



The Implication of Religious Practices on Human Health in Nigeria

Amaechi Louisa Ngozi (PhD)^{1*}; Agama Christian Sunday (PhD)¹ Nwakor Rose Ngozi²

¹Directorate of General Studies; Federal University of Technology, Owerri

²University of Nigeria, Nsukka

ABSTRACT

Religion is a system through which people reach their gods and goddess or super natural being for the purpose of problem solving, communication or interaction. It includes people's belief, faith, practices or veneration etc. in any given environment. Health system is the condition of man's body or mechanism when something is wrong and need to be addressed either with drugs, human experts, medical gadgets, therapy or prayer with faith. There are some health related challenges found in any given environment which may erupt as a result of epidemic, biological trait, type of feeding, malnutrition, environmental hazard, infection or spiritual sickness etc. Some believe in faith clinic alone while some make use of both prayer and drugs or other means of medical help either traditional or scientific. The paper therefore discussed the concept of religion and health system, the role of religion in the reduction of health related challenges. It also examined the challenges of religion and religious leaders in eradication of health problem in Nigeria society and recommends increase in religious faith and adequate treatment from the hospitals and medical-experts when faced with any disease, illness or any form of sickness for quick healing.

Keywords: Religion, health system and the role of religion in health system, the challenges of religion in eradication of health problem.

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INTRODUCTION

Religion is a 'powerful structure that can improve the condition of man and the health system in many ways. The potential for organized religious bodies should contribute constructively to the reduction of many health challenges starting from the inherited biological problems, environmentally contacted diseases, common African health problems such as malaria, fever, stomach problem, spiritual sickness, contaminated diseases, projected attack and other related health challenges etc Toyin [1]. The ways religion could play its roles include:

- 1) Religion promotes a culture of life, respect for the sacredness of life and celebration of life. These radically undermine infectious diseases, like HIV and AIDS, emotional stress and other health related sickness including poverty and hunger.
- 2) Religion cares for people and improves concern for the well being of human life, most people especially those who suffer for one thing or the other get relief through religious advice and counseling.
- 3) A religious community promotes a strong sense of social cohesion among its members (the extent and depth of social peace have been identified as critical factors influencing an epidemic, infectious diseases and environmental pollution.
- 4) Organized religious groups such as Islam and Christianity have extensive networks of people, institutions and infrastructure throughout a country, including areas where other organization may not penetrate.
- 5) Members of religious group tend to be strongly committed to their group and seek to avoid anything that would result in their becoming separated from it, for instance obedient to sacred, holy or righteous living or touching an infected animals and objects.
- 6) Apart from their gatherings in the mosque or church, those belonging to a religious organization frequently congregate together in other ways, providing various forms of awareness or support for one another. Such as humanitarian, social, recreational and financial bodies, educating one another on various issues including health related matters,
- 7) Religious leaders and ministers relate with their members easily, pass vital information about the government, environment and health system to their members. They make contact with people at the grassroots' level and deal with them directly, in their homes and elsewhere, without recourse to other intermediary functionaries. UNAIDS has stressed how grassroots and community mobilization is the core strategy on which success against HIV/AIDS builds. Faith-based organizations are uniquely well placed to promote such mobilization, Kelly [2].

- Religious leaders and speakers usually have relatively large and regular "captive" audience that is receptive to weekly messages, including messages in such areas as avoiding the risk of HIV infection, the desirability of going for voluntary counseling and testing, and responding to the orphans' challenge and poverty eradication.
- Christianity and Islam both combine codes of belief (faith) with codes of conduct (morality), the moral codes being rooted in faith-based considerations that form the greater part, embody critical understanding and values.
- Christianity and Islam each has its own wide-ranging body of time-tested principles relating to family life married life, and sexuality — areas closely connect with HIV/AIDS.
- Christianity and Islam are resolute in proposing high ideals for their adherents and in requiring sexual - abstinence outside marriage, the only completely certain way of avoiding the sexual transmission of HIV. They are equally resolute in requiring fidelity within marriage, which - apart from the case of a discordant couple - is the only completely sure way of not becoming HIV infected when practicing sex.
- Religious ideals and community solidarity support members of both faiths in their adherence to abstinence or fidelity, Mike [3].
- Islam requires male circumcision, a practice that tends to be associated with lower levels of HIV and STI prevalence.
- Christian social teaching advocates strongly for the transformation of economic, political and social' structures that effectively exclude the poor and deny the equal personal role and dignity of women in areas that are integral to a structural response to HIV/AIDS. Organized religious groups provide very much of the care and support that is available for those affected by HIV/AIDS. Thus, it is estimated that 25% of the care provided world-wide for those experiencing AIDS is provided by Catholic organizations, through home- based care, clinics and hospitals, while there is widespread recognition of the role of Islam in responding to the needs of those with AIDS in a country such as Uganda.
- Organized religious groups also tend to be prominent in devising ways of responding to the needs of children orphaned by AIDS or other circumstances. Apart from institutional responses through orphanages, groups associated with or originating from the various faiths seek to respond to orphan needs by strengthening family and community coping capacity, developing community schools, building income-generating capacity, and ensuring that the physical, social and psychological needs of orphans are adequately met. The majority of the members of these orphan support groups tend to be women, Onwuoke [4].

Most religious leaders should be able to teach their members to be hygienic in nature, create economy viable enough to make them feel well to avoid malnutrition, Keep their environment clean to avoid outbreak of diseases and infirmities. Churches and mosques should always build medical centers and provide enough health services that can take care of their sick members. The religious leaders should also educate their members on how to keep their environment clean. Vote for leaders that will improve their living condition irrespective of their religious, cultural and ethnic affiliation. Religious leaders should highlight to their members the need to go to school in order to improve their living standard and take care of their feeding pattern and health condition. The norms, ethics and values of the society that can improve the health system should be made known by the religious leaders and their organizations.

Divorce is a Contributing Factor to Health Challenge

Divorce is separation between husband and wife without any intention of uniting back again as one family. Divorce according to an Oxford Learners Dictionary is the legal dissolution of a marriage or decree that dissolves marriage.

Divorce can come as a result of misconception of issues, misunderstanding, misinformation or satanic evangelism and reckless living. Sometimes, unfaithfulness, sickness, poverty, hardship and lack can as well cause divorce. Also lack of trust, unfruitfulness (childlessness), unnecessary interference into marriage by friends and relatives of the couples can as well cause divorce. Diabolic measures and spiritual problems may equally be a contributory factor to cause divorce among Christian families. Divorce which is sociological and a religious phenomenon is big challenge-to every society, family and religious groups.

Divorce does not give joy either to the couple, children, the family, or the environment. It does not enhance economic growth of the couples; it is an aspect of war that does not create conducive atmosphere for any meaningful development in any given society. Children from a divorced home usually suffer a lot of psychological, philosophical and economic problems. In the "society, in school, sometimes they lack concentration in their studies always appear to be hitted, antagonistic and nagging, they can as well enroll in secret cult as a result of frustration, appear unkempt with bushy hairs. Sometimes, it affects the payment of their school fees, thereby increases their emotional practice, engage in several vices such as armed robbery, rape practices, kidnapping business, alcoholism abuse. They can be terror to the society, sometimes embark upon child trafficking and baby factory business, Maduabuchi, [5].

In order to meet up with the modern trend of their counter parts in the society or train themselves in school, they involve into prostitution or 419 cheating business and political thuggery. Divorced couples are equally affected. In some ways, they will no longer enjoy the adage that says, two heads are better than one, if not remarried, they exist as separate entities and continue to cause havoc in the society.

They will not also enjoy the; scripture that says that one shall chase a thousand while two will chase ten thousand. Oh what a cheat and deceit by Satan. They will no longer co-operate and integrate to improve their economy nor unite to give their children the best training in their environment.

It increases health problem in them, make them to have emotional disturbances, reduces their wisdom and can lead to premature death to any of the divorced couple who cannot cope with the trauma. It is a deadly disease that does not give hope to any society. Families as a matter of fact should start on time to give good advice to their children who have reached the age of marriage and to know what marriage is all about, educate, inform and prepare the minds of their family members before entering into marriage business. Different religious groups should instruct and counsel marriageable couple very well before they enter into the agreement. Marriage covenant is not a child's place and therefore needs to be properly guided by religious group, families and the society. Relatives of the couple should allow independent marriage to exist not unnecessary interference that can cause separation and divorce. Government should as well make provision by enacting a law that will make the man to keep sustaining the divorced family if found guilty on such case.' Couples should as well be prayerful, sensitive to issues that can break marriage and avoid or handle those issues carefully before it gets out of hand in order to safeguard and sustain their marriage. Religious leaders should play their role on educating parents and children on the issue of marriage. A healthy marriage is a healthy family and health families make healthy society and economy.

Finally, couples should try to engage themselves into a meaningful economic business to sustain their livelihood as married couples and allow God to be the only guest to be invited into their married .life when confronted with any challenge in their marriage. These steps can maintain marriages and stop its disintegration. Religious bodies can play vital roles in order not to enable affected couple to have health related challenges. Action must come from both the world community and the religious bodies themselves. The religious leaders should always engage their members on powerful teachings that can discourage divorce and emotional problem.

The world community above all the political, donor and intellectual sub-communities need to give full practical recognition and wholehearted support to the positive potential of religion in the combat of HIV/AIDS. This implies:

- An end to "putting down", discrediting, or sidelining the importance of religion or religious organizations in the struggle against both disease and epidemic.
- Efforts to secure the full participation of religious bodies in programmes and projects.
- Ensuring that religious leaders are involved in- the development of AIDS-related policies, plans and strategies.
- The establishment by UNAIDS of a strong desk for religious issues.
- Enabling religious bodies to have access to funding for their anti-AIDS and orphans programmes.
- Facilitating the religious organizations in developing a common internationally supported approach to reducing HIV transmission and mitigating the impacts of the epidemic, Maduabuchi [5].

From their side, the religious bodies need to:

- Come out loud and clear in every possible way about HIV/AIDS, overcoming silence or denial, in their own personnel, in their members and in their teaching.
- Adamantly reject every utterance, pronouncement or practice that carries any connotation of stigma or discrimination. –
- Pour their enormous human resources into the major tasks of eliminating poverty and ending the subjugation of women (recognizing the sea-change this will mean for many of their internal structures and practices). Recognize the dimensions of the orphans challenge and mobilize their communities for a massive response to it in humane and practical ways.
- Galvanize their members into action for the reduction of HIV transmission, the provision of care and support for those infected or affected, and the mitigation of the impacts of the disease and epidemic.
- Work in cooperation and harmony with one another, the representatives of local cultures, civic personnel, and local, national and international leaders.
- Maintain a multidimensional response to HIV/AIDS at the top of their agenda and as an integral element in their seminary and other training programmes, Kelly [2].

Finally, both sides-the world community" and the religious organizations-should put the condom debate to rest. The energy that has been poured into this debate has not borne fruit for either side. Neither has it contributed in a significant way to a reduction in HIV transmission. People will be better served, and more lives will be saved, if the energy is directed, instead, to the epidemic.

Religion has some positive and negative influence to man and the society. Religion which can be used to improve man's health, thought and living standard can cause serious injury to man, government and the entire society depending on the stylistics of the particular religious organization, Durkham [6].

Some religious groups or organization do not like to send their member to clinic for clinical examination and medical treatment for an improved health system because of the nature of their faith, belief or practices.

The two major religion existing in Nigeria by name, Christian religion and Islamic religion are two warriors that make government ungovernable and society a semi-hell to exist do not consider their effects of their behaviour to the existence of man. In Nigeria, the Islamic group dominated by Boko Haram and the Fulani Cattle herdsman in their action of killing and counter killings in Northern Nigeria do not always consider human health for protection because of the nature of their faith, religious belief and practices. Religion ordinarily that suppose to protect man, turns to be terror to man, Toyin [1].

Human rights abuse has increased in Nigeria. The activities of Boko Haram, and that of unknown gun men have increased the health problem in Nigeria. Nigerian economy as related to agriculture has nothing to talk about because of the activities of Hausa-Fulani herdsman both in the north and southern region in the country posed a big challenge to people's health. People can no longer afford enough food for good health.

CONCLUSION

Different religious bodies as a matter of fact should organize themselves well to reshape the mind and thought of their followers towards taking good care of them health- wise. Teach them the necessary ways of keeping and contagious illness and to take a bold step to approach some medical expert when faced with any form of health challenge. Different religious groups should learn to tolerate one another, respect their faith, stop human right abuses and maintain healthy environment.

Recommendations

- 1) Both government and the religious bodies or organization should work hand in hand to improve human health, protect live and property of people in any given environment:
- 2) Law to protect life should be maintained and religious group that destroys life or inflict injury that-will affect human health should be abolished from Nigeria.
- 3) Religious leaders should encourage their followers to take treatment and visit medical experts when they have health challenge. Religious organizations should teach their members how to keep their environment clean and make their bodies free from sickness and infectious.
- 4) To avoid sexually related diseases, religious group should educate their member on how to control themselves sexually and married couples to be faithful to each other. Finally, the need for adequate attention from hospitals, < limes and medical experts should be made known to everybody irrespective of their faith or religion when need be.

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