

Disease, Health and Wholeness in Iuleha-Edo (African) Belief

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ABSTRACT

Every man desires good health and wholeness of being. However, the conceptualization of health and illness differ across cultures. The paper takes a phenomenological review of Iuleha (Edo) traditional perception of disease and good health. It obtains ethnographic data through in-depth interview and non-participatory observation methods. The paper observed that wholeness is the underlying focus of the Iuleha (Edo) conceptualization of health; this involves being in good health and being at peace with both the sensible and the supersensible world. It unveiled among other things that the Iuleha worldview influences their perceptions of the source, prevention and cure of disease/ill-health. Disease or illness (emiami) in Iuleha belief thus covers all human and environmental hazards which usually ensue when the state of balance between the sensible and supersensible world is disrupted either by natural, supernatural or some mystical forces within the individual or in the society. The paper reiterates also that, every culture is unique; and that each culture has a system of belief which among other things acts as a lens through which disease is viewed, and conceptualized. It would not therefore be out of place to address illness from the perspective of how a person perceives, experiences and copes with disease based on the system of meanings he/she employs. The paper on this note proposes a need for dialogue between traditional healthcare providers, Western medical practitioners, the government and people of Nigeria, to build a consensus that will holistically address the varied and variegated health issues in modern African societies.

Keywords: Disease, Health, Wholeness, Iuleha, Traditional Medicine

INTRODUCTION

The question of life, health, wellbeing and wholeness are phenomena of universal concern for man. Every medical practice whether traditional or biomedicine is geared towards restoring and sustaining health (Ebhomielen 2008:14). The role of health in the development process has gained more prominence in recent years. In fact studies have unveiled that the health of the people has tremendous impact on the health of the nation. This is not unconnected with the fact that the people play the central role in development. Humans play a pivotal role in the production as well as the consumption of goods. The progress of nations thus depends largely on the good health of its human resources (Ebhomielen 2008:15). Citing the World Health publication of 1994 on "Better Life in Africa, Ebhomielen (2008:15) emphasizes that Health is an essential objective of development. And since the capacity to develop is largely dependent of human health, poor health thus, shackles human capital, reduces returns to

learning, impedes entrepreneurial activities, and holds back growth of Gross National Product (GNP).

Health as understood by Africans (Iuleha inclusive) is far more social than biological (Udofia 2014:11). Africans see health beyond the absence of physical ailments. What constitutes health to them is inextricably intertwined with their cosmological perception of things (religious belief). Peter White (2015:1) reaffirms this fact in his comment that there is actually a connection between physical ailment and moral evil in African belief. Hence, it is usually thought traditionally that 'there is no smoke without fire'. Sickness doesn't just happen, it may be caused by the patient's action or inactions (through his/her violation of a communal moral code), affliction from some malevolent spirits or some natural causes resulting from stress, parasitic, bacteria or viral infection (Ebhomielen and Ikhidero 2019:20). Although African traditional beliefs did not kick against any Western medical way of treatment

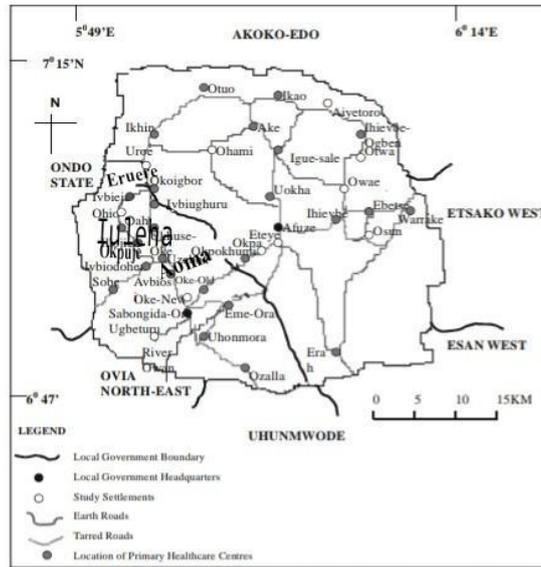
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or healing process, its followers believe that there are some disease situations that Western medical practice has limited knowledge about. These they believe need spiritual attention. This paper thus takes a phenomenological exploration of the Iuleha traditional view regarding disease, causes of disease, how a disease is diagnosed and treated.

WHO ARE THE IULEHA OF OWAN (EDO)?

The Iuleha people of Owan West Local Government Area are among the Edoid speaking groups occupying the Northern fringe

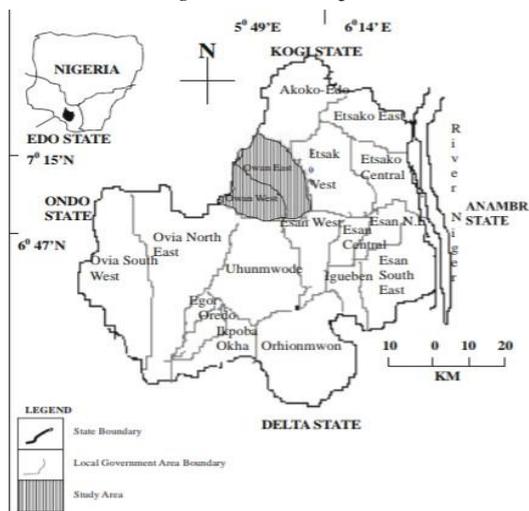
of Edo State, South-south geopolitical zone of Nigeria (Ikhidero 2013:105). The name *Iuleha* is a derivative of the Owan saying, *UdoL'ehayonvbie'akhe*– The tripod stones cook the meal well (OrędeAfensumun 2019: n.d.). It is a name that depicts unity, support and cooperation; *Erha-Iuleha* (Father of Iuleha), *Irimo* is said to have used the illustration of the tripod stones (IU) of the traditional hearth (cooking place) to preach unity among his three children - *Eruere, Aomaand Okpuje*; which invariably are the three major sub clans that make up Iuleha.



Map of Owan, showing Iuleha and other Clans/Communities in Owan land (Ojeifo2008:69)

Iulehatoday, as OmonOsiki (2008:95) has rightly pointed out is the single largest conglomeration of community in Owan West Local Government Area of Edo State, in terms of size and population. It comprises of *Uzebba, Avbiosi'vboa, Avbiosi'vbode, Ukhuse' Oke, Ukhuse'Osi, Okagboro, Obola, Oshofo, Eruere, Ivbiughuru, Iloje, Oah, Ivbioghola,*

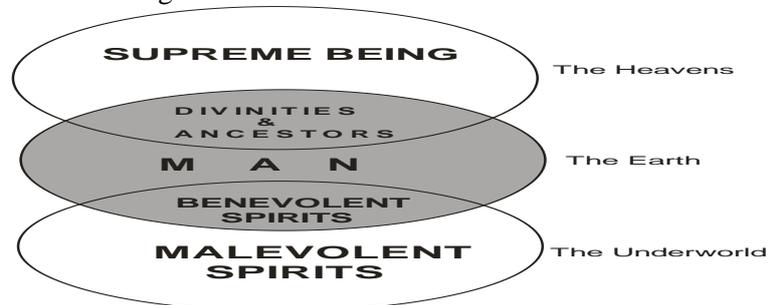
Okeigho, Orọmę and Ikpeyan. Owan West where Iuleha clan is situated is one part of the two Local Government Areas around the Owan River (Owan East and Owan West) in Edo State. The headquarters of Owan East Local Government Area is Afuze while that of Owan West Local Government Area is Sabongida-Ora (Ojeifo 2008:69).



Map of Edo State in Nigeria showing Owan and other Local Government Areas

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Cosmologically, the Iuleha of Owan in Edo State believe in a universe replete with myriads of spirits. They believe in the existence of a Supreme Being (*Oiselobua*), divinities/spirits (*aimin/eimin*), ancestors (*eimi-edionor eimi'oa*), reincarnation (*achere'agbon*), witchcraft (*Ibolikhuo*), and *Arhialusi* (fatalism/retributive justice; acts of previous existence) etc. (Akhigbe 2019: n.d.) The Iuleha ontological account of



Imafidon (2012:2) affirms this when he maintains that, in an African ontology, everything is taken as being; nothing exists that is taken lightly. The belief as Imafidon (2012:2) reiterates further is that there is a reason for whatever is. Hence, even though man may not immediately know why a thing is created, they all serve a purpose. Being is therefore conceived as the range of existent things arranged in an ontological hierarchical order.

Among the Iuleha people, it is generally conceived that *Oiselobua* (The Supreme being) is at the apex of the ontological hierarchical order of being. He is believed to be the creator of the universe and all beings therein. Morality, from the perspective of the Iuleha people flows from *Oiselobua*. He is the people's idea of the holy and the morally good in the community. He ensures that the moral norms of the society are strictly adhered to and He dispenses retributive justice through the divinities/spirits such as *Olokun*, *Ayelala*, *Adaobi* and the ancestors (*obazu*, *era-eruere*, *oyangbe*, *Okpujoro*, *Ojuretc*) (Ikhidero 2013:107).

The socio-religious practices of the Iuleha people recognize two practitioners: The Priest (*Ohen*) and The Diviner/Herbalist (*oboh*). An *Ohen* in Iuleha is a man or woman who is made to pass through a long series of initiation rites that qualifies him to mediate between human and a deity or divinity (Alamu 2013:155). The diviner/healer – *Oboh* is specialized in magical activity such as curing, divining, handling witches or administering ordeals. The *obohs* provided the people with herbs, charms, talisman and other medical attention for good health and also for protective and preventive

reality as is the case of many African societies is generally known to be a holistic one. This, as Anthony Ikechukwu Kanu (2012:95) points out is as a result of the manner in which both the sensible and non-sensible beings interlocks together as parts of one holistic world having a reciprocal influence on each other. This is aptly captured in the diagram below:

medicine after divination, or application of magic because of their natural tendency towards religion. Without any equivocation, in their spiritual, rational and corporate existence, the religious beliefs of the Iuleha people is the will and précis of their life and possession. The tenets of their religion provide them with shared values, cultural altruism and responsibilities. Indeed, their religion accounts for the peculiar features of the individuals concerning the universe, which encompass the physical reality. The wonder of the thick forest, the power of the rivers, the magnificent rocks and high mountains with the corresponding mystery of the human person all manifest a supreme power behind these physical realities (Ogbomo: 1994:222).

DISEASE, HEALTH AND WHOLENESS (EMIAMIN BI EGBEDAAN) IN IULEHA BELIEF

To say *egbeda'an'me* – 'I am healthy' among the Iuleha people means, 'I am not sick', 'my children are not sick' 'my finance is not sick' etc.; 'everything is going well with me' - this connotes a state of general wellbeing (EguaejeOjehomon 2020:n.d). This Iuleha perception is affirmed by Esther Adenike Idowu (2013:13) among the Yoruba in Western Nigeria, in the saying that; "*alafia lo ju, ileraloro, eniti o nialaafia lo niohungbogbo*" (health is paramount, health is wealth, whoever is in good health has everything). For the Iuleha people like other traditional Africans, health (*egbeda'an*) is not just about the proper functioning of bodily organs. Good health to them as corroborated by Peter Omonzejele (2008:120) consists of mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional stability of oneself, family

members, and community. This integrated view of health is based on the African unitary view of reality.

Bolaji Idowu (1973:13) notes that, in Africa (Iuleha inclusive), the absence of good health is illness and illness is understood in three particular ways. It may be natural, supernatural or mystical. That is to say, the absence of good health in Africa's belief may be due to natural causes such as poisoning, pain and so on. It can also be the result of supernatural or spiritual attacks by witches or wizards as well as some mystical occurrences induced by the spirits, divinities, or ancestors for punishment of offences against them. Therefore, to better understand the concept of health, its definition must encompass maintenance of body balance; physical and emotional balance, cultural and political balance, and spiritual and ideological balance. In this sense, ill health is not only about the threat to the harmonious functioning of the body system; it involves the mental, physical, spiritual, emotional even material imbalance experience by a person, his/her family members or community. Peter White (2015:1) tagged this; the Africa integrated view of health, which is based on the African unitary view of reality.

The belief in the existence of a supreme being, supernatural forces, origin, meaning, and the ultimate purpose and destination of human life greatly influence the Iuleha concept of health and wholeness. The traditional Iuleha (Owan) man like other Africans has his own ideas about disease and its causal agents. It is the belief of the Iuleha people that "there is no smoke without fire". Every disease has its natural as well as its spiritual cause. A correspondent to this study who preferred anonymity puts it succinctly thus; when *emianmi* (disease) suddenly afflicts an individual, it cannot be said to be normal; especially when it takes the life of a young person. Also, when disease appears to be chronic and incurable it must surely be due to either something that the victim (*arobosi*) or some other malevolent agent has done or willed to the victim (np). Onah Ajima and Eyang Ubana (2018:n.p) remark on this note that 'the general African belief is that illness is not just caused by germs but by the breach of natural laws. Healing can thus take place when the patient confesses his/her offence and the appropriate propitiation sacrifice is done. This as Ajima and Ubana (2018) add is to restore, maintain and correct human disorder.' Human actions and activities that breach both stipulated moral codes can result to breakdown of socio-spiritual harmony,

emotional trauma, social, environment or biophysical, drought, flood, poor harvest, infertility, being beaten by a snake, leprosy, killed by a falling tree and other serious human ailments.

The Iuleha also make distinctions among various diseases. For example, there are diseases that one acquires before birth. For example when a child is born with any form of deformity, the cause is usually attributed to the moral evil or stupid action of the parents or some other member(s) of the family. It may also be the result of reincarnated attribute of a dead member of that family. Even though all illness is considered as evil, a respondent to this study; Pa Atokhaimen Eguaoje (2019:n.d) who is a traditional healer talks about some disease aptly regarded as *emiamiope*— bad or evil disease or illness. These include; leprosy (*ekhii*), epilepsy (*ighikpa*), insanity (*ememe*) etc. These types of diseases are a disgrace to the person who contract them and to their relatives. In most of these cases according to Atokhaimen, relatives hide the victims of such diseases from the public. It should be noted however that, among the Iuleha people, diseased victims are never abandoned by their relatives no matter how disgraceful the disease may seem. To abandon a diseased relative is considered a grave sin. Another dimension to this is that, sick persons should never be ridiculed or laughed at. Sickness among the Iuleha is a curse that may result from many cause. Even when it is clearly thought to be the fault of the victim, he or she should not be ridiculed.

CAUSAL AGENTS OF DISEASES IN IULEHA BELIEF

As mentioned earlier, disease could be spiritually or naturally inflicted on an individual. Causal agent of disease in Iuleha belief can be classified into;

PHYSICAL/NATURAL CAUSAL AGENTS (EMIAMIN'OKHAN)

The Iuleha people are aware that the causes of diseases can be natural. They believe that it is part of life for a person to fall sick. Common ailments, such as headaches (*amahonmo*) or coughs (*oɛn*) are considered to be diseases with natural causes. The Iuleha of Edo state as comments from respondents reveal may trace the natural cause of diseases to accident or malfunction of human organism. They believe that diseases can also be caused by germs and other injurious elements entering into the human

system through food, drinks, skin etc. Malaria fever – *oyao* for example is attributed to mosquito (*evbavba*) bite. Some of the symptoms of malaria include; *ogbogbo* (shivering), *amahonmo* (headache) and the yellowness of the eyes/urine. Symptoms of these natural illnesses are treated at the household level, without resorting to magical practices. Natural diseases can be prevented by avoiding things that can cause the diseases, such as living in a hygienic environment, avoiding eating certain types of food, and avoiding cold and excessive heat. For other illnesses, or when a common ailment persists, recourse is sought to divination in combination with herbalism (Eguaoje Atokhaime).

MYSTICAL CAUSAL AGENTS (EMIAMIN'QBE)

For the Iuleha of Owan West in Nigeria, there is a clear correlation between moral evil and physical affliction. The presence of physical affliction is an indication that there is a strain or violation of a moral demand of the family or that of the larger community. And this is punished especially with disease and death by spiritual forces such as the Supreme Being – *Oiselobua*, divinities – *eimin*, ancestors – *eimi'edion* (family spirit) etc. some ailments in Iuleha (Owan) belief can also be supernaturally induced by malevolent spirits such as sorcerers – *Izamie*, witches and wizards – *ibolikhuo* (Eguaoje A).²⁸

It was gathered from this study that the Iuleha conceive health as equated with being at peace with the Supreme Being (*Oiselobua*). And whatever the cause of disease might be, it might be traced back ultimately to *Oiselobua* who sets the pattern of behavior which pleases him and those which he abhors. Such patterns of behavior are connected with chiefs and heads of clans. When such persons persistently offend the Supreme Being, he afflicts the clan or community with epidemics and pestilence until he is appeased. It should be noted that in Iuleha there are no temples, or priest as such of the Supreme Being as they have for divinities. But when a disease or an epidemic is thought to have been caused by the Supreme Being, the entire community rallies around its communal head and makes a joint sacrifice to appease him (Akhigbe O 2020:n.d.).

Another category of mystical disease-carrying agents are the divinities – *eimi* and the ancestors (*eimi-edion*). Among the divinities are; *Olokun*, *Ayelala*, *Adaobi* etc. They have devotees; they have their laws. These laws are expected to be

meticulously adhered to. When a person who has placed himself under the divinity breaks the laws of the divinity, the divinity reacts by causing disease. The divinity can also afflict aggressors of its devotees with disease basically to protect and rescue them. Individuals who offend the divinity, for example; by swearing falsely with the name of the divinity, stealing from its shrine etc. can be afflicted with diseases. The cause of such disease is diagnosed through divination. The ancestors as spiritual causal agents of disease in Iuleha belief are said to be the originators of most of the laws, taboos and customs of the people. Some ancestral figures in Iuleha are; *era-eruere* of *eruere* clan, *obazu* of *aoma* clan, *Okpujoro* of *Okpuje* clan. Others are *oyangbe*, *Ofure* etc. For the Iuleha, it is an ancestral taboo for one to commit adultery, incest or homosexuality; steal or kill; swears falsely or fail to perform proper funeral rites for a dead relative etc. when any of these injunctions is broken, the ancestors are said to become annoyed vent their wrath on the living with diseases of one kind or the other (Akhigbe O).

Sorcerers (*Izamie*) and witches (*Ibolikhuo*) according to Iuleha belief are also mystical disease carrying agents. Many respondents to this study (OluAkhigbe, OjehomonEguaoje, AtokhaimenEguaoje, AgbonluaiOtokhile 2019:n.d) attribute the cause of disease to the evil machinations of certain persons who seemed to bear certain grudges against the sufferer. They aver that witch and sorcerer can inflict diseases on people through their mystical power. Agbonluai (2020:n.d) reiterates an instance when a man accidentally saw a hawk transformed into an old woman and revealed it to his relatives. Some days later his child mysteriously fell sick. Immediately they went to the house of the old woman and threatened to kill her if the child dies. The old woman followed them and applied some concoction on the child and he immediately recovered. Apart from these categories of people, certain traditional healers (*obo*) are considered to have the power both to cause diseases and also to heal the sufferers. A sorcerer is an evil person. He uses tangible objects over which he makes incantations by means of which he cast spells (*ababe*) of afflictions (diseases) on victims. Witches are probably more evil than sorcerers. While the sorcerers can be detected because he or she acts with physical objects, the witches operate psychically. The Iuleha believe that witches afflict close relatives. Most often close

relative sells out their relations for witchcraft manipulations. This is why it is often said among the Iuleha people that, *oloaigbe, ore yagboi* – meaning, he whose kinsmen did not kill, no outsider can (Eguaeje A).

ESOTERIC CAUSAL AGENTS (EMIAMINARHIALUSI)

Diseases in Iuleha belief can esoterically be attributed to *Arhialusi* (fatalism). *Arhialusi* among the Iuleha people is a metaphysical cosmic force more or less like a man's response to an external stimulus triggered by his performance in a previous life. Central to Iuleha cosmology is the belief in a tri-dimensional concept of the human existence rooted in their belief in reincarnation. The previous life of an individual before reincarnation is called *Arhialusi* among the Iuleha people. And it is believed that an individual's deed or actions in *Arhialusi* whether good or evil determines his fate in his present existence -*Arhia'ona* in the present life. And in the continuous circle of cosmic justice an individual needs to live a good life in this present existence to guarantee a better fate in *Arhia'ovbere* (next existence).³³ The Iuleha believe that when one suffers from a disease spiritually imposed by the forces of *arhialusi* it is difficult to find a cure to such disease. Indeed the acceptance of what is thought to be inevitable is essential in Iuleha belief. Ajima and Ubana (2018:n.d) support this view in their comment that several ailments and sicknesses exist that orthodox medicine and personnel cannot cure, hence they are ignorant of their causation and diagnosis. In Iuleha, these are referred to traditional healers for traditional curative measures.

DIAGNOSING DISEASES IN IULEHA TRADITIONAL HEALING PROCESS

From a general African perspective, Dime (1994:30) gave a two-fold approach to ascertaining illness and its cause which is also applicable in Iuleha as follows:

PHYSICAL EXAMINATION/HISTORY TAKING

This involves an enquiry into the organic or physical cause of the sickness. The emphasis here among the Iuleha is on the psychosomatic meaning and symbolism of the symptom. The traditional healer here relies on oral interview and speculations. Indeed some of correspondents to this study state that traditional healers do some initial interview of their patients in order to find out the history behind

the sickness. According to Baba AtokhaimenEguaeje the patient would be asked the following question; how long the person has been in that situation? Is there any curse in the patient's family? Did the patient violate any moral law of the land? Has there been anyone in the patient's family who suffers from similar ailment both living and dead? This question is anchored on the belief that some illness can be the result of *arhialusi* (a wrongful act of a previous existence). This usually provides insight into the right approach on how to handle the particular case or disease. If the patient is unable to speak, other family members speak on behalf of the sick person. It has also been found that public opinion and rumours may help the diviner to trace the cause of a disease.

DIVINATION (BỌOR KAOGHEMI) – CONSULTING THE SPIRIT WORLD

This aspect of diagnosis according to Dime (1994:31) is the enquiry into the spiritual or mystical cause of illness. Divination according to Jacob Olupona(2004:103-104) is a way to access information that is normally beyond the reach of the rational mind. Diviners –*Obo* in this regard base their knowledge on communication with the spiritual forces, such as the ancestors, spirits and deities. Divination is an integral part of Iuleha traditional way of diagnosing diseases. We have seen from the foregoing that among the Iuleha people, the spirit world plays a large role in causing disease. The *Obo* (diviner), often call upon the spirits (*bọ*) to aid in diagnosis of disease. He uses variety of sacred items namely *agheren*, (pieces of bamboo sticks strung together with other traditional paraphernalia), *akhuere* or *Ikpogho* (traditionally strung cowries), *eken'Otoqeda* (sands from the bottom of the river) etc. to diagnose the cause of illness or misfortune from the unseen world (Eguaeje O 2019:n.d). Through these media it will be ascertained whether there was a violation of an established order from the side of the sick person. This is established through the use of cowry shells, throwing of bones on strips of leather or flat pieces of wood or speaking to the *agheren* to either open or close to unveil some hidden truth etc. According to Peter Omonjezele (2008:122) because of the revealing powers of divination, it is usually the first step in African traditional treatment and medicine.³⁹ Ikhazuangbe reiterates this in his assertion that; affliction of illness may invade a family due to the misconduct of a member of the family that angers a divinity, in this case family member are prompted to *kaoghemi* (check through a diviner)

to ascertain the cause. The supernatural aetiology of nocturnal diseases in Iuleha belief makes it impossible for treatment to be effective without consultation with diviners (*Obo*). This is because they believe that diseases can be caused by sorcery, ghosts, breach of taboo, spirit intrusion and acts of the Supreme Being (Ikhazuangbe O 2019:n.d).

Diagnosing or treating supernaturally induced ailment without consulting supernatural forces to reveal source and appropriate rituals is believed to result in the worsening condition of the patient (comments from respondents). Using orthodox diagnosis may simply be compounding the patient's problems. In traditional health system, it is believed that nobody becomes sick without sufficient reason. Iuleha traditional practitioners look at the ultimate "who" rather than "what" when locating the cause and cure of an illness, and the answers given come from the cosmological belief of the people. Rather than looking to the medical or physical behind an illness, Iuleha traditional healers attempt to determine the root cause underlying the ailment or disease. And as many respondents maintain supernaturally induced illness is believed to stem either from a lack of balance between the sick person and his/her social environment or between the sick person and the supersensible world. Natural causes are in fact, not seen as natural at all, but manipulation of spirits or the gods precipitated by the immoral act or guilt of the victim, his or her family or village/community (Eguaeje O.).

TRADITIONAL HEALING METHOD IN IULEHA

Healing is a part of the complex religious attempt by Africans (Iuleha inclusive) to bring the spiritual and physical aspects of the universe as well as man who lives in it, into a harmonious unity and wholeness. Wholeness is therefore the underlying focus of African medicine. Human life in Africa (Iuleha inclusive) is viewed as essential and valuable. These as reiterated by Ebhomielen (2008:16) can be seen through the elaborate protective measures and strict cautions among several ways recommended for effective and happy sojourn on earth.⁴³ Processes involved in the administration of traditional healing in Iuleha through which the goal of restoration of human health is achieved include:

TRADO-HERBAL MEDICATION (IKHUMUN-EFENMA)

An average Iuleha person has the knowledge of the use of herbs for medicinal purpose.

However, the *Obo* - herbalist in Iuleha sees deeper than the lay person. They are not only knowledgeable in the variety of roots and herbs that have therapeutic values; they also understand the psychology of their people's values. The Iuleha (Africa's) knowledge of the healing powers in roots and leaves is amazing (Ebhomielen 2008:20). Many claim to have acquired the knowledge of roots and herbs from *oiselobua* (God), others trace their knowledge of medicinal plants to some special esoteric powers that aids them to discover psychic names of plants, herbs animal and other objects. Ebhomielen (2008:102) emphasizes this in his assessment of Esan traditional medicine when he states that many traditional medicine men consult witches and wizards to acquire knowledge of herbs for the treatment of a particular ailment.⁴⁵ Ikhazuangbe (2019:n.d) an Iuleha respondent puts it succinctly that most *Obo* possess witchcraft spirits.

SACRIFICIAL OFFERINGS – (ZỌ'EMI)

Sacrifices are sometimes offered at the request of the spirits, gods, and ancestors. Sometimes animals are slaughtered or buried alive. Ritual cleansing among the Iuleha is done basically to appease the deities and ancestors and restore a good and cordial relationship between the patient and the deities so that their goodwill will cause any medicine applied in making him to recover to be effective. In the case of diseases that are caused by an invocation of a curse or violation of taboos, the *Obo* appeases the ancestors, spirits or the gods. This is done according to the severity of the case, by either sacrificing an animal or by pouring of libation. The patient or his/her relatives are most times told to provide the ritual articles needed for the sacrifice; as mentioned by the gods or the spirits. Agbonluai E. (2020:n.d) a respondent, re-echoed the Iuleha belief that, the treatment of a disease is not mere application of medicinal elements; it involves placating the divine order in the first place and proffering solution to the physical facet. This is why they resort to divination to diagnose the causes of ailments and the procedures and means of getting rid of the sickness or trouble.⁴⁷ In most cases a goat is offered to placate the angered divinity. In a discussion with Eguaeje A (2019:n.d) a trado-medical practitioner, it was emphasized that most *Obo* goes at night to *avan'ode* – (four junctions) to plea for mercy from spiritual force(s) on behalf of the afflicted. There are instances when the family of the afflicted is asked to do *isara* – prepare a particular meal,

usually bean-cake (*aka'a*) and serve to neighbours around (np), to appease some unknown force (persons) who may be holding grudges against the patient.

RITUAL CLEANSING

Rituals cleansing are usually done to consecrating traditional medicine. Some correspondence to this study avers that medicine without consecration may not be effective. Bolaji Idowu (1973:201) affirms this when he said that divine and ancestral sanctions are considered necessary before and during the preparation and application of medicine. There are instances according to Eguaoje A. where herbs are prepared for the person to bathe with at specific times for a number of days. He noted further that in some extreme cases, the blood of the slaughtered animal would be poured on the head and foot of the sick person, as a symbolic mode of cleansing and atonement for sinful act that brought about the ailment.

EXORCISM (KHUKHUEMI'SHOVBEGBERE)

Exorcism is the expulsion of malevolent spiritual forces from people that are possessed. This is another method of healing in Iuleha. This healing method is mostly done for those whose illness result from possession from *Olokun* (marine spirit). It is also the belief of the Iuleha people that mental illness (*ememe*) is caused by evil spirit. And until the possessed person is delivered from the power of that evil spirit the person will not be healed. The people thus use the practice of exorcism to expel such evil spirit for the patient to regain normalcy. Exorcism among the Iuleha is usually done with singing, drumming, dancing, and the spraying of sacred powders (from native chalk) to the sky and on the possessed person (Eguaoje O. 2019n.p).

From the foregoing, it is observed that every culture is unique and each culture has a system of beliefs which acts as a lens through which disease is viewed, and conceptualized. It is also the finding of this study that the role of a traditional healer (*obo*) is broader in some respects than that of a contemporary medical doctor. The *obo* in traditional healthcare delivery gives advice to sick persons and their relatives on all aspects of life. They advise them on physical, psychological, spiritual, moral, and sometimes legal matters. They also understand the significance of ancestral spirits and the concept of witches. Illness can thus be culturally defined as how a person perceives experiences and copes with disease based on the system of

meanings he employs. This system of meanings is an integral part of the entire world view, embedded in a particular culture. The Iuleha-Edo (African) people, like all other African societies have developed their own medical response and methods for coping with disease/ailment and ensuring the optimum health of its citizenry. These methods are based on their own ecological settings, natural resources and cultural practices. African traditional healers or diviners are intelligent enough to prescribe traditional solutions to diseases whether it had spiritual or physical causes with little or no side effect. When it is psychological, the person is sometimes counseled and is given the necessary attention. By implication therefore, healthcare delivery in African communities can be said to be inextricably intertwined with their worldview or belief hence, holistic in nature. Ikechukwu Kanu (2015:91) affirms this when he states emphatically that, African worldview is essentially the underlying though-link that holds together the African value system, philosophy of life, social conduct, morality, folklores, myths, rites, rituals norms, rules, ideas, cognitive mapping and theologies. Health and wholeness therefore is not just about a person's physical condition but about his general wellbeing, involving; the psychological, spiritual and social aspects of individuals, families and communities.

CONCLUSION

It is the findings of this study that the influx of western idea about medicine and healing did not deter the Iuleha-Edo (African) man from seeking help especially in health related matter from the gods of his fathers through traditional health delivery methods. Many correspondences to this study bear eloquent testimonies of the effectiveness of the traditional *modus operandi* in terms of their perception of health and disease management. To this end, this study posits that, in order to adequately maximize the health-care coverage of the multi-populated traditional Nigerian villages and communities with varied and variegated health challenges, sickness and ailments, there is obvious need for a dialogue between the traditional and neo-western medicine for effective health delivery. This would also encourage Western medical practitioners to refer patients that require spiritual attention to some of these traditional healers and vice versa. This dialogue will also help to ensure safety, quality and efficacy of

traditional medicinal products/practices and to regulate the activities of practitioners.

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