



Therapeutic Potency of the “Holy Mud and Water” in Selected African Initiated Churches in Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract. Western biomedicine is an explicit method to therapeutic illnesses with evidence-based treatment validated through biological research, with treatment administered via formally trained doctors, nurses, and other such licensed medical practitioners. In contrast, the African Initiated churches (AICs) see the therapeutic efficacy in restoring health in nature. Unfortunately, there were several attempts in the form of crusades to eliminate any ‘primeval knowledge’, and spirituality by the scientifically, economically and socially dominant western powers. Despite its significance, little research exists on the therapeutic efficacy of holy water in AICs. And besides the wide application of the sacred elements of mud and water, the therapeutic potency of it, remains poorly understood, leading to scepticism and mistrust. This knowledge gap necessitates an in-depth examination of holy water's role in AICs. This paper therefore is an attempt to show the therapeutic potency of the holy mud and water adopted as found in some African initiated churches in Rivers State, Nigeria for healing processes. The paper adopts the local content policy of Nigeria which was specifically designed to build domestic capacity relevant for service and product delivery; and encourage increase participation of local and indigenous institutions, ideas, knowledge and heritage for human socio-spiritual wellbeing as the theoretical tool to validate this research claims. A qualitative and descriptive method blended with ethnographic approach was employed to investigate the therapeutic potency of holy mud and water in three selected AICs. This study draws on symbolic interactionism as the theoretical frame and analytical mill. The results indicate that holy mud and water is perceived as a multifaceted healing agent, addressing spiritual, psychological, and physical ailments. Findings reveal that naturopathic (alternative) medicine such as the "Holy mud and water" are local wisdom and potent natural and spiritual objects for healing and wellbeing and recommends that indigenous knowledge such as this should be encouraged and harnessed as it is cost effective

accessible and easily available. Paper further recommends an integration of traditional healing practices into mainstream healthcare. There should be enhanced collaboration between the AICs and healthcare providers and conduct further research on the therapeutic potency of holy mud and water in Nigeria.

Keywords: Healing, Ritual, Therapeutic, Holy Mud and Water

1. Introduction

In the realm of traditional medicine and spiritual practices, the yes natural elements such as water and mud have been cornerstone of healing and wellness for centuries. In Africa, particularly in Nigeria where this work is situated, African Initiated Churches have long recognized the therapeutic potentials of holy water and mud, incorporating these elements into their spiritual practices and rituals. Holy water and mud have been revered for centuries in various cultures and religions for their perceived healing properties. These natural elements have been used in traditional medicine, spiritual practices and cultural rituals to promote physical, emotional and spiritual well-being. The therapeutic potentials of holy and mud lies in their unique properties which are believed to possess curative and restoration powers.

Holy water, often considered as sacred and purifying agent, is used in various religious traditions to cleanse and protect the body, mud and spirit. Its therapeutic properties are thought to derive from its spiritual potency, mineral content and temperature. Holy water is used to treat a range of ailments, from skin conditions and musculoskeletal disorders to digestive issues and immune system support. Mud, on the other hand, has been used for centuries to detoxify, cleanse and heal the body. Its therapeutic properties are attributed to its mineral content, temperature, and texture, like water, mud is also used to treat skin

disorders, pain etc. The combined use of the body water and mud is believed to enhance their individual therapeutic effects, promoting a holistic approach to healing. It also facilitates a deeper spiritual connection, enhance detoxification and cleansing, and promote overall wellbeing.

While the therapeutic potency of holy water and mud is deeply rooted in cultural and religious traditions, modern research has begun to uncover the scientific basis for their healing properties. Studies have shown that body/water and antioxidant properties which contribute to the therapeutic effects.

Despite the widespread application of the holy water and mud in some churches in media for therapeutic purposes, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding of their perceived therapeutic benefits, uses and cultural context. This knowledge gap hinders the integration of these traditional practices into mainstream healthcare, potentially limiting access to holistic wellness options for people seeking alternative or complementary therapies. Furthermore, the scarcity of empirical research on this area, raises concerns about the safety, efficiency and quality control of these traditional remedies, underscoring the need for a systematic investigation into the therapeutic potency of holy water and mud in these churches.

This paper, therefore, delve into the cultural and religious potency, therapeutic properties and applications, as well as the scientific research supporting their use. By re-examining the intersection of spirituality, traditional medicine and modern science, we can gain a deeper understanding of the healing potentials of these natural elements.

1.1 Research Objectives

- To examine the perceived therapeutic potency of holy water and mud in selected African Initiated Churches (AICs).
- To investigate the role of holy water and mud in addressing spiritual, psychological, and physical ailments among AIC members.
- To explore the symbolic significance and cultural relevance of holy water and mud in AIC therapeutic practices.
- To identify potential areas of integration between traditional AIC healing practices and mainstream healthcare systems.

1.2 Research Significance

Theoretical Significance

- **Contribution to African Spirituality:** This study enriches understanding of African spirituality, particularly in the context of AICs.

- **Advancement of Symbolic Interactionism:** By applying symbolic interactionism, this research deepens understanding of how individuals construct meaning around sacred symbols.

- **Integration of Traditional and Western Healing:** The study bridges the gap between traditional and Western healing practices, promoting cross-cultural understanding.

- **Expansion of Medical Anthropology:** This research contributes to medical anthropology by exploring the intersection of culture, spirituality, and health.

Practical Significance:

- **Informing Healthcare Policy:** Findings can inform healthcare policies on integrating traditional healing practices into mainstream healthcare.

- **Enhancing Cultural Competence:** The study promotes cultural competence among healthcare providers, improving service delivery to diverse populations.

- **Community Empowerment:** By documenting AIC healing practices, this research empowers communities to preserve and promote their cultural heritage.

- **Interfaith Dialogue:** This study facilitates interfaith dialogue, fostering greater understanding and collaboration between AICs and other religious groups.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Traditional Medicine and Spiritual Practices in Nigeria

Traditional medicine and spiritual practices have been an integral part of the healthcare system for centuries in Nigeria. Traditional healers use a combination of herbal remedies, rituals and spiritual practices to diagnose and treat various ailments. In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the therapeutic potentials of holy water and mud in some African initiated churches in Nigeria. These churches have a unique blend of traditional spirituality and Christian teachings, which has led to the development of distinct healing practices.

Research relating to holy water and mud in AICs is limited. However, existing studies suggest that these elements are used for various purposes, including healing, protection and spiritual growth. According to Afilake Bukumi, in the Celestial Church of Christ, holy water is used for baptism, healing and spiritual cleansing. In the Cherubim and seraphim church, holy mud is used for healing and protection. (Interview Sept., 12, 2024)

Scholars such as Owete K.I (2014) and Jacob Olupona (1991) highlighted the significance of traditional

medicine and spiritual practices in Nigerian society. According to Soyinka, traditional medicine is vital part of Nigerian culture and its practices are deeply rooted in the country's history and mythology. Olupona, on the other hand, emphasized the importance of understanding traditional medicine and spiritual practices within their cultural context. These works posit comprehensive and in-depth analysis of traditional medicine and spiritual practices in Yoruba mythology and cultures, but paid less attention to healthcare delivery and more emphasis on Yoruba culture and many ethnic groups in Nigeria.

Other scholars, such as Oyerouke Olajuba (2003) and Ademola Jegede (2007), have explored the role of traditional medicine and spiritual practices in healthcare delivery in Nigeria. Olajuba has examined the intersection of traditional medicine and spirituality in Yoruba culture, while Jegede has investigated the pharmacological and toxicological properties of Nigerian medicinal plant. In recent years, scholars such as Lateef Adegbite (2010) and David Omosule (2012) have also explored the interface between traditional medicine and modern healthcare in Nigeria. Adegbite has highlighted the potential benefits of integrating traditional medicine into modern healthcare, while Omosule has examined the challenges and limitations of this integration (Akama, 1997).

More recently, Olufunke Adeoluwa (2015) and Akanmu Adebayo (2016) have explored the role of traditional healers in healthcare delivery in Nigeria. Adeoluwa has examined the experience and perspectives of traditional healers, while Adebayo has investigated the cultural significance of traditional healing practices. This review suggests that traditional medicine and spiritual practices play a vital role in Nigerian society and culture. These practices are deeply rooted in the country's history, mythology and cultural identity and they continue to shape healthcare delivery and cultural expression in Nigeria.

Naturopathy, or naturopathic medicine, is a system of medicine based on the healing power of nature. Naturopathy is a holistic system, meaning that naturopathic doctors (N.D.s) or naturopathic medical doctors (N.M.D.s) strive to find the cause of disease by understanding the body, mind, and spirit of the person. Most naturopathic doctors use a variety of therapies and techniques (such as nutrition, behavior change, herbal medicine, homeopathy, breathing techniques, and acupuncture). There are two areas of focus in naturopathy: Supporting the body's own healing abilities and empowering people to make lifestyle changes necessary for the best possible health. N.D.s treat both short bouts of illness as well as chronic conditions, and their emphasis is on preventing disease and educating people. (Fleming&Gutknecht; 2010: 37)

The modern form of naturopathy can be traced to 18th and 19th century natural healing systems. Such systems include:

- Hydrotherapy (water therapy), which was popular in Germany.
- Nature cure, developed in Austria, based on the use of food, air, light, water, and herbs to treat illness.

Benjamin Lust, a German immigrant, first introduced naturopathy to the United States in 1902 when he founded the American School of Naturopathy. The school emphasized the use of natural cures, proper bowel habits, and good hygiene as the tools for health. This was the first time that principles of a healthy diet, like increasing fiber intake and reducing saturated fats, became popular. In the mid 1920s to 1940, the use of naturopathic medicine declined. It was not until the 1960s that naturopathic-style holistic medicine became popular again. Today, naturopaths are licensed care providers in many states. They offer a variety of natural therapies, including homeopathy, vitamin and mineral supplements, Traditional Chinese Medicine, relaxation techniques, and herbal remedies. (Atwood; 2003:39)

2.2 Holy Water and Mud in Some World Religious Traditions

Water is a clear, colourless and odourless liquid substance that is essential for human survival and plays a crucial role in various aspects of life. As conventionally known, water is not meant for drinking alone, but also for agricultural purposes such as irrigation, crop growth and livestock production. In the industry, water is used for manufacturing goods, cooling systems and as a raw material. Water is used in hydroelectric power generation; it is also used for recreational purposes such as swimming and boating. Medically, water is used in the treatment of dialysis, surgery and wound cleaning. As earlier stated, and as it relates to the paper, water has spiritual and cultural significance in many societies, including baptism, purification, ritual and sacred ceremonies. In the Christian religious tradition, particularly in old and New Testament era, water was specifically used for purification and spiritual rebirth in baptism, see Exodus 29:4, Leviticus 15:13, Numbers 19:13, Ezekiel 36:25, Matthew 3:13-15, Mark 1:9-11, John 3:5, Acts 2:28 etc.

In Islam and Judaism, water is seen as a symbol of life and fertility as well as for spiritual growth and purification. In Islam, it is compulsory for a Muslim to perform ablution which is the washing of hand, feet and face with water or sand before the commencement of the five daily prayers (Kilani, 2008).

In the Asian religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Shintoism, water is considered sacred, seen as a symbol of wisdom and clarity. Fertility and abundance; and as a purifying agent and spiritual growth. All of the religions of the world have stories of the healing water of God. The therapeutic significance of water became incorporated into religious ceremonies where it remains as the ritual of baptism. The earliest forms of holy water were made by putting sacred plants into water. The temples of the Roman Empire were purified by putting herbaria into the water and sprinkling the floor and altars. In India water became holy by putting sacred leaves of basil (herb) into it. In the Zoroastrian religion of Iran, holy water was known as Zohar. The priest recited prayers, while holding two empty metal cups. As he prayed they were filled with water, which then became holy. Zoroastrian scriptures known as the Aban Yost contains verses of water. The Quran mentions water sixty times. God and the angels were the source of the scarce water that people needed some of the verses reads: we opened the gates of heaven with pouring water and caused the earth to gush forth with spring. We send you water from the sky and give it, to you to drink. He sends down water from the sky to cleanse you.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

Symbolic Interactionism is employed in this paper to validate and authenticate our focus and interest. Symbolic interactionism is a theoretical tool in the social sciences, particularly in sociology to explain how individuals and group create meaning through their interactions with others and the symbols they use.

This theory was first introduced by Herbert Blumer in 1937, but its root can be traced back to the works of George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) and Charles Cooley (1864-1929). The position and assumption of this theory is that humans act towards things based on the meanings they assign. Individual actions are often interpreted by symbols. Secondly, meaning is derived, created and negotiated through interactions with others. Lastly, meaning is not fixed, but constantly evolving. This means that meanings can change. An application of this theory reveals that water and mud are symbols of spiritual cleansing, healing and transformation. The use of holy water and mud in rituals and ceremonies creates a shared meaning among participants reinforcing their beliefs and values. Through interaction, individuals negotiate the meaning of holy water and mud, creating a collective understanding of its significance. SI provides a valuable framework for understanding the therapeutic potency of holy water and mud in African initiated churches as can be seen in this contribution. By examining the symbols, interactions and meanings surrounding these practices, scholars can gain insight

into the complex dynamics of spiritual healing and transformation. While the theory has its limitations, it remains a valuable theory for examining the dynamics of human social behaviour.

Naturopathic Doctors (NDs) according to Head and Kelly (2009) treat the whole person, which means they consider a variety of factors before they diagnose an illness. Accordingly, an N.D. might look at the patient's mental, emotional, and spiritual state; diet; family history; environment; and lifestyle before making a diagnosis. Some of the more common treatments used by a naturopath include in their opinion the following:

- Nutritional counselling
- Herbal medicine
- Homeopathic medicine
- Acupuncture

Hydrotherapy (water therapy): These therapies include drinking natural spring water, taking baths, alternating hot and cold applications, and water exercise, all of which are thought to stimulate healing and strengthen the immune system.

Physical medicine: This natural approach to healing involves using touch, hot and cold compresses, electric currents, and sound waves to manipulate the muscles, bones, and spine.

Detoxification. This therapy removes toxins from the body by fasting, using enemas, and drinking lots of water.

Spirituality: N.D.s encourage personal spiritual development as part of an overall health program.

Lifestyle and psychological counseling. An N.D. may use hypnosis, guided imagery, or other counseling methods as part of a treatment plan.

Pharmacotherapy: In states where N.D.s are licensed to prescribe drugs; many do use conventional medications in addition to natural therapies.

Naturopaths consider people to be participants in their health care, so you may be asked to make lifestyle changes, such as changing sleeping, eating, and exercise habits. (Head and Kelly; 2009)

3. Research Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods. The study utilized a cross-sectional survey design to gather data from participants. A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants from selected African Initiated Churches (AICs) in Nigeria.

A total of 15 participants were recruited from 3 AICs in Rivers State, Nigeria. Participants were aged 18-65 years. A structured questionnaire was used to collect

quantitative data on participants' demographics, health status, and experiences with holy mud and water. In-depth Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 participants to gather qualitative data on their experiences, perceptions, and meanings associated with holy mud and water. Participant observations were conducted during church services and healing sessions to gather data on the use and administration of holy mud and water. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and themes in interview and observational data.

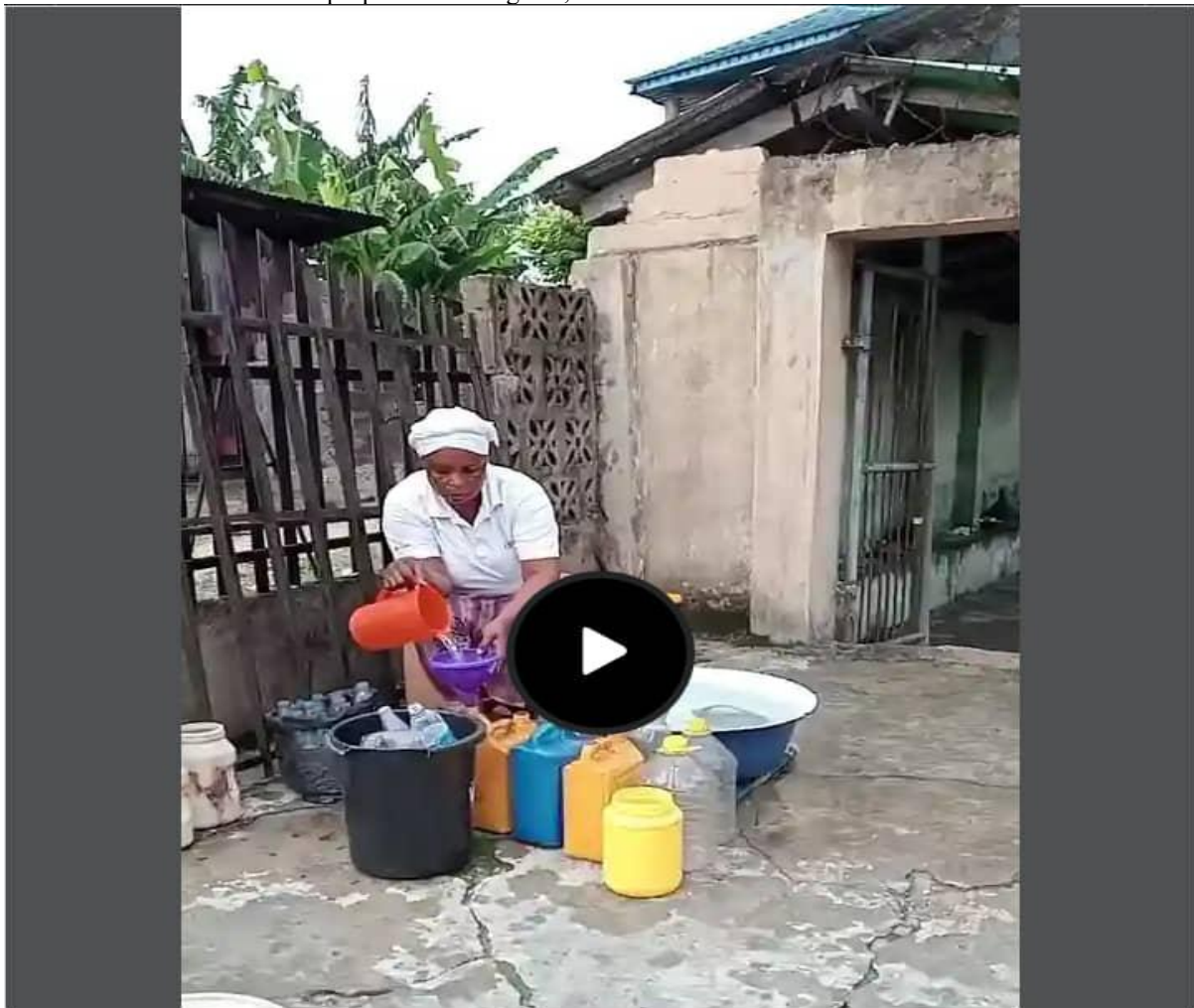
4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Christ Army Church of Nigeria: Beliefs and Practices in Relation to Holy Water and Mud

The Christ Army church was founded in 1912 by Garrick Sokari Braide, a Nigerian prophet and religious leader, in the 20th century. Garrick Sokari Braide in 1882 in Bakana, in Degema local government area of Rivers State, Nigeria. He was raised in a Christian family and educated by Scottish missionaries. Braide became a prophet and evangelist,

preaching in various parts of Nigeria. The church was founded with a focus on spiritual purity, holiness and the power of the Holy Spirit. There is a strong belief and emphasis on prayer, fasting and other forms of spiritual disciplines to achieve spiritual growth and healing. Though Braide faced severe persecution from colonial authorities and traditional leaders who viewed his religious movement as a threat, the church continued to exist today with a presence in Nigeria and other parts of West Africa. Garrick Sokari Braide died in 1918 (karibo, 2024).

In this strand of Christianity, there is the belief that the holy water possesses some spiritual cleansing properties which is used for purification, protection and healing. Mud is used for healing, spiritual growth and purification, symbolizing humility and connection to the earth. An interview with Alalibo Braide (23/8/2024); revealed that the use of water and mud is often accompanied by prayer, fasting and other spiritual disciplines, which is believed to bring healing, cleansing, purification and transformation in the individual.



Source: Researchers Phone Camera at Bakana the Supreme Headquarters of Christ Army Church: July 2024

According to Ibinabo Eferebo, Ipalibo West and Ibitroko Johnbull, holy water and mud are powerful tool for healing and spiritual growth. They added that the holy water and mud is believed to possess spiritual properties that facilitate healing and growth (interview Sept., 12, 2024).

For Taribo Benebo We use holy mud to heal various ailments, including spiritual attacks, and physical illness. It is a powerful tool that connect us to Opu-Tamuno.

The common themes that emerged from the interviews was the belief that water and mud are sacred elements and that, they are inherent with powers that bring and restore wholeness to human health predicaments.

4.2 Celestial Church of Christ and Its Use of Holy Water and Mud

The Celestial Church of Christ was founded in 1947 by Samuel, Ilehou Joseph Oshoffe Dahomey, present day Porto-Novo, Benin. Samuel Oshoffa was born on May 18, 1909 and was raised by a Methodist family. He received a divine call to start a new church in 1947. As at September 29, 1947, the pioneer worshipers were twelve (12). However, by 1950 the church has expanded with branches or parishes in Benin, Nigeria and Ghana. (Oshoffa 1985; Omoyajowo 1983; Hackett 1987). It is on record that Oshoffa introduced unique practices such as the use of white garments, candle, incense and other sacred symbols. Members of this Christian denomination believes that the use of holy water and mud was revealed to their founder, S.B.J. Oshoffa, through divine revelation. Hence, there is strong emphasis on spiritual purity, using these items for cleansing and protection. According to Tolu Babatunde “we use holy water and mud as sacrament. Rituals and ceremonies; such as washing of feet, believing that they possess spiritual power and efficacy. Bassy Elizabeth explained that water and mud are used in baptism, healing services and spiritual retreats (Interview, July 15, 2024).

4.3 Cherubim and Seraphim Church of Nigeria

The Cherubim and Seraphim Church (C&S) has its roots in the 1920s Nigerian independence movement. Founded by Moses Orimolade Tunolase and Abiodun Akinsowon in 1925, the church emerged as a response to colonialism and the quest for African identity.

Orimolade, a charismatic leader, emphasized spiritual healing, divine revelation, and holy living. His vision attracted followers from various ethnic groups, and the church grew rapidly. By the 1940s, C&S had spread throughout Nigeria, with branches in Ghana, Liberia, and other West African countries.

The church's early years were marked by persecution and conflict with colonial authorities. Orimolade's emphasis on African traditions and spiritual practices

was seen as a threat to colonial rule. Despite these challenges, the church persevered, and by the 1950s, it had become a prominent force in Nigerian Christianity. In the 1960s, C&S experienced significant growth, with the establishment of new branches and the development of its theological education. The church's unique blend of African traditions and Christian teachings resonated with many Nigerians seeking a more contextualized faith.

Throughout its history, C&S has maintained a strong commitment to social justice and community development. Church members have played key roles in Nigeria's independence movement, education, and healthcare. Today, the Cherubim and Seraphim Church is one of Nigeria's largest and most influential African Initiated Churches, with millions of members worldwide.

4.4 The Cherubim and Seraphim Church in Rivers State

The Cherubim and Seraphim Church arrived in Rivers State in the 1950s, with the first branch established in Port Harcourt. The church's early growth in the region was facilitated by the city's strategic location and economic importance. The church's presence in Rivers State was initially met with scepticism by local authorities. However, the church's emphasis on spiritual healing and community development resonated with the local population. By the 1960s, C&S had established several branches throughout the state. In the 1970s, the church experienced significant growth, with the establishment of new branches and the development of its theological education. The church's unique blend of African traditions and Christian teachings appealed to many Rivers State residents seeking a more contextualized faith. During the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), C&S played a crucial role in providing humanitarian aid and spiritual support to affected communities. Church members worked tirelessly to provide food, shelter, and medical care to displaced persons.

In the 1980s, C&S in Rivers State experienced challenges related to internal conflicts and leadership struggles. However, the church persevered, and by the 1990s, it had regained its momentum. Today, the Cherubim and Seraphim Church in Rivers State boasts numerous branches, schools, hospitals, and community development projects. The church remains a vital part of the state's social fabric, providing spiritual guidance, education, and healthcare services to thousands. The church's influence extends beyond Rivers State, with members playing key roles in Nigeria's national politics, education, and healthcare sectors, (Shalom Michael, gift Jackson and Ngowari Braid, Interv. August 2024)

5. Conclusions

This study has investigated the therapeutic potency of holy mud and water in selected African Initiated Churches (AICs) in Nigeria, shedding light on the complex relationships between faith, health, and well-being. The findings underscore the significance of these sacred substances in the spiritual and physical healing experiences of adherents. The research reveals that holy mud and water are perceived as efficacious tools for spiritual cleansing, protection, and physical healing. Respondents attributed various benefits to their use, including relief from ailments, emotional tranquility, and divine protection. These outcomes resonate with existing literature on the role of spirituality in health and well-being. Notably, the study highlights the syncretic nature of AICs, blending traditional African practices with Christian theology. This blending has resulted in unique forms of worship and healing practices that cater to the holistic needs of adherents. The therapeutic potency of holy mud and water serves as a testament to the resourcefulness and resilience of African religious traditions.

However, the study also raises concerns regarding the potential risks associated with the use of holy mud and water. Issues of contamination, exploitation, and lack of regulation necessitate attention from healthcare professionals, religious leaders, and policymakers. Ensuring the safe and responsible use of these substances is crucial for protecting public health. The

findings of this study have implications for interdisciplinary collaboration between healthcare providers, religious leaders, and community stakeholders. By acknowledging the therapeutic significance of holy mud and water, healthcare professionals can better understand the cultural and spiritual contexts of patients' healing experiences. This awareness can inform culturally sensitive healthcare practices and foster more effective partnerships between biomedical and traditional healing systems.

In conclusion, this research demonstrates the therapeutic potency of holy mud and water in selected AICs in Nigeria, underscoring the complex intersections of faith, culture, and health. As scholars, policymakers, and healthcare professionals, we must engage with these findings to promote holistic, culturally sensitive, and effective healthcare practices that respect the diverse spiritual and therapeutic traditions of African communities.

6. Recommendations

- Interdisciplinary collaboration between healthcare providers and religious leaders.
- Development of guidelines for safe and responsible use of holy mud and water.
- Integrate traditional healing into mainstream healthcare and conduct further research on the therapeutic potentials of holy mud and water in Nigeria and beyond.

References

Primary Source

S/N	NAME	STATUS	AGE	PLACE OF INTERVIEW	DATE OF INTERVIEW
1	KARIBO INNOCENT	CLERGY	48	IDAMA	2024
2	ALALIBO BRAID	MEMBER	56	BAKAMA	2024
3	EFREBO IPALIBO	MEMBER	62	BUGUMA	2024
4	TARIBO BENEBO	MEMBER	64	ABONNEMA	2024
5	BASSY ELIZABETH	MEMBER	37	AHU	2024
6	IBINABO EFEREBO	MEMBER	65	BAKAMA	2024
7	IPALIBO WEST	MEMBER	58	TOMBIA	2024
8	IBITROKO JOHN BULL	MEMBER	55	BAKAMA	2024
9	CHIBUEZE WOKE	MEMBER	36	ALUU	2024
10	SHALOM MICHAEL	MEMBER	18	ALUU	2024
11	TOLU BABATUNDE	CLERGY	65	ALUU	2024
12	LORD SAYLOR	CLERGY	57	SOKU	2024
13	GIFT JACKSON	MEMBER	26	ALUU	2024
14	NGOWARI BRAID	CLERGY	49	IDAMA	2024
15	TONYE JACK	MEMBER	33	ABONNEMA	2024

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