



# Traditional Igbo Belief in Causes of Disease: An Evaluation

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## Abstract

The mystical causes of diseases related with the Igbo traditional belief system are briefly investigated in this research. The specific goals are to look at mystical/spiritual reasons and techniques of fighting diseases, as well as their benefits and drawbacks in terms of disease therapy. For data analysis, the study used a qualitative phenomenological research design and a descriptive approach. Personal interviews were the major source of data collecting, whereas library materials were the secondary source. According to the study, several mystical forces in Igbo cosmology, sorcerers, *Ogbanje*, curses arising from the violation of taboos and oaths are to be blamed for untimely deaths and sicknesses befalling people. As a result, even in the face of western Germ theory, the Igbo belief in mystical causes of disease has proven that Germ theory, as far as the Igbo traditional conception of disease causation is concerned, does not satisfy the Igbo belief in what causes diseases, as some diseases have defied western medication. The study proposes, among other things, that hospitals in Nigeria should take into account mystical agents as well as pathogenic agents in order to provide proper and adequate treatment for the people who believe in such traditional approached

**Keywords:** *Ogbanje*, Mystical poisoning, Igbo traditional belief, ancestral curse, spirituality.

## Introduction

Disease is one of the most significant difficulties and challenges that humans face in each generation. It appears to have resulted in more deaths and grief than any other life-threatening event, such as a car accident or a plane disaster. Again, definitions of the term disease are yet to be stated in many medical dictionaries. A disease, according to the World Health Organization (WHO, 1946), is essentially the polar opposite of health. "Health is a condition of total physical, mental, and social well-being, not only the absence of disease or infirmity," (WHO, 1946). Disease, on the other hand, is defined by Wehmeier (2000) as a disruption of structure or function in a human, animal, or plant that creates specific symptoms or affects a specific place and is not just the result of physical injury. As a result, diseases are illnesses that affect people, animals, or plants and may lead to their extinction. Human beings become ill in one manner or another, and as a result, seek treatment based on their preferences (traditional-medical approaches or western medical treatment). In present-day Nigeria, the Igbo and Igbo-speaking people are predominantly located in the south-eastern states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo (Anizoba, 2020:1). The Igbo people believe in a creator- god, whom they call *Chukwuokike Abiama* (Almighty God). Although the Igbo Traditional Religion is not opposed to western medical therapy or healing, its adherents believe that particular disorders, such as Elephantiasis and Epilepsy, are incurable by western medicine. As a result, traditional drugs are sometimes used in herbal home practices to



treat some of these disorders. Again, certain infections, such as the Human Immuno Deficiency Virus (HIV) / Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), Ebola, and Corona virus, are reported to have defied both orthodox and traditional therapies, and as a result, the individual affected must manage the illness. Mystical and traditional medicine are two of the most widely used and acknowledged approaches of treating ailments. In Igbo Traditional Religion, it is believed that there are magical energies in the universe that can be tapped and used to produce various results, both good and harmful (Omeregbe, 1999). Some people, according to Omeregbe, have gained access to these forces (supernatural powers) and use them (page). These magicians and traditionalists some people use them for beneficial reasons, such as healing and resolving problems. Priest-physicians are among them. Some people, on the other hand, use their abilities for malevolent ends, like harming and infecting others. These could be witches and sorcerers who use supernatural forces to wreak harm. In this manner, the Igbo Traditional idea of disease and illness is usually linked to gods, divinities, or spiritual forces. Humans can also manipulate some factors in order to produce diseases or sicknesses in their fellow humans.

Western medicine and medical practices, on the other hand, have a very different understanding of disease causation than Igbo Traditional Religion. According to Last (2007:10), the traditional view of disease origins is largely based on "Germ theory." According to Waller (2004:10), diseases are produced by microorganisms that are sometimes referred to as germs. These germs get into the human body and cause a variety of ailments. Even in the face of widespread Western medical methods, the Igbo in modern times, continue to believe adamantly in mystical causes of disease (Ilogu, 1987:12; Ngong, 2009:12). The question then becomes whether diseases are produced by mystical energies as per the Igbo belief system or germs as per western germ theory. According to Informant 1 (2020), it is the responsibility of the medicine man (herbalist or *dibia*) in most Igbo traditional medical practice to first determine the mystical origin of a certain sickness through necromancy before treating it with appropriate herbs. The western germ hypothesis, on the other hand, associates each disease with a specific causative agent, such as a virus, bacteria, or other pathogen.

The study focuses on Igbo traditional ideas about mystical disease . In Igbo society, diseases are sometimes linked to supernatural forces such as witchcraft, sorcery, ogbanje (repeater) fear, ancestral curses, and poisoning unlike Western germ theory where every disease causation are linked to one bacteria, fungi etc.

## **Methodology**

The study adopted a qualitative phenomenological research design and descriptive method of data analysis. Personal interviews formed the primary sources of data collection while library materials and a range of literature were the secondary sources. For the primary sources, 7 informants were chosen at random for the interview. They were given code names which range from informants 1 to 7. These informants were diverse in terms of distribution of five states of Igbo land, gender, occupation, and religious affiliation with particular regards to Christianity and African Traditional Religion. The interview questions were semi-structured. This allowed the researcher to follow up on similar groups of interview questions based on the respondent's responses. All relevant issues guiding the ethical conduct of interview were followed. It was made known to the informants that there was no payment of any sort for their participation and that the information obtained from them would be solely used for this research study. The period of the research was from 2017 to 2020 when field work was conducted for the research. The participants were not obliged to participate and did so entirely voluntarily and they remained anonymous throughout.

## **Operational definition of the terms**



**Mysticism:** According to Bouyer (1981:15), the name "mysticism" comes from the Greek word "muo," which means "to conceal." 'Mystical' was a term used in the Hellenistic world to describe "secret" religious rites. Mysticism is described as "hidden" metaphorical interpretations of Scriptures and secret presences, such as that of Jesus at the Eucharist, in early Christian beliefs. The phrase was only later coined to refer to "mystical theology," which included direct encounters with the divine or Supreme Being. Jantzen (1995:5) categorised mystical experiences and their natures in many faiths and mystical traditions; he inquired as to how much a mystic's language and culture influence mystical experiences, and whether mystical experiences provide evidence for the reality of their contents. Turner (1996:5), on the other hand, questioned the focus on experience in favor of exploring the full mystical complex.

Without a doubt, Bouyer (1981) summed it up when he stated that the term "mysticism" often refers to a set of beliefs and practices relating to a personal encounter with the divine. Much, but not all, mystical thought and practice is based on or draws on formal religious teachings, emphasizing reflective, introspective, and meditative techniques as the keys to increasing perception and awareness, which will eventually lead to knowledge of and communion with the divine. As a result, mysticism entails knowing about the spiritual or hidden realm. Most people who have the knowledge have utilized it for positive purposes such as treating the ill, forecasting tomorrow, and so on, whereas some have used it to cause tragedies, sicknesses, and diseases to their fellow human beings.

**Disease:** There is no proper definition of the term disease in many medical dictionaries. According to WHO (1946), however, disease is merely the polar opposite of health. "Health is a condition of total physical, mental, and social well-being, not only the absence of disease or infirmity"(WHO, 1946:6). Diseases, on the other hand, are ailments that harm a person, animal, or plant, according to Wehmeier (2000:220). As a result, diseases are illnesses that affect people, animals, or plants and may lead to their extinction.

**Western theory of Germ:** The western notion of germs as a cause of disease, point to microbes as the primary cause of disease. Henderson and Bernard (1999:1-12), view these microorganisms as too tiny to be observed without microscope magnification. As a result, both Waller (2004:12)and Last (2007: 10) believe that these microscopic creatures can infect humans, animals, or other live hosts. Diseases can be spread via their growth and reproduction within their hosts. For the sake of this work, Germ theory is the empirical belief that diseases are caused by germs.

### **Diseases with a mystical cause**

Many mystical causal agents of diseases, including magic and medicine, witches and wizards were tapped and employed to bring about some results, good or bad, according to Omoregbe (1999:10) in African Traditional Religion. Many of those who wield these abilities do so both positively and negatively. It is positive when it is used to bring about specific beneficial acts such as healing, solving tough difficulties, and curing diseases; and it is negative when it is used to give people sickness and diseases. (Informant 2, September 10, 2020) According to Igbo Traditional Religious thinking, some sicknesses are supposed to be the result of supernatural influences. Some diseases are supposed to be caused by unseen forces or agents, especially in African traditional belief. Such forces include ancestral curses, manipulation by corrupt and evil individuals, witches, sorcerers, and poison, as addressed in the work. As a result, when diseases hit a person or a group of people, it is common to seek the services of a medicine man, also known as *dibia* among the Igbo, and this is in order to determine the forces underlying the diseases people are suffering from through divination. Even among the educated and informed in modern times, this is still widely practiced.



Traditional Igbo beliefs hold that medicine men, herbalists known as *dibias*, first determine the mystical (spiritual) source of a disease before treating it with medicines (Informant 3, 2020). In this way, the belief in mystical causes of disease addresses both the spiritual and physical aspects of human beings. This is due to the Igbo people's worldview, which holds that the physical and spiritual worlds interact and intersect. The belief in mystical causes of diseases, according to (Mbiti, 1969:20; Ugwu & Ugwueye, 2004:10; Akrong, 2011:10), feeds into Africans' idea that there is always a spiritual cause of sickness and even death. This idea is still widely held in modern times, for example, among the Igbo tribe of Nigeria. It is not uncommon to see an Igbo man seek traditional medicinal treatment after receiving medical attention for a sickness that does not respond to western therapy after a short period of time. Of course, such an Igbo man's resort to traditional medicine is based on the concept that "*oriaagbaro aka*" (there are mystic causes of diseases). As a result, they require the Dibia's (*dibiaafa* – visionaries or seers) spiritual vision to discover the mystical source of the ailment. When an Igbo person believes he has offended the gods or that he is being pursued by foes, this becomes much more pronounced. In certain circumstances, this belief proves to be correct. Even in the face of Western orthodox Germ theory, resorting to belief in mystic origins of disease demonstrates that germ theory, as far as the traditional Igbo notion of disease causes is concerned, cannot truly satisfy the Igbo belief in disease causes.

### **Magic and Medicine as a disease causation**

Ekwunife (2007:5) describes magic as the magician's confident command of all visible and invisible elements to fulfill his or her immediate needs (good or bad) to produce sickness and disease through spell incantations and utterances. Magic and medicine, according to Awolalu and Dopamu (1979:8), are based on the concept that the universe contains vital forces or supernatural power that may be harnessed and controlled by man. Some of the Igbo traditional deities, according to Ugwu (1999:12), operate as executors of God's anger and can punish humans instantly if they violate God. The punishments according him, are intended to make the perpetrator repent and show some regret. Swollen legs, partial strokes, and other strange diseases and illnesses may be used by the gods as a kind of retribution for such defiant people. Medicine men may also utilize a technique known as infectious magic to cause disease in individuals, according to Ugwu and Ugwueye (2004:12). This, claim, is founded on the assumption that materials one has touched can be used against them. A man's strand of hair, footprint, nail, handkerchief, spittle, urine, and feces may all be used magically to injure him or cause him disease and sickness.

In a same vein, Ugwu (1999:4) believes that a woman's urine, hair, or a piece of fabric can be magically manipulated to gain her love or to inflict disease and sickness on her. A man's possessions can also be magically manipulated to gain his favor or even inflict sickness and disease on him. This is the primary reason why a traditional African takes proper care of everything that belongs to him, whether valuable or not, in order to prevent enemies from gaining access to them for malicious intentions.

### **Fear as a disease-causing agent**

Fear is a spirit-force, according to Madu (1999:8). Its goal is to deplete one's life force. No wonder, according to Madu (1999:30), one frequent trait of fear is that it can be violent at times and quite moderate at others. It can also be nascent at times. At this time, the victim has the option of gaining weight. When it becomes aggressive, however, the victim becomes gaunt, reclusive, and frequently has uncontrollable heart pounding. Spirits can also cause dread in smaller creatures like fowls, which is why it's common to witness a fowl fleeing from a spot that appears to be safe.



Madu believes that fear-inflicted ailments are resistant to both conventional and herbal treatment. This is a common symptom of such issues or diseases, and the only way to know for sure whether the issue is caused by the spirit is to consult the oracle through diviners.

The term phobia, according to Steimer (2002:5), is frequently used to refer to a fear of a specific trigger. However, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) Steimer (2002:5) recognizes different categories of phobias. They observed that Specific phobia is an irrational dread of a specific trigger that can lead to illness and disease. A severe dread of public humiliation and being singled out or judged by others in a social context, as well as feeling inferior or intimidated in any environment in which one finds himself or herself, is known as social phobia or social anxiety. For someone with social anxiety, huge social gatherings are daunting. To put it another way, not everyone can handle the crowd. It differs from shyness in that it can lead to illness and disease like making one to develop high blood pressure, headache etc. On the other hand, Agoraphobia is a dread of situations from which it would be difficult to escape if a person became really panicked, such as being in an elevator or being outside of one's home. It's sometimes misconstrued as a fear of open spaces, although it can also refer to being trapped in a small place, such as an elevator, or on public transportation.

People who suffer from agoraphobia are more likely to develop panic disorder, madness etc. Again, Simple phobias, according to King, Valença, and Nardi (2010:8), are defined as phobias that can be related to an identifiable cause that does not recur regularly in an individual's daily life, such as fear for snakes. As a result, they are unlikely to have a large impact on daily life. This sort of phobia can result in elevated blood pressure, uneasiness in one's environment as a result of a fear of one animal or another, and even a house or road disaster. This sort of fear can lead to psychological anguish or even lunacy, depending on the situation. Of course, one cannot distinguish between these phobias and fear as a spirit-force. What can be said here is that both of them can cause psychological disorders.

### **The curse of the ancestors as a source of disease**

In African religion, good health can also be understood in terms of one's relationship with his ancestors. Health among Africans is measured not only in terms of how it affects the living, but also in terms of how happy the ancestors are so that they can protect the living. According to Iroegbu (2005:19), good health is also thought to be the outcome of acceptable behavior, or living in accordance with the values and conventions of the society's traditions. In light of the foregoing, Magesa (1997:41) and Westerlund (2006:5) point out that traditional Africans explain or comprehend disease in a variety of ways. The first is the belief that disease is frequently brought on by demonic or evil spirits. Some people think that if their ancestors are mistreated, they will punish them with disease. As Nyamiti (1984:8) points out, when ancestors are neglected or forgotten by their relatives, they are considered to be enraged and punish them with disasters. Their rage is usually subdued by prayers and rituals involving food and drink. Life in Igbo Traditional Religion is built on maintaining the equilibrium between the visible and invisible worlds, according to (Informant 5, 2020). The greatest ethical task of humanity is to maintain this balance and harmony, as it defines the quality of life.

Ilogu (1974:12) believes that in traditional Igbo society, sufferings pains, or abnormalities in nature such as a child born blind, lame, dumb, deaf, with chronic disease, including all forms of suffering, come from some divinities as punishment for crimes (*aru*) committed either by the person suffering them, or by his parents. As Nyamiti(1984:5) points out that when ancestors are mistreated or forgotten by their relatives, they are thought to become enraged and deliver them disasters as punishment, including sicknesses. (1974:8;1984:5).



## Diseases caused by Witches and Sorcerers

Witchcraft and sorcery, according to Idowu (1973:20-32), are attempts by man to capture and control the supernatural resources of the cosmos for his personal profit. Ekwunife (2011:40) agrees with Idowu's opinion, stating that it is man's attempt to manipulate and control natural and supernatural realities through incantations, spells, gestures, and other taught practices in order to achieve unexpected events for his own selfish gain. Mbiti (1969:200) affirms the following:

Sorcery, on the other hand, is defined as the use of toxic materials in someone's food or drink. However, this is a matter of academic dexterity. People's sorcery in Africa refers to the anti-social use of mystical power, and sorcerers are the most dreaded, as they use all of their possessions to harm their targeted opponents.

Witchcraft, according to Anizoba (2021:4-8) is not a case of possession, in which a spirit, usually thought to be a bad spirit, takes control of a victim and utilizes the person to execute feats that are normally above the victims' capacity. Spell-casting and witchcraft, according to Olupona (2004:9), are also ways to inflict sickness. People with wicked powers, he claims, can make other people sick as a form of retribution if they perceive them as their adversaries or are disrespectful to them. Furthermore, many traditional African groups believe that certain illnesses that resist modern treatment might be passed along through witchcraft and other supernatural forces. These include barrenness, infertility, attacks by dangerous animals, bites by deadly snakes, persistent headaches, and recurring miscarriages (Obinna, 2012:6; Thorpe.1993:7). Witches and sorcerers, according to Anizoba (2021: 9), Mbiti (1970:6) are tremendous adversaries of human beings because they are believed to be an obstacle to their holistic progress. According to Informant 6, (2021), the witch causes devastation solely through spiritual means, without the use of tangible items. The victim of witchcraft would develop a mysterious sickness that medical doctors would be unable to diagnose or treat. All laboratory tests will show that the patient is in good health and that all of his organs are operating normally. But he is dying. He may be drained, and may complain of exhaustion. Generally, such patients are evacuated from hospitals and sent to traditional medicine men, who would quickly recognize the nature of the ailment and proceed to apply counter-energies (mystic) to neutralize the witch's forces (Omoregbem,1999:4) Sorcerers are thought to have the ability to inflict diseases on individuals in African belief systems. According to Awolalu and Dopamu (1979) Sorcery refers to bad or illegal magic. It is offensive and dreaded because it has the potential to kill, injure, or destroy life or property, to turn a joyful fate into an unpleasant one, and to disrupt the individual's and society's well-being (p.246). In a similar vein, Ekwunife (2011:8) states that a sorcerer uses a lethal concoction to carry out his or her evil deeds as described by Awolalu and Dopamu; but, if such an object is murdered in the process, the sorcerers who have projected their vital energy into them are in trouble.

Despite the western Germ theory of disease and its western medication, Mbiti (1969:4) observed that there are large volumes of literature on the subject of magic and witchcraft in Africa Igbo respectively. He goes on to say that the debate is concentrated on two opposing camps. According to Mbiti (1969:4), people who display their own ignorance, incorrect beliefs, exaggerated prejudices, and a negative attitude that belittles and despises the entire concept of mystical power belong in the vast camp. The alternative, he claims, is represented by a few academics who take seriously African perspectives, concerns, uses, and manipulations of power. He said that the majority of the skewed beliefs came from popular writers, missionaries, and colonial officials in Europe and America. Every African who has grown up in a traditional context will undoubtedly be familiar with this mystical power, which is frequently experienced or manifested in the form of sorcery, divination, witchcraft, and inexplicable phenomena that defy immediate scientific explanations. Mbiti (1969:4) recounts a story of an illness he witnessed in his



community that could not be cured through medical treatment in the hospital but was cured by a traditional medicine man. While commenting on the sorcery style of oppression, Mbiti (1969:18) noted that sorcery entails the use of toxic materials in food or drink.

Sorcery is associated with anti-social use of mystical power among African peoples, and sorcerers are among the most feared and despised members of society. It is feared that they will use a variety of methods to hurt others or their property. They send flies, snakes, lions, and other animals to attack or infect their adversaries, they spit and direct the spittle with secret incantations to damage someone, they dig up graves to extract human flesh or bones for use in their rituals, and they conjure spirits to attack or possess someone (Madu, 1999). Africans believe that the employment of this mystical power in the hands of a sorcerer, witch, or wizard causes all of the different maladies, misfortunes, sickness, accidents, tragedies, sufferings, dangers, and unhappy mysteries that they face or experience. It is here that we can see why a grieving mother whose child died of malaria may be unsatisfied with the scientific explanation that the child was stung by a mosquito carrying malaria parasites, causing the child to suffer and die of malaria. She will be curious as to why the mosquito stung her child rather than someone else. The only plausible explanation is that, that "someone" delivered the mosquito or used bad magic to harm her child. This is not a scientific explanation, but it is the reality for most Africans.

Although mosquitoes can be readily eliminated and many diseases avoided, accidents, barrenness, misfortunes, and other unpleasant experiences will always occur. These are not mere body sensations for Africans; they are intensely religious "mystical" experiences (Mbiti, 1969:4). People in the villages will freely discuss them since they are a part of their reality, regardless of what scientists and theologians claim. If you keep your ears open, you will hear the names of people being blamed for disasters, sickness, accidents, and various forms of misery in every village. Women are primarily blamed for bad events, and many women have suffered as a result of such accusations.

### ***Ogbanje as a disease causing agent in Igbo traditional believe***

According to Metuh (1970:10), Ogbanje (repeater) is regarded as a highly nasty person in Igbo society. He went on to say that they usually arrive as firstborn children to their parents, and that they keep dying and returning to the same parents, eliminating their chances of having more than one child at a time. This is something they do on purpose to punish their parents by inflicting them with miscarriages on a regular basis, as well as other illnesses and diseases. What is being said here is that these repeaters (Ogbanje) cause persistent miscarriage and various sicknesses and diseases to women, with the most common symptoms being infertility, barrenness, and miscarriages.

### **Breaking of Taboos and Oaths as a means of disease causation**

Many traditional healers and practitioners believe that breaking taboos is one of the ways that people get sick (Gyekye, 1995:10). Taboos are an integral aspect of traditional African religion. They are items or ways of life that a community or group of people prohibits (Isiramen, 1998:22). A social or religious custom preventing or restricting a certain conduct or forbidding affiliation with a specific person, place, or thing is known as a taboo (Westerlund, 2006:19). Taboos exist to ensure that the universe' moral structures remain intact for the benefit of humans (Magesa, 1997:16). Various communities have food and meat-related taboos. Disobeying these taboos could put the person(s) or community at risk of serious sicknesses. Despite the fact that they are all classified as taboos, they all have moral and ethical implications. The amazing element of many of these taboos, according to Informant 7 (2021), is that when one breaches one of them covertly, the person does not get away with it. The consequences inevitably manifest



themselves in the form of sickness and possibly death, either on the person(s) involved or on the entire community. Magesa (1997:10) coined the phrase "life force effect" to describe this phenomenon. Moral behavior, according to Magesa (1997:5), sustains and enhances one's life energy, whereas disobedience and disloyalty to ancestors' traditions weakens one's life power. As a result, the ancestors or spirits may punish a defaulter in the form of sickness and misfortune.

### **Spiritual Poisoning as cause of disease**

According to Umeanolue and Anizoba (2017:8), there are other ways of causing diseases that are clearly immoral, such as poisoning other people's food with a concocted potion or witchcraft, plotting to deprive a person of his rightful possession, duplicity, deep rooted anger that has the quality of poisoning relationships, and inability to restore what has been given to someone for safe custodianship.

### **Evaluation**

Western germ theory links every disease with a particular causative agent- such as a virus, bacteria and other pathogens. This therefore means that there is no room for the belief in ancestral curses, magic, fear, breaking of taboos etc. as causes of diseases as the Igbo people see it. Hence it can be argued that while traditional belief in mystical causes of disease in Igbo Traditional Religion can be said to be unscientific, that of western germ theory is scientific and suits the modern ways of thinking and belief. Critically speaking, the belief in germ theory as principal cause of diseases leaves much to be desired. It is a proven fact that in today's Igbo world, there are diseases which have defied western medication and, their causes also seem more mystical than scientific. Among the Igbo, there have been cases where diseases defied western medical practices and sometimes, medical practitioners advise patients to seek traditional help, thereby proving the efficacy of the Igbo belief in mystical causes of disease.

### **Recommendations**

In view of the findings of this research work, the following recommendations were made;

- i. Hospitals in Nigeria and beyond should take into cognizance the mystical agents such as witchcraft, witch doctors, superstitions, breaking of oaths, ancestral curses, fear and so on of disease causations as in pathogenic agents as reflected in Germ theory for their proper and adequate medication.
- ii. The Nigerian Herbalist Association should let their members know that there pathogenic agents such as bacteria, virus, fungi, protozoa and so on that also cause disease, as they lay more emphasis on mystical agents that cause disease such as witchcraft, witch doctors, fear, breaking of taboos, ancestral curses and so on, since they claim to cure all.
- iii. Federal government of Nigeria should encourage the employment of mystical experts in government and private hospital in the country. These mystical experts such as necromancers, witch doctors, herbalists and so on, will take charge of the sickness and diseases associated with mystical causes for holistic diagnosis and proper treatment / healing.
- iv. Parents as first "teachers" should teach their children about the pathogenic agents of disease causation as reflected in Germ theory and how some cultural agents otherwise known as mystical agents can also make individuals susceptible to diseases.
- v. Curriculum planners should integrate "the multi-factorial nature of diseases" into the school Biology curriculum for secondary school students as well as tertiary institutions to





- have broad knowledge about diseases, their causative agents and preventions. By so doing awareness will be created right from the early days in school to adulthood.
- vi. People should be encouraged to visit both medical practitioners as well as traditional doctors when they are sick for proper medication to treat their symptoms. This is because some religious beliefs and practices are against western medication while some are against traditional ways of healing by the virtue of their religious beliefs and practices.

Finally, the study recommends an integration of mystical and western doctors in our tertiary institutions to ensure proper documentations and continuity in knowledge on chronic diseases.

**Contribution:** According to the study, several mystical forces within and outside African cosmology, such as witches and sorcerers, *Ogbanje*, curses arising from the violation of taboos and oaths, are to blame for untimely deaths and sicknesses, even in the face of western germ theory.

## Conclusion

In Igbo traditional beliefs and medicine, the investigation looked into the mysterious causes of ailments. Diseases are seen to be the result of mystical energies in Igbo Traditional Religious thought. These mysterious energies can be summoned and used to inflict disease on humanity. All ailments are supposed to be caused by unseen forces or agents, especially in Igbo traditional belief. These include ancestral curses, manipulation by corrupt and evil individuals, witches and sorcerers, poison, and so on, as addressed in this work. In contrast, the western germ theory associates each disease with a specific causative agent, such as a virus, bacteria, or other pathogen. This means that, in the eyes of the Igbo people, ancestral curses, magic, *Ogbanje*, dread, and breaking of taboos as causes of sickness have no place. However, the belief in germ theory as the primary cause of disease leaves a lot to be desired. It is a known reality that there are diseases in today's African world that defy western medicine and whose causes are more mystical than scientific.

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