

Spiritual Healing as an Alternative Health Care Delivery in Benue State: Issues and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to explore the attitudes and perceptions of faith healing users in Benue state, Nigeria. This has become necessary because spiritual healing practice may be a crucial area but remains neglected within the health care literature. The main objective of the study is to look at the issues such as time of use, the attitude of the user towards spiritual healers, effectiveness, and challenges of spiritual healing. This is borne out of the desire that in an age when bio-western medicine is touted as the cure for many diseases, understanding how and why individuals seek alternative treatment, specifically spiritual cure services may help to develop more effective health care interventions. We employed an exploratory study design of a purely qualitative research approach involving 100 randomly selected participants to urge a maximum variation of experiences and opinions on the time of consultation, perceived effectiveness, and challenges of spiritual healing practices in Benue state, Nigeria. In-depth interviews were conducted from 15th October 2020 to 25th January 2021. Data were thematically analysed and presented using the posteriori inductive reduction approach. The main findings were that spiritual healers served as the first port of call in disease treatment and prevention. Patient perceived their health status to be good and improved after utilising spiritual healers. However, users faced challenges like stigmatisation and victimisation in seeking health care as well as fake spiritual healers parading around. This study has offered baseline evidence to this important area of inquiry that has been neglected within the scholarly discourse in Benue state, Nigeria.

KEYWORDS: *Spiritual healing, alternative health care, health care delivery, Benue State, Nigeria*

INTRODUCTION

Spiritual healing can be defined as the direct interaction between one individual (the healer) and a second (sick) individual to bring about an improvement in the illness. The practice of spiritual healing in the medical diagnosis, prevention, and treatment of a myriad of health issues is pre-historic and dates back into antiquity in numerous countries (Adams, Sibbritt & Broom, 2017; Elisabeth, 2006). There is a growing use of spiritual healers for curative reasons as well as health promotion especially in sub-Saharan Africa (Angela, 2014, Levin, 2016). Spiritual healers usually target Christians or traditionalists in form of animists who mostly heal with the petition (prayer), laying hands-on clients, giving holy water,

and also medicinal herbs (Benor 2015; John, Eric, Emmanuel, Ennin. 2018).

Spiritual healers think that their healing power originates from God with overjoyed states and also trance-contact with a Holy Spirit and/or ancestral spirit (Angela, 2014). The increasing patronage of spiritual healing services can partly be attributed to the climbing understanding in its full healing process (Alia, 2015; Benor, 2015; Crawford, Sparber, Jonas, 2003). In the course of treating the patients, spiritual healers see health and wellness as well as illness with the integration of mind, body, as well as spirit mostly within the context of community (Akpenpuun, 2014;

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Alia, 2015). This indicates that the healers handle the total person besides giving treatment for physical, psychological, spiritual, and social signs.

The strategy of spiritual healing goes beyond the World Health Organisation (WHO) explanation of health as “a state of complete physical, psychological as well as social well-being and not just absent of disease or infirmity (Benor, 2015; Chittaran & Radhakrishnan, 2009). Notably, a significant number of individuals sought the services of spiritual healers due to the truth that spiritual healing is frequently readily offered to potential consumers (Benor, 2015; Talita, Silvia & Emilia, 2016). Nonetheless, regarding other types of treatment such as bio-western medication, patients commonly take a trip long distances and experience longer waiting times to access the required healthcare (Benor, 2015; Brown, Wierzbicka, 2014; Shea, 2000). Whereas spiritual healing services are inexpensive, the choices to use such services are encouraged by trust, accessibility, and availability, recommendations from pertinent others, and belief in the superordinary causation of disease (Lionet 2014; Herbert, Jeffery, Jane, Peter, Charles, William, Sidney, Peter, Donald, Manoj & Jain, 2016). Traditional health care has been in existence in all cultures as an independent health care system alongside the officially established system. However, there is a clear and widely spread skepticism, if not hostility amongst modern or scientific health care practitioners regarding the traditional health care system.

It is believed that the understanding of the attitude and health perceptions of spiritual healing amongst patients is important following the rising use of spiritual healing methods in Nigeria. In an age when orthodox medicine is touted as the cure for most diseases, understanding how and why individuals seek alternative treatment, specifically spiritual healing services may help to develop more effective health care interventions. This study is apt and timely it will provide baseline evidence to substantiate the imperativeness of the non-medical methods of treatment in healthcare service delivery in Nigeria.

Evidence shows that ignoring spiritual demands results in less beneficial results for individuals such as reduced quality of life, discontentment with treatment as well as increased costs at the end of life (Akpenpuun, 2014; Lionet, 2014; Alfred in Bell, 2015). However, examining the effectiveness of spiritual healing using scientific questions is questionable while there is no or limited evidence of restorative effectiveness of spiritual healing techniques such as prayer (Benor, 2015, Levin, 2016, Alloegh, 2014, Dossey 2013). However, it is evident

that a substantial proportion of clients turn to spiritual healing as the first port of call in various cultures as well as additionally believe in its potency (Benor, 2015; Alloegh, 2014; Iorkosu, Alugwa, Anum & Dooior, 2020).

Despite the efficacy of spiritual healing as reported by many scholars, there are fundamental challenges to spiritual healing on the ground of widely reported cases of fake healers and healing, though, this is not limited to spiritual healing practice only. To support this version, Ebomoyi (2016) alluded that since the spiritual healers could be rendering beneficial services to a large population, it might be commonplace to encounter quacks among the practitioners. In the same vein, Pretorius (2016) notes that “in the current economic condition and amid the high level of unemployment, there is a reported increase in the ranks of spiritual healers, among whom there are, unfortunately, quite several charlatans and deceivers.

Considering this debate, therefore, there is an expanding research interest as well as recognition to explore, the efficiency of faith healing by scientists and health care providers. Even though there has been a growing research study on the relationship between faith and health internationally, there is a scarceness of research study on this subject in the Nigerian context especially about mindsets and health perception of spiritual healing users. Furthermore, the proliferation of spiritual healing churches/Mosques and also centres in Nigeria and also the general interpretation of illness as well as health problem causation within a religious context, validate the need for this research. Furthermore, the limited understanding of the attitudes and health perception of spiritual healing often tends to restrict the policy adoption as well as application in regulation to spiritual healing methods.

Literature Review

Concept of Spiritual Healing

Burckhardt (cited in Pretorius, 2016) explains that attempting to specify devoutness belongs to making an effort to lasso the wind. The wind is picked up and also experienced, and its result on our team and also points around our team could be found, however, it may certainly not be had within enforced limits or perhaps the most ideal interpretations. However, Benor, (2006) reviewed his work and determined spiritual healing as the organized, deliberate interference through several individuals striving to assist an additional lifestyle being actually (individual, creature, vegetation or even various other living systems) making use of targeted purpose, hand calls, or even exchanges boost their ailment.

Although there is no personal meaning of spirituality, explanations of its features are plentiful in literary works.

In this study, a spiritual healer was tailored as a professed Christian, Islamist, or Traditional spiritualist who heals by application of faith mostly through prayer, fasting, holy water, ointments, and medicinal plants.

Issues and Challenges of spiritual healing

Individuals around the world look for the services of spiritual healers for all kinds of ailments consisting of social and psychological problems. Nevertheless, some faith healers are experts in managing certain health problems and in emergency instances, refer people to conventional health care services for treatment (Akpenpuun, 2014; Jones and Berthett, 2015, Dossey, 2013, Camila, Erika, Denise, Talita, Cristiane & Cristiane, 2014).

Spiritual healers worked because they are the first port of call involved in disease curing and also prevention. On the curing, it was observed several things that underwent the procedure from the centres. Especially, at the Christian centres, it was observed that apart from the reassurance of religion via prayers and also fasting, clients were provided 'divine' oil and water by the leaders who were themselves, healers, to be applied at the parts of their body they were affected by. The application of this water, oil also as ointment weren't just to heal these conditions yet likewise to prevent future diseases from coming. Nevertheless, at the Islamic spiritual healing, therapists were assisting patients in treating illness primarily with the prescription of traditional medicines. Here, prayers and fasting weren't mostly made use of by the therapists (Oyelakin, 2014). Likewise, the appliance of 'holy' oil and also lotion were unusual, unlike the Christian faith cure centres. The individuals thought that these natural herbs suggested by the healer can heal them. This occasion was similarly observed at the normal faith cure centre (Prince, Razak, Prince, Williams, Emmanuel & Josephine 2018). For the Islamic and also traditional spiritual users, the selection to consult belief first of all before seeking therapy at the medical facility was predicated on two primary variables: respect for his or her leaders, which are mostly the healers, and also the assumption that faith heals. The users discussed that bypassing their leaders to seem for treatment shows disrespect to them, thus their option to consult them for therapy within the initial circumstances (Brown & Wierzbicka, 2014).

Various studies such as that Akpenpuun, (2014), Alia, (2015), Prince, Razak, Prince, Williams, Emmanuel & Josephine (2018), Brown & Wierzbicka (2014)

found that the research study participants related to faith healers as their spiritual healers who intercede for them worrying a variety of concerns including health. Several of the participants discussed that spiritual healers act as their resource of spiritual understanding and analysis. It was identified that spiritual healers use to individuals a few services consisting of prayers for treating as well as avoiding illness that emanates from both physical and spiritual realms. With this, faith healers were not only consulted on health issues but personal concerns too. Individuals kept those spiritual healers are every little thing to them and also can refrain from doing without their solutions.

Researchers have shown that several spiritual healing is important and effective therapeutic regimens in the treatment and prevention of a wide spectrum of diseases some of which may not be effectively handled using orthodox medicines (Jones and Berthett, 2015). According to researchers spiritual healing is been considered to be desirable and necessary for treating a range of health complications that orthodox medicine does not treat adequately. Jones and Berthett, (2015), Bell, (2015), Akpenpuun, (2014), Alia, (2015) among others found that spiritual healing is very effective in the treatment of many illnesses.

Spiritual disciplines potentially improve coping skills and social support; foster feelings of optimism and hope; promote healthy behavior, such as avoidance of tobacco and alcohol; and reduce feelings of depression and anxiety (Gundersen 2000). Spiritual practices can induce a relaxation response and allow people to participate in uplifting rituals (Matthews 2000). Thus, such practices ameliorate stress responses involving neurological, endocrine, immune, and cardiovascular functions (Koenig 2000). The effects of spirituality seem to be explained best by Mind-Body Medicine, now frequently referred to as psychoneuroimmunology, which represents bi-directional communication between the central nervous, neuroendocrine, and immune systems (Masek et al. 2000). Prayer seems to confer an additional advantage: Those who engage in regular prayer are more likely to avail themselves of available medical resources (Matthews, 2000).

Many thousands of people around the world are expressing increasing interest in the role of spirituality in their health and health care. Some observers believe this may be due, in part, to dissatisfaction with the impersonal nature of our conventional medical system, and to the realization that medical science does not have answers to all questions about the maintenance of health and

wellness (Romesh, 2017; Gundersen, 2000). To some, the increasing patronage of spiritual healing services can partly be attributed to the climbing understanding in its full healing process (Alia, 2015; Benor, 2015; Crawford, Sparber & Jonas, 2003). In the course of treating the patients, spiritual healers see health and wellness as well as the illness with the integration of mind, body, as well as spirit mostly within the context of community (Akpenpuun, 2014; Alia, 2015). This indicates that the healers handle the total person besides giving treatment for physical, psychological, spiritual, and social signs. Akpenpuun, (2014); Alia, (2015); Prince, Razak, Prince, Williams, Emmanuel & Josephine (2018); Brown & Wierzbicka(2014) argued that spiritual healing users see the communication between traditional healers and their patients is better compared with formal healthcare providers.

Despite the effectiveness of spiritual healing in the treatment and prevention of different illnesses and unhealthy conditions, it has been challenged by some scholars. In other words, the inclusion of spiritual considerations in health care is controversial and raises several ethical questions (Crawford, Sparber & Jonas, 2003). It has been observed that spiritual healers sometimes handle issues that should be better treated medically thus resulting in loss of life. Again, due to orthodox medicine's lack of faith in the efficacy of faith healers, people who need spiritual healers for certain health challenges that orthodox medicines cannot cure are denied such services. The orthodox scientists were of the view that individuals who usually mix herbs, divine water, as well as other assumed spiritual therapy are utilising harmful health practices leading to physical problems.

Some medical personnel feels that adverse effects may result if they are engaged in areas outside of their expertise. Others hold that orthodox doctors' advocacy of spiritual practices can be inappropriate and intrusive and may induce guilt or harm, making users believe that ill health is a result of insufficient faith. There is also the possibility that medical doctors could influence or be insensitive to a patient's religious beliefs or lack thereof (Gundersen, 2000). Also, there is the fear that people may replace prayer for medical care, or that spiritual practices could undermine the receipt of medical treatment; in this vain, children with parents whose religious affiliation conflicts with orthodox medical practices may be at particular risk (Koenig 2000).

The ethnocentric and medico centric tendencies of the Western hegemonic mentality that are usually paraded by most stakeholders in orthodox medicine pose a very serious challenge. It is a general belief in

the medical community that spiritual healing defies scientific procedures in terms of measurement, objectivity, classification, and codification. Even then, there is evidence that the physical aspects of spiritual healing (i.e. the physical ingredients) can be scientifically studied and analysed. In Tiv culture, for example, spiritual healing includes the physical and spiritual realms. The physical aspects can be subjected to scientific analysis using the orthodox scientific methods of investigation, the spiritual realm may not (Benor, 2014). The biggest challenge, therefore, is how to scientifically analyse the spiritual aspect of spiritual healing e.g. (incantation). Again, if integrated, who provides training to medical doctors on the ontology, epistemology, and the efficacy of spiritual healing given the ethnocentric tendencies in modern medicine? That is, who determines the efficacy and effectiveness of spiritual healing given the inherent epistemological and ideological characteristic differences of both medicines? It is part of these difficulties that some scholars suggest that both spiritual healing and cosmopolitan medicine be allowed to operate, develop and flourish independently of one another (Konadu, 2018; Oyelakin, 2014). "After all, the western people did not develop their medical aspect to integrate it with anyone else. Theirs was to first make themselves and later the rest of the world live a healthy life" (Oyelakin, 20014). From this point of view, if spiritual healing is co-opted into modern medicine, it would further justify and promote the "supremacy" or "superiority" of cosmopolitan medicine thereby jeopardising the identity and integrity of spiritual healing in Nigeria.

Another fundamental challenge to spiritual healing is the widely reported cases of fake healers and healing, though, this is not limited to spiritual healing practice only. Ebomoyi (2016) alluded that since the spiritual healers could be rendering beneficial services to a large population, it might be commonplace to encounter quacks among the practitioners. In the same vein, Pretorius (2016) notes that "in the current economic condition and amid the high level of unemployment, there is a reported increase in the ranks of spiritual healers, among whom there are, unfortunately, quite several charlatans and deceivers.

Method

Study design and setting

The study adopted a qualitative approach thus the subjective interpretative paradigm underpins this study. This was to allow the respondents the liberty to explain their viewpoints and feelings concerning the problem under research study in their very own context. With this strategy, the original sensations,

experiences, as well as belief systems of participants, were valued. In line with the paradigm, the exploratory design was utilized. A sample size of 100 was determined using the snowballing method. Data was collected from spiritual healers and users in Benue State through interviews and observation. The study used purposive and convenient sampling techniques to ensure that only spiritual healers (religious and traditional) and people who have used their services were selected for the survey.

We randomly selected five faith healing centres with 100 participants (faith healers and users) to get a maximum variation of experiences and opinions on the time of consult, perceived effectiveness, and challenges of faith healing in Benue state. Four main criteria were used in the selection process: being in existence for more than ten years; being popular to the general population, the centre being a spiritual healing church/ mosque; being a non-church faith healing centre.

An in-depth interview was the device for data collection. In-depth interviews were made used to elicit information and also an interview guide was developed to ensure that comparable themes and questions were covered in each discussion and interview. The meetings were systematically carried out in between a participant and also a recruiter at the location where the participant was hired, mostly at the spiritual healing centres. The interviews were conducted in "Tiv, Idoma, and Hausa" which are the common dialect in the study area. With the authorization of the participants, interviews were audio-recorded while field notes were also taken.

Data analysis

Sound records were recorded in both the "Tiv, Idoma and Hausa" dialect and English which was later converted into English by the authors. The transcribed text was across checked with the sound records as well as handwritten field notes to ensure legitimacy, reliability, and also quality control. The research used the a posteriori inductive reduction approach to create consistent themes. The data was subjected to thematic and also content analysis where coding and content analysis is used to determine themes as well as sub-themes. Therefore, we classified and arranged data according to essential themes, principles and emergent classifications.

Results

Characteristics of the participant

Out of the 100 individuals, 31 were participants of Christian spiritual healing services, 30 were individuals of traditional spiritual healing services with 10 utilizing Islamic spiritual healing services. Remarkably, a total amount of 10 participants were

utilizing all three faith healing methods (Christian, Islamic and traditional). Out of the 10 who were making use of all the 3 healing, 6 were Christians, 2 were Muslims with the remaining 2 coming from the Traditional types. The best percentage of study participants remained in the age group 18-40 years. The majority of participants were unemployed (27) and also those employed. Relative to the healers, 10 were Christian spiritual healers with the remaining 10 being traditional and also Islamic spiritual healers respectively. All the individuals have a lot of expertise concerning spiritual healing. It was observed that a lot of the participants that were hired at the spiritual healing centres visited do not pray at these centres, nevertheless, they went to the centres purposively for certain issues consisting of health.

Result of the interview

In an interview in Gboko, the traditional spiritual healers also verified that their clients got to know them through deferral. He said:

Hmmm, I think individuals got to know us through suggestions of previously healed people who came here. A lot of sometimes people who have been healed head out to advise their friends as well as family members that are likewise suffering from comparable problems.

The effectiveness of spiritual healing made individuals recommend to others who are struggling with a comparable health problem: a respondent in Otukpo in an interview alluded that:

I once watched this therapist on the television and I was pressed ahead for therapy for my menstrual pains and I have been recovered.

The healers in Makurdi also verified that their clients got to know them through similar means stated by the individuals:

I think individuals got to know us through suggestions of previously healed people who came here. A lot of sometimes people who have been healed head out to advise us to their friends as well as family members that are likewise suffering from comparable problems.

The healers see themselves as individuals who help assist individuals to deal with both economic also as social issues including wellness with the appliance of faith. A pastor and founder Zege Tor Evangelism in Makurdi acknowledged that:

We are people that come from a selected faith, be it Christian, Islam, or

Traditional to handle numerous life challenges including health and wellness. as an example, I'm a Christian leader, so I heal individuals with the appliance of

Christian confidence. an equivalent point applies to both Islamic and also Traditional leaders.

Time the users utilise spiritual healers

A patient who was found within the healing centre in Wadata said that:

Mostly, I first consult my pastor on my health and wellness problems before taking it to the hospital upon his recommendation. I do so intending to ascertain the start of the illness, it's all-natural or spiritually motivated. Sometimes some illnesses are not natural yet stem from numerous external resources like witchcraft, ancestors also as a curse which require to be tackled via spiritual ways.

Another respondent in Gboko said:

Likewise, he [healer] is the leader who is leading us in diverse ways, including both physical and also spiritual, consequently consulting confidence initially is the appropriate thing to try to do. Also, I even have faith that I will be able to be recovered by God via him. If he says I want to hunt formal health care then I'm going, if he claims I might certainly be recovered with faith, I think so.

A respondent reacted in an interview in Otukpo that:

I believe in everything you would like to consult your leader first before any quite additional action. I consult my leader initially since I value and believe him. Once I don't consult him and proceed to hunt medical aid, maybe a sign of disrespect.

Another pastor and a healer in the North Bank area in Makurdi voiced out that: *I always recommendations my participants to urge in-tuned with God first in any sort of circumstance including wellness concerns. This is often thanks to the very fact that faith truly heals and also heals faster than the scientific procedure of recovery. I can inform you emphatically that those that lollygag around seeking medical aid from the formal healthcare system before coming here mainly don't receive therapy and pass on consequently. So, I feel consulting your belief on health and wellness problems first before other choices may be the right thing to try.*

Also, the healers expressed that trying to find health care from official medical aid delivery initially before considering ones' faith hold-ups his/her healing procedure, all since faith heals much faster than clinical applications. The spiritual healer Daudu in Guma LGA has this to say:

Sometimes, I tell people that seek therapy to travel to the medical facility. I do that after I even have become aware that the illness isn't spiritually-motivated.

One more healer in Otukpo also noted that: *I in some cases refer individuals who come below to seek medical therapy from the clinic. This is because I acknowledge the truth that not all conditions might be treated by confidence, some need clinical interest.*

Users ' attitudes towards spiritual healers

The research study discovered to name a few points that spiritual healers have miraculous regard of the individuals as well as the other way around: one of the participants attested that:

Spiritual healers are everything to my family. They are our source of recovery. I appreciate them. I see faith healers as spiritual fathers who see all diseases that are about to impact the body and stop them from coming. To me, I am nothing without my church leader [therapist]

Another Christian spiritual user additionally emphasized that:

My religious belief teaches me to have more respect for my leader which is leading me to paradise than any other individual. This leader is my healer, preacher as well as protector both physically and emotionally.

Interestingly, the research individuals contrasted their mindsets towards spiritual healers as well as orthodox medical practitioners. A lot of the individuals shared great perspectives toward spiritual healers' more than traditional medicine practitioners. In support of this, a respondent in Makurdi alluded that:

Spiritual healers command more regard than medical doctors. We have sufficient regard for them since they heal both physical as well as a spiritual health problem. They likewise have time to pay attention to our complaints, commit time to teach us, and explain spiritual events to us. To me, they are our source of good health so we concern them, therefore.

It was discovered that a lot of the individuals regarded their health status as poor before making use of spiritual healing. Furthermore, individuals

considered their recovery procedure as faster compared to when they went to the orthodox health care facilities. One of the respondents in Gboko in an interview said:

I regularly complained of headaches as well as a stomach ache but given that I began using faith healing, I rarely fall unwell. Before utilizing the herbs prescribed by this faith healer, [the healer at one centre checked out] I was acquiring orthodox medicines prescribed by medical professionals to heal "usual" headache as well as stomach ache yet those medicines could not heal it up until I located faith healing. Currently, I can claim my health status is a really great contrast to before utilizing faith healing.

One Christian spiritual healing user in a similar way pointed out that:

I can say my health and wellness condition is excellent. I need to attest to the reality that my health condition was not good when I was making use of orthodox medicines for condition treatment. So with faith via petitions, fasting, anointing oil suggested by my pastor, my health condition has been excellent.

Christian spiritual healing users in Walemayo of Makurdi stated that:

Due to prayer and fasting, conditions that were expected to be originated from the spiritual worlds were, therefore, avoided, therefore advertising their wellness and welfare. The Islam spiritual healing user in Makurdi said that:

I spent greater than 2 months at a certain healthcare facility in this metropolitan area seeking therapy. Originally, the physicians informed me I was dealing with a stomach ulcer as well as later educated me that I had contracted typhoid high temperature additionally. I acquired and used a variety of medicines but to no avail. A pal recommended this recovery centre to me. I have actually been below for just concerning a week yet I have seen a significant enhancement in my health and wellness. Right here, the therapist only prays with us as well as uses divine water, ointment. I see this kind of therapy to be holistic. Because the prayer and the ointment do not heal one illness but several diseases.

Perceived effectiveness of spiritual healing

All the patients regarded the effectiveness of the spiritual healing method as excellent for healing diverse forms of health issues. The unanimous perceived efficiency of spiritual healing was seen to be originated from the idea that a lot of health issues originated from the spiritual realm and spiritual healing technique is the effective curer of spiritually-motivated conditions. A respondent in Otukpo during an interview opined that:

I am a living testament. This is since I am concerned this place doubting the efficiency of the petition for healing. I had a damaged leg while playing football. I have been to different formal healthcare facilities but generated no favorable renovation for concerning five years. One of my relatives recommended this prayer camp to me but I was at first uncertain. When I ultimately agreed and also was sent to this place for just nearly 3 weeks, with prayers and also other ointments, I am able to stroll. I can emphatically state that faith healing [prayer] is very powerful as well as reliable.

Respondents were asked if they ever sought orthodox medication after spiritual healing failed to address their problem. In response, a respondent in Gboko town averred that:

I have not visited or sought further medication in the hospital because my condition was addressed.

Another respondent in Otukpo in his own view alluded that:

I went to the spiritual healer for the treatment and after praying with me, he also directed that I should also go to the hospital for additional treatment because my condition can be handled spiritually and medically. So I visited the clinic here in otukpo for the continuation of the treatment.

Types of condition/disease that required spiritual healing

Specifically, some situations of conditions that have been recovered through belief were generally highlighted including mental problems, typhoid fever, sexually transmitted infections, infertility, poultry pox, menstrual troubles, sexual weakness, low sperm count, stacks, cold, flu, cough, rupture, intestinal problems and bone crack among others. A respondent Gboko during an interview clearly stressed that:

To me, spirituality is the reason for nearly all conditions and also has to be recovered with spiritual means. My daughter was seriously experiencing infertility. She was married for about 6 years without a child. The interesting component was that doctors found no worry with her and the partner yet, they could not deliver. I took both my little girl and also her partner to this place as well as was told that her womb was secured by a relative who is jealous of her marital relationship. We prayed, fasted, and also applied certain oil as well as directions given by the healer, currently they have 2 kids.

The spiritual healers in Otukpo likewise agreed with users on the viewed effectiveness of using spiritual healing for recovery. He said:

Mostly, many people do not believe in the recovery power of spiritual healing up until they have their

own experiences. *I must tell you that I have healed many people with various health and wellness concerns including psychiatric concerns via belief. All individuals you are seeing below included serious health problems but now have their issues virtually gone or enhanced.*

One traditional spiritual healer also discussed that: *My brother, I have to tell you that belief really recovers; actually, no medication in this world heals more than faith. I am the healer and understand a variety of people with diverse health and wellness concerns that I have actually been able to treat as well as stopped with faith. We have many manners in which conditions pertain to impact the body. Either physical or spiritual as well as sometimes a mix of both.*

Respondents were asked why they choose to patronise spiritual healers to orthodox medicine. A respondent in Makurdi responded:

There is some sickness that cannot be treated in the hospital such as "Akpiti", 'Usu', 'Ambi' (cultural illness belief to because by the activities of witchcraft). These diseases can only be treated by spiritual healers.

Another respondent in Gboko was also of the opinion that:

I patronised spiritual healers for a condition considered to be caused by the enemies and witchcraft. These categories of disease can only be handled by spiritual healers and not medical doctors. For instance, I was infected with "Usu", I went to the general hospital here in Gboko and after spending out a week, the Doctor told me to visit spiritual healers for better treatment. This is because "Usu" is a cultural disease.

On the challenges of spiritual healing, the respondent in Makurdi cried out that:

There are many spiritual healers in Makurdi but many of them are fake and are not called by a supreme being (God). In addition, some of the traditional healers have no spiritual power as they claimed, and as such, they are not effective. This is worrisome, my brother.

Another respondent in Otukpo also voiced in dismay that:

Poverty and unemployment in the country brought above the increasing number of fake prophets and spiritual healers. Many of them deceived people just for monetary reasons. Many of them take it as a business and are not real spiritual healers. This is dangerous indeed and must be checkmated.

A respondent in Gboko also agreed that: *There are fake spiritual healers in Gboko.*

Discussion

This research examines issues and challenges including health perceptions of spiritual healing. The research study revealed that individuals obtained details and knowledge regarding spiritual healing healers mainly through recommendations by relatives, loved ones as well as the mass media (both print and electronic). It was evident that those who had been recovered with spiritual healing frequently advise friends or family members struggling with similar conditions to utilised. The findings of this study corroborate with previous studies that close friends, the mass media as well as members of the family are the sources of information on the use of spiritual healing services (Prince, Razak, Prince, Williams, Emmanuel & Josephine 2018). Significantly, this research study disclosed that faith healers acted as the first point of call for a considerable number of individuals for main health care needs in spite of the existing orthodox health care therapies. It was observed that the majority of the individuals experiencing small as well as significant health problems sought aid from spiritual healing prior to most likely looking for clinical treatment, usually upon the instructions and also suggestions of the therapists. The study observed that individuals believed that explanations on the sources of illness should be known very first before application of medication. Henceforth, knowledge concerning the root causes of illness assists proffers appropriate options. Considering that individuals get in touch with spiritual healers first prior to attending to medical therapy, some therapists carry out cross-referrals of patients. However, such referrals rarely occurred when there is a lack of emergency situations. This finding is absolutely in line with Prince, Razak, Prince, Williams, Emmanuel & Josephine (2018) who averred that spiritual healers are spoken with internationally for nearly all types of conditions including social and emotional concerns yet mostly refer cases to the conventional doctor in emergency situations. It was established in this research that faith individuals reveal positive as well as good perspectives to the spiritual healers. Also, it has been noted that vital signs for examining high-quality medical care delivery consist of users' perspective, complete satisfaction, and trust.

Aside from the faith, spirituality, and society, treatment was likewise recounted by the participants to account for the positive attitudes towards spiritual healers. Contrary, it was inferred from the accounts of the participants that many health care experts treat their clients with derision as well as large disrespect. These attitudes by spiritual healing users toward the healers have been widely observed. This is consistent

with the study findings of Akpenpuun, (2014), Alia, (2015), Prince, Razak, Prince, Williams, Emmanuel & Josephine (2018), Brown & Wierzbicka(2014) who argued that spiritual healing users see the communication between traditional healers and their patients is better compared with conventional healthcare providers. Such evidence regarding traditional healers' service users' attitudes might have been accounted for by the familiarity with culture-bound syndromes and traditions coupled with their relationships with patients and their families.

It was found that the preponderance of the study participants perceived their health status as good. The study established that users who perceived their health status as poor before their visit perceived their health status as good after the visit to spiritual healers. This result is in line with other previous studies by Angela, David, Jane, & Louise (2017), Benor, (2015) that most users of spiritual healing services perceived their health status to be good. The perception of participants on their health status after visiting a spiritual healer reflects how they feel after utilising the prescribed complementary medicines given by the healer. This finding implies that most users often experienced positive improvements in their health status after they had visited and taken the prescriptions by the healer.

Arguably, investigating spiritual healing service effectiveness using scientific inquiry is controversial while there is limited evidence of therapeutic effectiveness of spiritual healing service such as prayer. Nevertheless, the study findings proved that most users have a strong belief in the potency of spiritual healing services. Most of the study participants perceived spiritual healing service to be very effective for curing, managing, and preventing diseases. Clearly, the participants said that they have effectively been cured of their health problems such as communicable and non-communicable diseases due to their practice of spiritual healing. This finding is in tandem with many scholarly works such as Prince, Razak, Prince, Williams, Emmanuel & Josephine (2018), Benor, (2015), Brown & Wierzbicka (2014), Talita, Silvia & Emili, (2016), Robert, Ahmed, Hall, et al, (2017); Iorkosu, Alugwa, Akor & Orngu, (2018), Elisabeth, (2006), Joyce & Welldon, (2016). Specifically, for mental disorders, in the study of the resort to spiritual healing by patients with severe mental illness in Benue state, most people believed in the causative role of witchcraft on mental problems. Most people believed that the person having an abnormal mental state was a victim of external factors, without any problem in body or mind; and considering the nature of this causative

factor, spiritual healing would help rather than medicines. It is, therefore, appears that one culturally prescribed way of dealing with such health problems believed to be caused by another person by action at a distance is resorting to spiritual healers or the use of counter-power and magic.

The reason for selecting spiritual healers as the first port of contact could be as a result of the perceived effectiveness of faith healing services coupled with the fact that most ailments resulting from the spiritual realm and spiritual healing modality are effective curer of spiritually-motivated diseases. By implication, participants believed that certain diseases have strong spiritual connections. By inference, the utilisation of spiritual healing is based on perceptions of illness and disease. This perception suggests that diseases must be treated through the exact ways by which they emerged and this is entrenched in spiritual healing practices. This finding corroborates the discoveries of Akpenpuun (2014), Talita, Silvia & Emili (2016) that belief in supernatural causes of illness strongly predicts traditional medicine such as spiritual healing utilisation.

The study revealed that stigmatization and victimisation were the main challenges of using spiritual healing services. The study established that patients who utilized spiritual healing services particularly those who visit spiritualists and oracles more often than not did not receive respect from their neighbours and community members because they were tagged as sinners and non-believers of Jesus Christ. This has implications for the social interaction, self-esteem, and well-being of users. This finding is in agreement with previous studies such as Talita, Silvia & Emili, (2016), Prince, Razak, Prince, Williams, Emmanuel & Josephine (2018). It, however, contradicts the findings of John, Eric, Emmanuel & Ennin, (2018) that spiritual healing services should be modified and integrated into the mainstream health care services because patients who received services from spiritual healing rated it better than treatment from a psychiatric hospital. However, this could be more so when the family neighbours and the community in which the user finds his or herself have a positive attitude and perception toward spiritual healing. Thus, a society that generally does not accept spiritual healing as a cultural method of healing may stigmatise and victimise spiritual healing users and vice versa (**source**).

Conclusion

The present research study explored the mindsets as well as health and health assumptions of spiritual healing individuals in Benue state, Nigeria. The research has actually provided empirical evidence to

develop that spiritual healing users have positive and also inviting mindsets towards faith healers. As a result, spiritual healers are recognised by patients as the first point of call for curing, management, and prevention of ill-health. Findings additionally showed that individuals of spiritual healing perceived optimum wellness standing mostly due to the perceived efficiency of the spiritual healing method. The findings may help the physicians and nurses to recognize the spiritual needs of patients. Health-care policy-makers may use the finding to solve the spiritual needs of patients. For instance, religious leaders that work as healers and mediums between man and God may help the patients by visiting them regularly. Conducting public prayer sessions by religious leaders at hospitals and clinics is an example of a spiritual healing session or a chance for the patient to visit religious healers. Nonetheless, the research uncovered some challenges faced by the client, consisting of a fake spiritual healer, stigmatisation, and victimisation which are mainly connected with using spiritual healing services in Nigeria. This study recommends that spirituality, society, and also religion have actually been introduced right into the medical circle, suggesting a growing passion for the health benefits connected with having a spiritual idea and/or following a religion. Therefore spiritual healing should be incorporated into orthodox medicine for effective health care delivery.

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