionals.

### **Method of Data Collection**

Tools for data collection were triangulated. That is, both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection were used in data gathering. The questionnaire, key informant and in-depth interview were used in data collection. A total of 400 questionnaires was issued to respondents in the study area. Out of these 400 questionnaires, a total of 335 was properly filled and returned. A total of 35 in-depth interviews were granted. Thus, total respondents were 400. The respondents who were age 18 and above and were resident in the research area for at least 10 years was co-opted as samples for data collection.



### Method of Data Analysis

For data analyses, quantitative data were analyzed using the statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) version 23. The analysis was categorized into three levels. The univariate analysis described vividly the statistical relevance of the frequency distribution of participants according to their socio-demographic characteristics. Bivariate analysis with the use of a chi-square test was adopted to show the impact of traditional rites and practices in recent time. This analysis detailed the health and psychological effect of these age long practices. A thematic extraction method was also used in the analysis of qualitative data, which were transcribed verbatim and related accordingly. Deductive extractions of information grouped responses from the interviews based on the objectives of the study, and these responses which were classified into themes were subjected to percentage tabulation analyses. Referencing in the body of the work for qualitative data appeared as for age, for example: M, 40 years +.

### Data Presentation and Discussion of Findings

**Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents.**

S/N	VARIABLE LABEL	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
<b>1</b>	<b>Age</b>		
	15-25	72	21.5
	26-35	61	18.3
	36-55	87	25.9
	56-68	59	17.6
	69-above	56	16.7
	<b>Total</b>	<b>335</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Gender</b>		
	Male	169	50.4
	Female	166	49.6
	<b>Total</b>	<b>335</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Education</b>		
	Primary	74	22.1
	Secondary	62	18.5
	B.Sc	85	25.4
	Post graduate	58	17.3
	Others	56	16.7
	<b>Total</b>	<b>335</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Income</b>		
	10-30	104	31.1
	31-50	85	25.4
	51-80	62	18.5
	81-110	58	17.3
	111-above	26	7.7
	<b>Total</b>	<b>335</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Occupation</b>		
	Farmer	114	34.1
	Business	85	25.4
	Civil servant	62	18.5
	Doctors	58	17.3
	Others	16	4.7
	<b>Total</b>	<b>335</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Religion</b>		
Christian	182	54.3	



	Muslim	72	21.5
	Traditionalist	60	17.9
	Atheist	18	5.4
	Others	3	0.9
	<b>Total</b>	<b>335</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Marital status</b>		
	Single	182	54.3
	Married	102	30.4
	Divorced	20	5.9
	Separated	18	5.4
	Cohabiting	13	3.8
	<b>Total</b>	<b>335</b>	<b>100</b>

### Health Implications of Inimical Ritual Practices on Community Members

Total of 79% respondents revealed that most ritual practices such as widow inheritance practices and circumcision have affected many victims. They revealed that many contract diseases such as HIV, Hepatitis etc. In-depth interview revealed that through wife inheritance and incision of majority of the community members with the same razor has led to contraction of infection from affected personality. Violation of human rights through forceful enforcement of most of these practices makes life unbearably hard; this imparts adversely on health, their psych and general social wellbeing. This finding is in tandem with the findings of Ikenyei (2023), whose research findings revealed that, inimical cultural practices inflict health challenges on victims and as well violate their human rights.

Total of 67% respondents revealed that compulsory enforcement of inimical practices induces many health challenges ranging from psychosomatic dissonance to anxiety, psychometric disturbances, and psychosis, insomnia and delusion, suspicion, paranoia, depression, high blood-pressure, hypertension, disorientation and stroke. They become complacent, those who seek redress are embattled with difficult terrain. As such, victims become stoic and unpatriotic; often exhibiting unwholesome behaviors to community norms.

### The Psychological Implications of Inimical Ritual Practices on Community Members

For psychological *consequences of inimical ritual practices*: a total of 85% of the participants revealed that some traditional ritual practices predispose victims to aggressive behavioral manifestation. This coincides with the findings of Maiese, (2013) and O'malley, (1999). To the respondents, out of frustration, (89%) revealed that they became aggressive. A total of (52%) of them revealed that most victims experience confusion and lack of direction; they become disoriented (49%), and disorganized (46%). According to (68%) respondents, the victims out of disorientation, frustration and disorganization, suffer psychosomatic disturbances. This disturbance which often takes the form of cognitive dissonance, turns the reasoning faculty of the victim's head up. The victims lose consciousness in their environment. The victim loses touch with reality of the world around them. Loss of respect for human rights does not only affect the individuals, but it also impacts on all other sectors in the community. To 56% respondents, this breeds an unpatriotic spirit in the minds of the citizens. This is in tandem to Weber's action theory. Actions, according to Weber and Marshall, are modelled by personal, group or structural interests. These interests (struggle for limited resource) push the offender to violate its victim. Consequently, victims live with loss of hope and expectation. They just live each day as it comes. They lose ambitions and spike of life with which they started their lives. As a result of uncertainty and unpredictable nature of constitutional rights, 4% respondents revealed that the victim becomes suspicious of people's moves. Over a long



period of time, this creates fear and high blood pressure. A total of 7.3% respondents reported that loss of confidence and depression on citizens. This coincides with the findings of Anon Ikenyei (2023).

According to 85% of the respondents, unwholesome treatment shows no guarantee that their lives are secured, community member lose self-esteem and self-worth.

### **Effects of Traditional Ritual Practice on Development**

A total of 83% of the respondents believe that investors do not want to invest in a community that is dominated by human rights violations. This is predicated on the fact that there are frictions and constant conflicts. This, according to 5.6% of the respondents leads to insurgency and unrest which cause stagnation, in socio-economic growth and development in many Nigerian communities. This finding is line with Ikenyei(2020), (2022) and (2023) research findings.

A total of 79.3% of the respondents and correlation coefficient of ( $X^2=13.19$ ;  $P<0.05$ ) revealed that 75% mandatory enforcement of these practices on individual creates unpatriotic and destructive spirits among victims in Nigerian. This induces psychosomatic dissonance and psychological disorder. This condition disrupts peace and wellness. The unfair treatment, high cost of seeking redress, and the quest for immediate gratification by law enforcement agencies with little or no long-term plan of removing repugnant practices undermined the hope for genuine mediation.

### **Summary**

The study examined the health and psychological implications of traditional rites and ritual practices in Nigeria. Functionalist and social change theories were used in the explanation of core variables. There was triangulation of research instruments. Both qualitative and quantitative tools were used in data gathering. Data was analyzed using chi-square, tables and thematic extraction of responses. Although, the sustaining the practices of traditional rites comes with so much advantages in the past, it is believed that majority have become inimical and repugnant to health and psychological wellbeing in recent time. The study revealed that the as beneficial in the past. They provided the pillar on which the community and members rested on to live a successful life. Never the less, despite these benefits, its continual practice caused health challenge to members of the community. This occasion more hardships and death. This is in tandem with Ikenyei (2017) findings. These heightened retrogression and level of psychologically disadvantaged persons in Warri and its environs. There is wide spread of robbery, rape, hunger and prostitution amongst others. Respondents believed that one of the major solutions to these problems is for concerned authorities to make frantic effort to ensure that these practices are re-examined and possibly eliminate the inimical aspects of the practices. In line with this, government should create awareness on the ills of some traditional practices and community members should fight for their right by rejecting practices that are dangerous to their health. This coincides with the fining of Ikenyei (2023, 2022)

### **Conclusion**

Traditional practices are more of a blessing than a curse. Agitations for elimination of some of its inimical ritual practices is due to modern innovation which have proved beyond doubt that most of the traditional rites like circumcision is inimical and repugnant to health and psychological wellbeing. Call for elimination is alleged to be due, due to the negative effects of these traditional rites and practices on community members.





## Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the study recommends that community leaders should make frantic effort to ensure that inimical and repugnant traditional practices are eliminated. Government should make laws that protect the right of citizens from prosecution for not adhering to inimical traditional practices. They should be public awareness on the dangers of practicing some traditional rites.

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