

Choices of Treatment for the Mentally Ill in Nigeria: Nollywood Narratives and Reality

Blessing Adjeketa, Cornelius Eze Onyekaba, Theophilus Adjeketa

Department of Creative Arts, Dennis Osadebay University

*Asaba, Nigeria, Department of Mental Health, Delta State University Teaching Hospital,
Oghara*

Corresponding email: blessing.adjeketa@dou.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the factors influencing treatment decisions for mental health issues in Nigeria, particularly focusing on traditional approaches. It examines two prominent schools of thought, often depicted in Nollywood films like "Village Destroyer" (2016). The first emphasizes the role of family and community in choosing treatment, often prioritizing traditional healers and herbal remedies based on the perceived cause of the illness. The second believes that appeasement rituals to deities are essential for complete healing. The research aims to determine the current beliefs of urban and rural Nigerians regarding these treatment choices. It explores how perceptions of the causes of mental illness influence treatment selection and whether communities still rely on appeasement rituals. The study employs content analysis and mixed methods, including random interviews and stratified sampling, with data collected from villages in the Sapele and Ethiope West local government areas of Delta State. Verbal informed consent for participation for the study was obtained as written consent was denied by participants.

Keywords: Nollywood, Village Destroyer, Nigerian society, Mental illnesses, Choices, Treatment places

INTRODUCTION

Nollywood, Bollywood, and Hollywood are the most popular film industries in the world. The Nigerian movie industry Nollywood is the second-largest movie industry in the world in terms of quantity of production. As Bollywood produced 1,091 feature-length films in the year 2006, Nigeria top second with 872 productions and the United States took third place with 485 major films (Uchenna & Abosede, 2020, Adjeketa, 2023). Films emanating from these industries are a viable vehicle for projecting the host nation's identity (Adjeketa, 2023). In Nigeria, the focus of Nollywood films is not only to entertain and educate its audience. The films also function not only as a cultural product aimed at engendering socio-cultural and economic development (Ayakoroma, 2021), but focuses on health and illnesses representation (Adjeketa and Adjeketa 2024, Adjeketa, etal 2025). Conversely, western films often perpetuate harmful myths and stereotypes about African culture and traditions.

A common narrative portrays Africa as a continent plagued by danger, darkness, violence, poverty, and despair, neglecting any positive aspects (Amy E. Harth ND). These films frequently depict Africans as living exclusively in rural areas and engaging in bizarre or "strange" customs, reinforcing a skewed and inaccurate image of the continent and its people. This misrepresentation contributes to a negative perception of Africa and its diverse cultures. This popular narrative supports the myth of tradition, ceremony, and ritual which posits that African history, customs, and tradition are timeless and unalterable, a static, rather than dynamic culture. Studies indicate that cultural and traditional beliefs significantly influence treatment choices for severe illnesses in Africa, particularly in Nigeria. Conditions like diabetes, cancer, sickle cell anemia, and psychosis are often attributed to supernatural forces, leading to treatment approaches that extend beyond conventional medicine physical (Adjeketa, 2021, Aina, 2004, Asuni, and Swift, 1994). This study investigates the prevalence of these beliefs in modern Nigeria, focusing on the treatment of mental illness as a case study. It analyses the film "Village Destroyer" and gathers opinions from individuals with family members who have experienced mental illness to determine the enduring influence of traditional rituals and ceremonies, and to ascertain whether the myth of tradition, ceremony, and ritual is still resilient in modern Nigeria. The research aims to assess whether these narratives surrounding traditional healing practices are factual and still relevant in contemporary Nigerian society.

Film often depicts individuals with psychotic conditions as detached from reality, experiencing hallucinations, delusions, and sensory perceptions that others do not share. These characters are portrayed as believing in things that are untrue. While such conditions are considered uncommon in traditional Nigerian society, there are instances of them occurring within certain families. However, it remains that most families in Nigeria do not encounter such experiences. In Nigeria, where certain illnesses like psychosis are uncommon among some families, communities often struggle to understand and support individuals experiencing them. This lack of familiarity leave friends, relatives, and the wider community uncertain about how to respond appropriately. Furthermore, when individuals with such conditions face a crisis and cannot make decisions about their treatment, the responsibility falls primarily on their family members. This highlights the critical role families play in navigating healthcare decisions in the face of rare or poorly understood illnesses.

This study examines how Nollywood portrays treatment options for individuals with mental illness, contrasting these representations with the realities of mental healthcare in both traditional

and modern Nigeria. A central question is whether the traditional customs and treatment methods depicted in the film “Village Destroyer” remain relevant and unchanged in contemporary Nigerian society. The research methodology primarily involves interviews and secondary data analysis to draw informed conclusions about the accuracy and evolution of these representations.

OVERVIEW OF TREATMENT FOR THE MENTALLY ILL IN TRADITIONAL (RURAL) /MODERN (URBAN) NIGERIAN

In traditional Nigeria, the initial response to mental illness often begins within the family compound (Ejenavi, 2024). When a mental health crisis arises, the affected individual is typically restrained by family members while decisions about their care are made (Ejuko, 2024). This highlights the central role of the family in managing mental health issues, particularly in the early stages, due to limited immediate treatment options. In situations where conventional medical facilities are inaccessible, families often step in to provide essential healthcare. This can include using herbal remedies or investigating the underlying causes of an illness before deciding on a course of treatment (Adjeketa, 2021). Family members play a crucial role in the patient's recovery, attending to their needs such as food, clothing, and personal hygiene. This highlights the significant role of family support in healthcare, particularly when formal medical resources are limited.

In contemporary Nigeria, perspectives on illness diverge significantly. While some individuals consider mental illnesses a natural occurrence treatable with conventional methods like herbal remedies, a substantial portion still attributes the illness to supernatural causes. This duality in understanding influences healthcare choices and treatment approaches within the country. When herbal remedies fail to provide relief from an illness after a period of time, family members may start to suspect that the illness has supernatural causes (Lazrus, 154). This can lead them to seek the help of traditional healers or seers. These healers are known by different names depending on the ethnic group, such as Obo in Okpe, Dibia in Ibo, Babalawo or Ifa in Yoruba, and Mai Gani in Hausa. The purpose of consulting these traditional seers is to identify the underlying cause of the illness and, potentially, the person or entity responsible for it. Across Nigerian communities, diviners play a crucial role as specialists with the ability to diagnose spiritual, physical, and emotional illnesses. Many diviners also function as herbalists, using their knowledge of herbs to treat mental illnesses and other ailments. They act as intermediaries between the physical and spiritual worlds, holding significant importance in traditional Nigerian societies. The diviners' expertise in herbal remedies fosters trust and encourages patronage from the community. Herbalists occupy a unique space, bridging the gap between biomedicine and Indigenous knowledge (Petryna et al 36). They assert familiarity with the systematic approaches of modern medicine while operating within the cultural framework of the communities they serve. This allows them to offer holistic, cost-effective, and readily available healthcare solutions through the development and application of herbs.

Traditional Nigerian society has, another group involved in mental healthcare. They comprises of devotees of native Nigerian immortals. These devotees are believed to possess inherent healing powers, regardless of age or gender (Sorsdahl 287). The traditional healers who serve these immortals operate from shrines, often situated in secluded locations such as near rivers, streams, or within forest areas, providing a quiet and private setting for their practices. In Nigerian traditional healing practices, devotees of native immortals are believed to possess supernatural abilities, enabling them to diagnose and treat physical, mental, and social ailments. These healers rely on guidance from supernatural forces to prescribe remedies, often utilizing traditional pharmacies

(Kpobi 3). When a patient doesn't improve as expected, the healer may refer them to a devotee of a "higher" native immortal for further treatment, indicating a hierarchical approach within the system of spiritual healing (Sorsdahl 287).

Further, traditional communities, have experienced individuals, often men and women, who serve as vital resources for understanding and treating illnesses, particularly those suspected to be inherited. They are versed in Folk history and in the application of herbs to cure diseases. Their expertise stems from observing similar cases within family lineages and understanding the history of the illness. These individuals can describe the progression of the illness and the therapeutic approaches that have proven effective in the past. Similar to herbalists and seers, they are widely consulted for their treatment advice and play a crucial role in healthcare within these communities. In many local communities in Nigeria, access to orthodox mental health treatment centres is severely limited. Consequently, many individuals in these communities remain unaware of the available treatment options and face significant barriers in accessing the care they need, contributing to a reliance on alternative, often less effective, methods of managing mental illness. However, the increasing interconnectedness of the world, facilitated by electronic media such as the internet and film, is impacting even remote rural villages in Nigeria by disseminating information about places of treatment for the mentally ill and how to access those places. While dedicated mental health treatment and rehabilitation centres may be lacking in rural areas, primary healthcare facilities do exist. Health workers in these facilities play a crucial role by referring patient relatives to available treatment centres, bridging a critical gap in mental healthcare access (Adjeketa, 2021). Even with this, many in the rural villages cannot still access mental health care. For example, Onoghro, an Okpe village in the Sapele local government area of Delta State, Nigeria, is an example of a community that lacks basic amenities and access to essential health services. With a small population of less than 20 indigenous residents, many original inhabitants have migrated to urban areas for education and business opportunities. The village is primarily inhabited by farmers and fishermen from neighbouring villages who temporarily reside there for work. Onoghro lacks essential infrastructure such as schools, motor able roads, electricity, potable water and a primary health care facility. Most importantly, current residents are unaware of available mental health care centres (Ogbotor Matthew, 2025 interview), highlighting the limited reach of civilization and essential services in many local Nigerian communities like Onoghro. Over the years, local communities like Onoghro have developed unique knowledge systems, beliefs, values, and attitudes. These elements have significantly shape and influence their behaviours, thoughts, emotions, and decisions regarding the treatment of individuals with mental illness (Ampadu 31, 34). While this highlights the importance of considering cultural context in mental health care, they miss out of orthodox care. Because there are no orthodox treatment centres present in these local communities, the traditional treatment centre which is readily available becomes the only choice. The cultural beliefs of patient relatives in such communities therefore serve as the main influence on choices of treatment places for the mentally ill.

Despite advancements in infrastructure like electricity, internet, and roads in some developing villages, a significant gap persists in the understanding and treatment of mental health issues, particularly psychosis. Even with increased awareness of orthodox medical facilities, a prevailing belief persists within these communities that psychosis stems from spiritual causes (Onukpere, 2025). Consequently, traditional healing methods remain the preferred approach for treatment, highlighting a disconnect between modern healthcare accessibility and deeply ingrained cultural beliefs (Adjeketa, 2021). This reliance on traditional methods, as opposed to orthodox

treatment, underscores the need for targeted interventions to bridge this gap and promote evidence-based mental healthcare in these regions. There is also a prevailing belief which suggests that spiritual problems, including psychosis, are more effectively treated using traditional medicine methods compared to Western medicine (Oghenovo, 2025). This perspective, particularly relevant in contexts like modern traditional Nigeria, stems from the idea that conditions like psychosis are often attributed to black magic or spiritual causes. Consequently, proponents argue that orthodox doctors, trained in Western medicine, may not adequately address the underlying spiritual roots of the illness, leading to less effective treatment outcomes (Lazarus 4). This highlights a divergence in understanding and approaches to mental health between traditional and Western medical systems.

More also, in contemporary Nigeria, the choice of treatment for mental illness is not solely determined by a person's social standing. While it's often assumed that less educated individuals are more likely to attribute mental illness to supernatural causes and seek traditional remedies, this belief extends to well-educated Nigerians as well. Many educated individuals maintain a strong conviction that herbal houses offer superior treatment options for mental illnesses, indicating that cultural beliefs and perceptions significantly influence healthcare decisions, irrespective of educational attainment. This highlights the complex interplay between traditional beliefs, modern medicine, and individual preferences in addressing mental health challenges in Nigeria. The case of Chief Edegware (2025) highlights the complex interplay between traditional beliefs and modern healthcare in addressing mental illness. Chief Edegware, (a graduate of public administration), initially sought professional help for his brother at a mental health facility. However, his belief that the illness stemmed from spiritual causes led him to discharge his brother to perform a family rite, driven by the fear of fatal consequences if the ritual was delayed. Despite readmitting his brother to the facility, Chief Edegware maintained that the traditional rituals were the primary path to recovery, with conventional treatment playing a supporting role (Theophilus 2025). This case exemplifies the tension between faith-based healing practices and medical interventions in the context of mental health within some Nigerian communities. Ndetei et al and Lazarus gave a broader view of why people in modern Nigerian villages opt for herbal treatment centers. Ndetei et al stated that:

Traditional healers are the first professionals contacted for mental illness in many parts of Africa. This is because they are sufficient in numbers in the communities; are accepted; do home visits, do not stigmatize mental illness, are often consulted, and have been demonstrated to see many people with mental disorders. They are enshrined in the minds of the people, are respected in their community, are often its opinion leaders, and are first respondents in case of an emergency (12).

Many individuals, like Chief Edegware, including patients, their families, and community members, also turn to traditional medicine due to its perceived holistic approach. This approach is believed to addresses the interconnectedness of the mind, body, and spirit in the healing process. A key aspect of traditional healing often involves rituals such as chanting, aimed at invoking the support of the patient's ancestral spirits before any treatment is administered (Lazarus 4). This spiritual element is a significant factor in the preference for traditional medicine among many Nigerians. The core concept revolves around the perceived connection between a patient and their ancestors as a means of facilitating healing and reassurance. This connection is believed to instill a sense of comfort and confidence in the patient's relatives. The underlying premise is that the family ancestors, possessing intimate knowledge of the patient, are capable of divining the cause

of the illness and guiding the treatment process (Okpako, 2024). This belief system leverages the ancestral connection to provide solace and direction in times of medical uncertainty (Okpako, 2024). The ancestral connection or spiritual therapy, as practiced by herbalists and traditional medicine men, on the mentally ill aims to restore harmony between the living (the mentally sick) and the spiritual realm (his ancestors). A key aspect of this involves appeasing ancestral spirits, who are believed to continue influencing earthly events after death. In the Nigerian context, this traditional approach often sees individuals consulting a shrine or traditional healer to determine the root cause of an illness and seek a cure. However, the availability of modern, orthodox treatment centres have lessened the influence of these traditional practices on patient relatives in contemporary Nigeria (within popular cities in Nigeria). Still, the traditionalist will typically prioritize visiting the shrine or traditional medicine man, both to diagnose the cause of the illness and to obtain a remedy. Relatedly, due to the prevalent cultural belief attributing the origins of psychotic disorders to supernatural forces, a significant portion of the population believes that effective healing must also stem from supernatural interventions. This perspective is rooted in the conviction that orthodox medical treatments alone are insufficient when the fundamental cause of an illness is perceived to be supernatural, emphasizing the need to address the perceived underlying spiritual or supernatural factors for complete recovery (Boyitie 2024). Therefore, a key distinction exists in the motivations of those seeking treatment from orthodox care centres versus traditional healers. Individuals who visit orthodox centres typically do so with the primary goal of finding a cure for an existing illness. In contrast, those who consult seers and traditional doctors are often driven by two main objectives: first, to identify the underlying cause of the illness, and second, to receive care and treatment (Ndeti 12). This highlights differing expectations and approaches to healthcare within the community. Ojakovo's (2025) interview highlights a critical perspective on healthcare choices, particularly concerning mental health treatment. The interview suggests that some individuals opt for traditional healing methods over conventional medicine due to instances where orthodox medical treatments, specifically medications prescribed by doctors, have reportedly led to a deterioration in the patient's condition. This negative experience with orthodox medicine serves as a significant factor influencing the decision to explore and utilize traditional alternatives. This perspective adds nuance to the understanding of healthcare preferences, especially in contexts where trust in conventional medicine may be compromised by perceived failures or adverse outcomes.

Esiaba Irobi's play, "The Colour of Rusting Gold" (2014), illustrates the tragic consequences surrounding orthodox mental health treatment choice. The character Oriakanjonuchichi, a bright young boy, is driven to insanity by his uncles. His mother, Ngasi, desperately seeks a cure, taking him to four psychiatric hospitals without success. The dialogue between Nketa, Ngasi, and Alika in the play reflects the common perspective among traditional Nigerians regarding the treatment of mental illness, a perspective also highlighted in an interview with Ojakovo above. The play serves as a commentary on the limitations and potential harm of orthodox approaches when dealing with mental health issues.

Nketa: Is it long this madness starts?

Ngasi: No, only three months ago

Nketa: Did you take him to any hospital?

Ngasi: Yes, four psychiatric hospitals

Nketa: You destroyed him. Those doctors in the hospitals are useless. Don't you know that half of the people who die in the hospitals are killed by doctors, expired drugs, and all those licensed killers ill-equipped universities manufacture.

Ngasi mentions seeking help from four psychiatric hospitals and Nketa sharply criticizes this decision, accusing Ngasi of destroying the afflicted Oriakanjonuchichi by taking him to these hospitals. Nketa expresses a deep distrust of doctors and hospitals, claiming they are responsible for many deaths due to incompetence, expired drugs, and inadequate training. This reflects a strong scepticism towards conventional medical practices. Ngasi with her son, has visited four psychiatric hospitals in three months without getting results. Her only hope for a cure is the place of Otagburuagu, a seer and herbalist

Ngasi: This is the end of the road...if Otagburuagu can not cure you then (... her arms fall limp-a gesture of defeat)

She is reassured by Nnenna that her son will get a cure from Otagburuagu

Nnenna: don't worry yourself, woman. You have come to the right place...your sorrows are over...Mother, you are just wasting your tears, wait until Otagburuagu handles him, your sighs will turn into smiles.

People like **Nketa and Alike** in traditional Nigeria prefer to first visit a 'native doctor' (diviner) to tell the underlying cause of an illness, and apply herbal remedies before visiting an orthodox center. The reason according to Alike is

Alike: Otagburuagu finds fresh cases easiest to cure

Some individuals like Nketa and Ojakovo hold the belief that conventional medicines can exacerbate mental health conditions, particularly when expired drugs are used. A key argument is that herbal remedies are superior due to their perceived lack of expiration dates and accessibility in natural environments (Enegoblu 2025, interview). Furthermore, there's a concern that orthodox medications, with their complex chemical compositions, can lead to unintended side effects and the development of new ailments, contrasting with the belief that herbs are free from such adverse effects (Edafe 2025 interview). This perspective reflects a preference for natural, readily available treatments over manufactured pharmaceuticals. These views suggest that in contemporary Nigeria, treatment choices for mental illness are significantly influenced by a lack of trust in orthodox treatment centres and a perception of inadequate medical personnel. Also, a prevailing fear exists regarding the potential for contracting additional illnesses within these centres. Conversely, there's a widespread acknowledgement of the potency of herbs in treating mental illness, coupled with a strong trust in individuals knowledgeable in their application. This preference highlights a cultural inclination towards traditional remedies rooted in confidence and perceived safety. The supernatural forces' involvement in the affairs of the living continues to influence treatment choices for the mentally ill. When the supernatural forces reveal the cause of mental illness, a total cure is attained. In the outbreak of a mental case, the choice of orthodox treatment is secondary. Diviners and traditional healers who subscribe to the supernatural in their respective places of practice are approached first. The herbalists are also visited on the failure of orthodox medication to provide the cure.

EXAMPLE FROM NOLLYWOOD: *VILLAGE DESTROYER* AS PARADIGM

Ugo Ugbor's film, *Village Destroyer* (2016), unfolds in the traditional Nigerian community of Ugbakala. The narrative centres on Nwabueze, who descends into madness after refusing to support Ekene in a contentious land dispute with Ikemba. Ekene, having unlawfully seized land, attempts to coerce Nwabueze into providing false testimony. Upon Nwabueze's refusal, Ekene enlists the services of Ikuku, a shrine priest, to inflict madness upon him. Ikuku, motivated by financial gain, employs mystical powers to curse Nwabueze, decreeing his madness to coincide with the birth of his first child after seven years of marriage to Nkechi. Years later, Nwabueze's sanity is restored following appeasement rituals conducted within the community.

In the Ugbakala community, Nwabueze's sudden descent into madness has shocked everyone. After seven years of waiting for his wife to conceive, he loses his sanity on the very day she gives birth to a daughter. The community members believe something is amiss and recognize the urgent need for Nwabueze to receive treatment so he can recover and fulfil his responsibilities to his family. The question arises: who will decide the course of treatment for Nwabueze and how will that decision be made?

In "*Village Destroyer*," the decision regarding Nwabueze's treatment rests with two key groups. First, Nwabueze's immediate circle of family and friends, including Uche, Nne, Ada, and Paulina, plays a crucial role. Secondly, the chiefs of the Ugbakala community are also responsible for the choice of treatment. This shared responsibility stems from the setting of the film, Ugbakala, which represents traditional Nigerian communities. These communities emphasize communalism, a system where close-knit ties bind people together, and the community collectively shares responsibilities and burdens. This belief dictates that making important decisions are not solely the responsibility of the immediate family but involve the combined efforts and consensus of neighbours and the community. A society, where everybody is responsible for the other. When Nwabueze began exhibiting abnormal behaviour, his family and friends, particularly Nne and Uche, initially opted for treatment from a local herbalist. This decision reflects a common approach to healthcare in many Nigerian communities, where traditional medicine plays a significant role.

Nne: Uchechukwu, this is no longer a joke. Get hold of him if you can, let's take him to Mazi Egwuomu's place.

After an initial escape, Nwabueze is captured and brought to Mazi Egwuomu, a local herbalist, for treatment. Nwabueze's family and friends, Nne and Uche, opt for Egwuomu due to their belief in his ability to cure him and the immediate availability of his services. Even though the herbalist promises to proffer a solution, Egwuomu acknowledges the complexity of Nwabueze's condition, attributing his madness to external forces, which suggests that recovery will be a lengthy process. Egwuomu's prompt response to patients' needs demonstrates both his closeness to the people he serves and his professional dedication. This combination of personal connection and professional competence contributes to the trust, respect, and acceptance that Nwabueze's family has for Egwuomu's treatment facility. Ultimately, it suggests that these qualities are vital for building a strong reputation and fostering patient loyalty within a community.

Nwabueze's mental illness is presented as an exceptional case, suggesting it is not of natural origin. The efficacy of herbal remedies is contingent upon identifying the underlying cause of his condition. This identification process is deemed beyond the capabilities of just Nne and Uche, necessitating community involvement. The communal spirit depicted in "*Village Destroyer*"

highlights the collective responsibility where innocent members willingly and gladly assist Nwabueze in his journey to regain sanity. Traditional Nigerian society places a high value on communal living and mutual support, exemplified by the emphasis on "we" and "us." This extends to caring for individuals with mental illness, where support goes beyond immediate family to encompass the entire community. The story of Village Destroyer illustrates this, showing how elders in the Ugbakala community convene to address the challenges faced by one of their own who is experiencing mental health issues. This collective approach highlights the community's commitment to the well-being of all its members, reflecting a deeply ingrained sense of shared responsibility

Elder 1: We are here to deliberate on the issues surrounding Nwabueze's madness. Nwabueze is mad, we must have to find a solution to it.

Elder 2: What is the way forward? How do we solve this problem? What do we do?

In the Ugbakala community, culture and tradition are central to decision-making, particularly in complex situations like Nwabueze's illness. The chiefs' judgments are deeply rooted in these cultural norms. In Nwabueze's case, the elders suspect Nkechi of using witchcraft to cause her husband's madness by exchanging him with a child. To resolve this, Nkechi must take an oath of innocence. If she is proven innocent, the community will explore other potential causes of Nwabueze's condition and consider alternative treatments. This approach highlights the community's reliance on traditional beliefs and practices in addressing health and misfortune.

Elder 2: If the woman in question says she knows nothing about her husband's madness, then it's a very simple matter let her go to Ikuku shrine.

Elder 3: If her hands are clean, then she should not fear.

Nwabueze's prolonged illness, unresponsive to traditional herbal remedies, is believed to stem from supernatural causes, specifically a curse. Suspicion falls on his wife, Nkechi, who is accused of sacrificing her husband's sanity in exchange for a baby girl. To resolve this serious accusation and potentially restore Nwabueze's mental health, the community elders have decided that Nkechi must undergo an oath-taking ceremony. This involves her publicly declaring her innocence at the Ikuku shrine by touching or holding sacred emblems associated with the gods. This oath is seen as the most reliable way to determine the truth and address the root cause of Nwabueze's madness. The community elders believe that Nwabueze's madness will leave him when divine punishment is inflicted upon Nkechi, whom they suspect is responsible. Their belief is that once the gods' punishment is addressed, Nwabueze will recover. To resolve this, Nkechi is required to take an oath of innocence as a means of proving her innocence and, consequently, restoring Nwabueze's sanity. The process hinges on the perceived connection between Nkechi's guilt or innocence and Nwabueze's mental state.

Ekene: How would you explain the situation? The wife wasn't pregnant for seven years. She finally became pregnant and gave birth to a baby girl, all of a sudden, the husband went mad. That woman must have exchanged her husband for that baby. The woman must be taken to the shrine to swear an oath.

In Ugbakala custom, when questions arise regarding a person's sanity, as in the case of Nwabueze's madness, a critical step involves determining the legitimacy of any exchanges that may have occurred. To ascertain the truth, an oath before the gods of the land is often required to prove the innocence of the exchange. The decision of whether or not to proceed with this oath rests solely with the elders of the community, highlighting their authority in upholding tradition and ensuring justice.

Elder 2: Well to me, if the woman in question says she is innocent and says she knows nothing about her husband's madness; it is a very simple matter. Let her go to the Ikuku shrine. If her hands are clean, then she should not fear.

In a desperate attempt to restore Nwabueze's sanity, Nkechi is compelled to undergo a traditional oath-swearing ceremony to prove her innocence. However, the failure of this oath to bring about the desired effect leads to the implementation of another cultural practice: an appeasement ritual. This ritual is seen as a potential remedy for insanity believed to be caused by a curse or spiritual affliction. The Ugbakala community is in turmoil following the revelation that Nwabueze has been cursed. Egede, a respected seer from a neighbouring community, has identified Ekene as the perpetrator, aided by Ikuku. This curse has led to the desecration of Ugbakala, and Nwabueze's sanity can only be restored through a ritual of appeasement. The community now faces the urgent task of performing this appeasement to cleanse the land and heal Nwabueze.

"Village Destroyer" highlights the significant role of appeasement rituals within Nigerian communities, portraying them as deeply ingrained cultural and ancestral beliefs. The film underscores the conviction that maintaining a positive relationship with ancestors through these rituals is crucial for ensuring good health and overall well-being within the community. The narrative is built upon the premise that honoring and appeasing ancestors is essential for a harmonious existence. The Ugbakala community believes that appeasement is the only solution to the tragic situation affecting Nwabueze and the calamity befalling Ugbakala. This stems from the belief that the spirit of Nkechi, a woman from Ugbakala who died an unnatural death after being falsely accused and hanged, is the cause. Nkechi was not given proper funeral rites, and the elders believe her spirit must be appeased before Nwabueze, who is considered cursed, can regain his sanity, and the entire community be set free from calamities. Therefore, the focus is on addressing the spiritual imbalance caused by Nkechi's unjust death and the subsequent neglect of her spirit. The community of Ugbakala is plagued by a series of calamities, attributed to the vengeful spirit of the late Nkechi. Her anger manifests in death and environmental disasters, leaving Nwabueze deeply affected as he remains insane. To restore peace and Nwabueze's sanity, the elders initiate a ritual of appeasement. This ritual, involving Egede and Wabugo (Nwabueze's daughter), aims to identify and punish Nkechi's killers, appease her spirit, and cleanse the land of the evil she brought with her. Egede takes the chiefs and family members of Nwabueze through the process:

Egede: Nkechi, Nkechi, Nkechi, I can see your angry spirit in our midst. Appear before your daughter who never had the opportunity to suck your breast. Appear that she may cleanse your tears. Forgive the deeds of the past. The people of Ugbaka land are sorry. They beg for forgiveness.

Wabugo: Mother, forgive them. Let your angry spirit rest.

To Nwabueze, her father, Wabugo says:

Wabugo: Nwabueze, the father of one, takes this piece of cloth. Use it to clean your face when you sweat.

These incidents lead to Nwabueze regaining his sanity.

Nwabueze's recovery from madness is deeply intertwined with the communal values and structures of the Ugbakala community. The elders' decision-making process regarding his treatment hinges on their understanding of the events that triggered his mental state. Given the mystical origins of Nwabueze's condition, the community's chosen treatment methods align with their beliefs about the illness's root cause. Essentially, they believe that addressing the underlying spiritual or mystical issue is paramount to alleviating Nwabueze's symptoms and restoring his sanity. His physical recovery is contingent upon resolving the fundamental cause of his madness.

"Village Destroyer" highlights a crucial aspect of mental healthcare in traditional Nigerian society: the communal approach. Unlike individualistic models, the responsibility for the well-being and recovery of a mentally ill person doesn't solely rest on the immediate family. Instead, a wider network of friends, kinsmen, and the entire community actively participates in the decision-making process regarding treatment and care. This collective involvement aims to provide comprehensive support and facilitate the individual's return to mental wellness. The narrative also places traditional medicine men who utilize herbs as often the first point of contact for families and friends seeking treatment for various ailments. This is particularly true in the context of mental illness, where a prevailing belief suggests that complete healing cannot occur without first consulting and appeasing the supernatural forces believed to influence the community's well-being. This perspective highlights the significant role of traditional beliefs and practices in healthcare decisions, especially concerning mental health.

REALITIES, CHOICE, OR MYTH OF TRADITION AND CULTURE?

The traditional treatment methods depicted in "Village Destroyer" are still prevalent in contemporary Nigeria. Specifically, many Nigerians, particularly relatives of those suffering from mental illness, seek help from herbal homes. Additionally, the practice of taking an oath of innocence at shrines, such as the Ikuku shrine, to uncover the cause of mental illness before a cure can be achieved remains a common practice in modern Nigeria. These examples highlight the intersection of traditional beliefs and practices with modern healthcare approaches in the country.

In traditional Nigerian communities, particularly in rural villages, the treatment of mental illness is often deeply intertwined with cultural beliefs and available resources. The film "Village Destroyer" illustrates this through the depiction of appeasement rituals aimed at cleansing the community of evil influences as a precursor to restoring an individual's sanity, as seen in Nwabueze's case. The choice of treatment is primarily driven by two factors: the accessibility of herbal remedies within the home environment and the prevailing cultural and traditional practices that guide the community's understanding and response to mental health issues.

The narrative of "Village Destroyer" illustrates how deeply ingrained cultural beliefs can shape perceptions and attitudes towards mental illness and its treatment. The kinsmen's decisions reflect a cultural framework where mental health is understood and addressed through traditional, community-driven methods. This perspective highlights the significant influence of culture on individuals' thoughts, feelings, and behaviours concerning mental health, particularly in the context of choosing appropriate interventions. The story underscores the idea that cultural norms and values play a crucial role in shaping how mental illness is perceived and managed within a community. The reason behind these choices is that the people's culture is the embodiment of a their collective knowledge, beliefs, values, and attitudes (Ampadu 34). These elements shape their behaviour and establish a shared way of life, which is then passed down through generations. This transmission ensures the continuity of cultural identity and practices.

Traditional healing homes have historically been a cornerstone of mental health treatment within many Nigerian communities. For generations, these homes served as accepted and vital resources for addressing mental illnesses among local populations. Even with the advent of modern medicine, many Nigerians continue to seek the guidance and treatment offered by traditional healers, highlighting the enduring relevance and trust placed in these practices. Traditional healing practices remain a significant aspect of mental healthcare for many Nigerians. Relatives of patients often vouch for the effectiveness of these traditional methods, which involve herbal remedies and spiritual interventions. These treatments are typically sought after consultation with supernatural forces believed to influence the physical world, reflecting the enduring cultural value placed on traditional approaches to health and well-being. In contemporary Nigeria, due to limited access to and affordability of orthodox mental health facilities, many individuals in local communities turn to herbalist homes. These traditional healers offer accessible and cost-effective treatments using traditional medicines, making them a trusted and viable alternative for those who cannot afford or reach conventional healthcare. The proximity and established trust between herbalists and local populations further contribute to their role as a primary source of mental healthcare for many Nigerians.

"Village Destroyer" highlights the resilience of traditional practices in Nigerian communities, specifically focusing on the Ugbakala community. It emphasizes that traditional Nigeria possesses established methods for crime control, that leads to mental health recovery which are deeply rooted in its social structure. These mechanisms include the involvement of elder's councils, chiefs, village heads, and the practice of oath-taking. These entities and practices play a crucial role in interpreting and enforcing the community's code of conduct, thereby preserving the cultural norms and behaviors passed down through generations. The perception that Nigerians blindly adhere to cultural traditions and traditional medicine when treating mental illness is inaccurate. Therefore, the values for African (Nigerian) culture and tradition as well as the "tested potency of traditional medicine" (Adjeketa, 2024) in the treatment of a mental illness are not mythical, and modern Nigerians are not enslaved to the practices described in "Village Destroyer"; instead, they base their treatment decisions on their understanding of the underlying causes of the illnesses, and many are influenced by their fear of using outdated medications and the lack of qualified medical professionals. Their approach to mental health care reflects a blend of respect for cultural values and a pragmatic assessment of available healthcare options. The decision-making process is influenced by a shared value for tradition and culture.

"Village Destroyer" highlights the significant role of oath-taking within traditional justice systems. This custom serves as a mechanism for discerning guilt and innocence in disputes,

ultimately aiming to maintain social equilibrium and cohesion (Aniekan Etim Nana 2020). Oath-taking is presented not just as a legal process, but as a vital component of social order, helping to expose wrongdoing and uphold community values. Village Destroyer puts forward the cultural practice of oath-taking as a swift method for resolving disputes and securing justice, particularly in cases involving individuals with mental illness. This practice underscores the community's reliance on traditional methods of justice and dispute resolution

In traditional Nigerian society, oath-taking is a practice that evokes significant fear. Decisions regarding the treatment of mental illness within these communities, as illustrated by the experiences of Nwabueze's kinsmen and his relatives, are shaped by a complex interplay of factors. These include individual preferences, deeply ingrained cultural and traditional beliefs, and the practical consideration of accessibility – often leading families to seek help from the nearest available resource during a crisis. This highlights how cultural norms and immediate circumstances significantly influence healthcare choices for the mentally ill in this context. The narrative of "Village Destroyer," particularly through the actions and decisions of the kinsmen, highlights the significant role culture plays in shaping individuals' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Specifically, the story underscores how cultural beliefs and values can profoundly influence people's perceptions and attitudes towards mental illness and, consequently, their choices regarding treatment options. The kinsmen's actions demonstrate a cultural framework where mental health is viewed through a specific lens, impacting their decisions about where and how to seek help for those affected.

The perception that Nigerians blindly adhere to cultural traditions and traditional medicine when treating mental illness is inaccurate. Instead, treatment decisions are often rooted in an understanding of the perceived causes of the illness (Adjeketa, 2024), coupled with concerns about the efficacy of older medications and the availability of qualified medical personnel. This approach reflects a blend of respect for cultural values and a pragmatic assessment of available healthcare options. The decision-making process is influenced by a shared value for tradition and culture.

CONCLUSION

In contemporary Nigeria, a multifaceted approach exists in addressing mental health challenges. This includes herbal homes, appeasement rituals, and orthodox treatment centers. Due to the limited accessibility of orthodox facilities, particularly in rural areas, herbal homes often serve as the primary option for families facing a mental health crisis. The practice of seeking guidance and solutions from the supernatural is a deeply ingrained cultural norm, influencing treatment decisions. The feeling of satisfaction attained from due consultation from the supernatural in a case of mental illness is a shared custom among many Nigerians in traditional and modern Nigeria. Ultimately, the treatment path chosen for mental illness in Nigeria is not fixed but rather adapts to the dynamic cultural landscape, offering a range of options.

In Nigeria, the care and recovery of individuals with mental illness extend beyond immediate family members. The broader community, encompassing friends and extended family, plays a crucial role in the decision-making process. This collaborative approach aims to ensure the well-being and recovery of the affected individual. Furthermore, traditional beliefs often incorporate consultation with spiritual forces, which influences the selection of appropriate and effective treatment methods for mental health conditions. This blend of community support and spiritual guidance shapes the landscape of mental healthcare in both traditional and modern Nigerian contexts. Appeasement rituals are practiced to purify the physical world, which is believed to be

desecrated by humans engaging in diabolic acts that cause suffering. The core belief is that mental illnesses, especially those considered cursed, require the placation of the supernatural world to restore harmony and achieve a complete cure. Ultimately, the decision to seek treatment for mental illness in Nigeria, whether through traditional herbalist shrines or modern hospitals, depends on individual choice and trust in the chosen method.

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Consent to Publish: Recorded Verbal Informed Consent for participation for the study was obtained from participants for their oral interview and opinions to be published. The audio record is with the author and would be made available on reasonable request.

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