



# Kpakpando Journal of History and International Studies

## The History of Trado-Medical Practice in Eggon Land since 1850: Some Health Problems and their Treatments

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*Kpakpando Journal of History  
and International Studies: Vol.  
1 no. 4 July, 2024. ISSN:  
2437-1750*

### Abstract

The study examines the history of trado-medical practice in Eggon land since 1850. Some health problems and their treatment'. It captures the rich but neglected cultural aspect of the Eggon people by many historians. The practice of traditional medicine in Eggon land has been viewed in retrospect to the present, showing some basic principles of such practice. Some health problems common to the people have been identified and the traditional recipes for treating such discussed. What happens to this long existing aspect of the Eggon culture in the face of modernity? Should the practice of traditional medicine in Eggon land be jettisoned, preserved or improved upon for the sake of combining the challenges posed by health in Eggon land in particular and the world in general?. The objective of the study is to document the rich history of the Eggon people and to contribute to the history of trado-medical practice in Nigeria and that of Eggon people. The study adopt both primary and secondary method of data collection and analysis, with more emphassis on oral sources. Based on the findings of this research, some recommendations were proffered.

**Keywords:** History, Trado-Medical Practice, Eggon Land, Health Problems, Treatments

## **Introduction**

The of trado-medical practice in Eggon land is as old as the existence of man on earth. This is because man, from the very primitive stage, is besieged with many health challenges that propelled him to find ways of treating them as rightly captured by Risse and Chotkowski:

Sickness, however defined, has been an inescapable companion of the human race. Coping with pain and disability challenges every culture, promoting the development of strategies designed to explain the events, given meaning to life and death, and ameliorate suffering.<sup>1</sup>

It is in view of the above that medical practice of whatever kind deserves to be given utmost attention to enable mankind contain the unending challenges of ill-health, since health is the most prized commodity and the basis of every joy. The Eggon people, like other groups of people in Nigeria have developed a complex knowledge of medicinal herbs for the treatment of various ailments that have been threatening their existence. Animal and mineral substances as well as incantations are also used in the treatment of health cases in Eggon land.

## **Some Health Problems and Their Treatments**

Human societies since the beginning of ages are being confronted with myriad of health problem and as such, they relentlessly struggle against it. The Eggon people in their determination to survive amid the ravages of diseases thought out some ways of combating the situation. The focus of this study is on some health cases in Eggon land and how such are treated traditionally since 1850. The following are the health cases and their treatments.

- i. **Dysentery:** This is a bowel inflammation from infection either with shigella organisms (bacillary dysentery) or with Amoeba (amoeba dysentery). The symptoms include frequent passage of stools containing blood and mucus, abdominal pain, fever and general upset.<sup>2</sup>

**Treatment:** The bark of izin is usually boiled and given to the patient. Also guava leaves, eko are chewed raw and the juices is usually swallowed or the leaves are pounded, put into the water and the juice extracted and drank.<sup>3</sup>

- ii. **Catarrh (APKho):** It is caused by virus that is spread through the small drops of saliva found suspended in the air we breathe. It is spread during cold and wet season because the cold causes the blood vessels to constrict (Shrink), making it difficult for the blood to reach tissues, thus decreasing local immunity symptoms. The incubation period is two to five days before the appearance of the symptoms. It includes burning sensation in the nostrils and pharynx, a general feeling of weakness and running nose among others.<sup>4</sup>

**Treatment:** The leaves of gbara, akimakpa and lemon grass are usually boiled, drank and steamed twice a day depending on the severity of the catarrh.<sup>5</sup>

- iii. **Headache:** This is as a result of pain signals caused by interaction between the brain, blood vessels and surrounding nerves. It is caused by environmental factors such as stress, pollutions, noise, weather changes among others; or dietary factors like alcohol,

artificial sweeteners, caffeine etc. Some women also feel headache before, during or immediately after menstruation.<sup>6</sup>

**Treatment:** Ashlo (a strong smelling plant) is cut and rubbed on the head by those with the efficacious hands.<sup>7</sup>

- iv. **Abdominal Pain (Lolo akpiki):** It is the discomfort at the abdominal region such as soreness, tenderness or cramping in the abdomen. Causes include alcohol, some spicy or fried foods, food high in fat, heavy or late meals, appendicitis, and hernia among others.<sup>8</sup>

**Treatment:** The bark of emoa or eze (mahogany) is soaked and drank or the bark of mahogany is processed in to powder and applied into water and drang.<sup>9</sup>

- v. **Measles (Akphofegna):** A highly contagious viral infection spread in droplets of water that comes from the sneeze or cough of an infected person. The incubation period is from ten days to two weeks, after which, the flu-like symptoms may develop,

including nasal stuffiness and discharge, sneezing and coughing, irritated eyes, a sear throat and a fever that is as high as 104<sup>0</sup>f, which remains at that level for a week. A few days after the onset of symptoms, tiny white spots with red rings appear on the tongue and the lining of the mouth, particularly on the inside of the cheeks opposite the molars.<sup>10</sup>

**Treatment:**The head of dried catfish (daren) is soaked in hot water and the water given to the patient to drink or sand is fried and water added to it. The patient is administered the water to drink and bath or the seeds of fegnaangbla (aspecie of cowpea) are grinded, mixed with palm oil and rubbed on the patient's body. Another treatment for measles is that palm wine is given to the patient to drink and bath with. The result of the above treatment is that they hasten the appearance of tiny white spots on the body which is a great step toward recovery. The patient's mouth is

then washed regularly with water using finger while care is taken to ensure that the patient do not swallow the water, especially in large quantity. This regular washing of the spots in the mouth is to prevent the swallowing of the pus released by the ripe spots.<sup>11</sup>

- vi. **Beriberi (Evma):** This is a disease resulting from a deficiency of thiamine (Vitamin B), a nutrient essential to the metabolism of carbohydrates and proteins and which affect the nervous system, such as muscular spasm (Sharppain) and paralysis. The disease exists in three major forms wet beriberi characterized by heart failure and tissue swelling, dry beriberi, which causes central nervous system manifestation, peripheral nerve dysfunction and numbness in the hand and feet; and infantile beriberi, a leading cause of death in infants between two and five months old.<sup>12</sup>

**Treatment:**Short incisions are made on the patient's left chest (the position of the heart), same

- side at the back and sometimes the incisions are also made on the left side at the lower abdomen. The powdery substance prepared from the bark of avugu fetched from the western side is then applied to the incisions. The bark is also boiled with red potash added to it and administered to the patient to drink.<sup>13</sup>
- vii. **Poisoning (Ekpha):** The introduction of a poisonous substance into the body through inhalation, ingestion (swallowing) and skin absorption.<sup>14</sup>
- Treatment:** The patient is given plenty of palm oil (masin) to drink and vomiting is induced. In case of skin absorption, affected part is washed thoroughly and balm applied.<sup>15</sup>
- viii. **Abscess (Awhili):** This is also known as boil. It occurs as a result of microbes entering the tissue and provoking an inflammatory (swollen) type of defensive reaction, which generally ends up producing pus. Its symptoms include high body temperature and general unwell.<sup>16</sup>
- Treatment:** It is treated by rubbing the boil with oil processed from shear butter seed (waligiezheba). This causes the boil to form pus quickly and aids in pressing out pus through local surgery. Hot palm oil is then applied to the cut until finally healed.<sup>17</sup>
- ix. **Whitlow:** This is an infection of the pulp of the fingertip usually from deep prick. The symptoms include, dull pain redness and swelling of the finger at the initial stage, but later throbbing and severe tenderness. This leads to abscess formation necessitating surgical drainage.<sup>18</sup>
- Treatment:** The leaves of broom weed (dnandzi) are pounded and rubbed on the finger. This hastens the formation of abscess and pus thereby cutting short period of throbbing. The pus is then removed surgically and hot palm oil is applied to the wound to complete the healing.<sup>19</sup>

- x. **Conjunctivits (Lolo ayi):** It is a viral disease which causes the inflammation of conjunctiva, the membranes lining inside of the eye and the eyelids symptoms include gritty sensation as if there were sand in the eye, red watery eyes, sensitivity to bright light and the eyelids may be stuck together in the morning as a result of dry secretions forming a crust (conjunctiva catarrh).<sup>20</sup>

**Treatment:** A small branch of andzayi tree is cut with leaves, dipped in water and sprinkled on patient but only by the efficacious hand or the young leaves of dzagele (*moringaoleifera*) is squeezed and the juice dropped into the eye.<sup>21</sup> The patient can also wash his/her eyes with water of fermented cassava.<sup>22</sup>

- xi. **Waist Pain (Lolo usin):** This is a severe pain at the waist which could be as a result of the following conditions: hard labour that requires one to bend down regularly, child bearing labour by women that usually makes bending or walking difficult.

**Treatment:** Sturban grass (Izhugu) is knotted and used with red lump of soil (ambuguabams) to rub on the waist and stretched. This is done only by those that have the efficacious hands or the bark of ashe and the root of Nyedu are boiled for drinking.<sup>23</sup>

- xii. **Snakebite:** The victims of snakebites experience general weakness of the body, tingling lips and tongue.<sup>24</sup>

**Treatment:** As a first aid, a rag is tight strongly some few inches above the bitten part especially if it were the limbs. This stops the venom from circulating quickly round the body. Then the powdery substance applied to it and administered to the patient to drink.<sup>25</sup> Also, the bark of envo, the root of agumugba, the bark of shear butter tree and garlic are prepared into powdery substance and administered to patient to drink. This could also be drunk ordinarily for some time to keep snakes off from one's way.<sup>26</sup>

- xiii. **Scorpion Stink:** This involves introduction of poison into the

body by a sting from scorpion causing very severe pain.

**Treatment:** As a first aid the stunk limb is tight strongly with a rag few inches above the affected area to prevent the poison from circulating. They could hold the affected part and rub it from the top towards the point of the stunk and the pain gradually goes off or the affected area is given some cuts and onion is chopped and rubbed on the area. Moreso, the leaves of the hot tiny pepper are rubbed on the affected area by those with the efficacious hand. Yet the root of dzagele (*Meringa oleifera*) is chewed and rubbed in the affected area and the juice from such root is also swallowed.<sup>27</sup>

- xiv. **Gonorrhoea (Egze):** A sexually transmitted disease which causes the discharge of pus and mucus and can lead to salpino. In women, it is the narrowing of the urethra and that of urine tube in men. If not treated well, it could lead to infertility in both sexes.<sup>28</sup>

**Treatment:** The roots of male engba, dzagelo (*moringaoleifera*), gbara and iroko tree are tied up and boiled with red potash and drank twice in a day until it is certified that the disease is gone.<sup>29</sup>

- xv. **Piles (Akno):** Piles are caused by increased pressure in the veins of the anus (varicose vein). The most common of this pressure is straining during bowel movements, but piles can also be caused by fits of coughing, vomiting, sneezing, constipation, prolonged sitting and arial infection. The symptoms of piles include rectal bleeding and piles are very common, especially during pregnancy and after child birth.<sup>30</sup>

**Treatment:** The bark of abmi, ebhomoawenshe and kaki are boiled and the hot water is inserted into the anus of the patient by a person that has the efficacious hand. However, the traditional practitioner could give the barks a touch of efficacy before giving them out to be used.<sup>31</sup>

xvi. **Difficulty in Child Delivery:**

This is a situation where by a pregnant woman experiences a prolonged labour.

**Treatment:** Broom weeds (Dnandzi) are removed, pounded roughly, boiled to warmth and administered to a woman to drink during child labour. If this method fails, the woman is asked whether she had extramarital sex; if she replies in the affirmative, she would be required to mention such person(s), and some rituals are performed by the traditional priest (ashum), after which she delivers her baby. However, the woman is asked to pay certain amount of fine afterwards. But if she had extra-marital sex and she decline to confess, she could die during the course of the labour.<sup>32</sup> Although this is hardly the case in Eggon land today.

xvii. **Retained Placenta (Ibiazigimbo):** This is a situation where a woman delivers and the placentas is not discharged afterwards.

**Treatment:** Juice is extracted from the leaves of egbaba and administered to the woman to drink and she is hit moderately at the hip by the birth attendant.<sup>33</sup>

xviii. **Internal Bleeding**

**(Manzhiadzueshen):** Internal bleeding is the trapping of blood internally as a result of some internal ruptured arteries caused by accident or beating.

**Treatment:** The leaves of envo are boiled and administered to the patient to drink and bath.<sup>34</sup>

xix. **Rheumatism (Vuoloegaba):**

Rheumatism is a term used to describe any kind of pain or stiffness in the muscles or joints from minor aches to pain that is related to disorders such as rheumatoid arthritis (Inflation in the joint usually swollen, redness, pain and restricted movement).<sup>35</sup>

**Treatment:** The bark of akno (rama) is boiled and the patient baths with the water. The he/she rubs the oil extracted from the shear butter seeds (waligiezheba).<sup>36</sup>



- xx. **EmbagaAweyele:** This literally means toad wizardry. It is a situation whereby part of the body develops a swelling that traps in some blood.

**Treatment:** A toad is caught alive and the stomach rubbed severally on the affected part. The trapped blood is absorbed by the toad in the process and the stomach reddens. If not enough, another toad is caught and the process repeated. The toad is then released after the treatment.<sup>37</sup>

- xxi. **Bone Setting (huakupu):** Bone setting is the process of putting in place or re-fixing a dislocated or fractured bone.

**Treatment:** The roots of *evomo* is pounded and boiled. A rag is then dipped in a hot water and processed upon the dislocated joint or the point of fracture at the same time trying to fix back the bone. After the hot water treatment and ointment, a composite of palm kernel oil (*waligingbakubu*), shear butter oil (*waligiezheba*), liniment and the fat of python (*onvoboeshen*) is

rubbed generously on the affected area. Then a splinter is put on the area for support and is tied up. The process is repeated at intervals of three days or one week until it is certified that the bone is properly healed.<sup>38</sup>

### **Problems of Trado-medical Practices in Eggon land**

The practice of traditional medicine in Eggon land since 1850 is not without problems. In the pre-colonial period, Ikuamgba remarks that problems associated with traditional medicine were handful such as immorality on the part of some practitioners. However, as time progresses the problems confronting the practice increased steadily.

One of the basic problems affecting such practices is the extinction of some species of medicinal plants. Ikuamgba lamented that some medicinal plants in earlier times are hardly found today.<sup>39</sup> Some factors responsible for such extinction are the ever-increasing pressure on land for cultivation and constructions, bush burning and the use of herbicides among others.

Another problem confronting the practice of traditional medicine in Eggon land is the introduction of the western type health care

system into Eggon land in the colonial period by the Christian missionaries and today these modern health care centers are located in many parts of the land. The patronage enjoyed by traditional medicine in Eggon land before the advent of orthodox medicine reduced appreciably. Thus, most practitioners of western medicine discouraged patients from patronizing traditional medicine.<sup>40</sup>

The influence of Christianity in Eggon land reduced the level of prominence commanded by tradition medicine in the area. This new and foreign religion has taken a dim view of some practices associated with traditional medicine and these include animal sacrifices, incantations, consultation of mediums, libation etc. As such, Christianity bars her faithful from visiting practitioners they see as engage in unbiblical practices. Faithful who contravene such injunction are placed under church discipline. Islam also frowns at some practices associated with traditional medicine. Many youths in Eggon land today view traditional medical practices with contempt. They consider it a mere dirty job, crude and non-curative, hence they allow the elders die with the knowledge. Some of them who inherited or learnt the practice became

careless with it and the knowledge gradually disappears.<sup>41</sup>

Moreover, most practitioners of traditional medicine in Eggon land do not have a better place to take care of their patients and as such, most patients would come, receive medicine or treatment and go back to their homes or the practitioner visits a patient to give treatment in case of protracted illness. Yet in other cases, patients with severe cases coming from distant places share tent with the practitioner or nearby.<sup>42</sup> This absence of accommodation or its poor state hinders close monitoring of patients by practitioners and complicates illnesses.

The lack of documentation of knowledge of traditional medicine in Eggon land also constitutes a major problem. Since this knowledge had not been documented from the beginning, it continues to degenerate over the years, as the mere verbal transmission of such is susceptible to forgetfulness.

## **Conclusion**

A number of health care common on Eggon land have been identified and discussed. In such discussion, we tried to explain such health cases, some of their possible causes and how such cases are treated traditionally using herbs, animals and mineral substances.

Also discussed in this paper are some of the problems affecting the practice of traditional medicine in Eggon land since 1850. These mostly human induced problems include the extinction of some species of medicinal plants, the introduction of western medicine, Christianity and Islam, cold attention given to the practice by many youths, lack of structures to take good care of patients and the grossly inadequate documents on how traditional medicine is being practiced in Eggon land.

### **Recommendations**

Based on findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- (i) The knowledge of trado-medical practice should be properly documented to ensure better continuity from one generation to another.
- (ii) Trado-medical practitioners should constitute themselves into strong union that would champion their course as well as regulate their practices
- (iii) Traditional medical practitioners should make sure that their medicines are hygienically prepared and at least the

environment which they operate should be kept clean

- (iv) The government should evolve ways of educating traditional medical practitioners on the rudiments of modern medicine
- (v) The dismissive attitude on the face value exhibited by some orthodox medical practitioners on traditional medicine should be discarded

### **Endnotes**

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