

## THE INDIGENOUS CULTURAL WAYS OF DIAGNOSIS IN THE ASHANTI REGION OF GHANA

### Abstract

The primary aim of this study is to make the indigenous cultural ways of identifying diseases known in order to promote and remove the mystery and superstition associated to them. Due to the nature of the study, the purposive sampling technique was largely employed. Interviews and observations were the main data collecting instruments used. The four study areas which are *Bongari Shrine* at Adumakasekese, *Asuo Abresua Shrine* of Ahwirewam, *Bokankye Akua Gyabon Shrine* (currently situated at Mankranso Peposo), and *Apomasu Kwao Shrine* of Ntensere were purposively selected. The study revealed that the traditional healers use items ranging from natural to artificial such as eggs, talismans, cowries, money and other objects to diagnose various diseases. In diagnosing of diseases, the traditional healers take a holistic approach which are the social, natural, spiritual and the cosmic environment which are not in the case of the orthodox medication. It is therefore important for government and stakeholders to give recognition to these diviners and spiritual healers by putting up nice buildings (clinics and hospitals) and providing them the necessary needs like what they have been doing for the orthodox health centres and if possible integrate the traditional medication into the orthodox ones.

**Keywords:** Cultural, Indigenous, Diagnosing, Diseases, Ashanti Region, Spiritual Diagnoses, Diviners, Traditional Healer

## 1. Introduction

Indigenous culture is an integrated pattern of human behaviour that includes the language, thoughts, actions, medication, customs, beliefs and institutions of racial, ethnic, social, or religious groups (California Endowment, 2003). This definition denotes that indigenous culture is intricately intertwined with every aspect of the entire human life within every group of persons. Barimah (2016) argued that medical systems have ties with the way of life of a people and that the institution of diagnosing has ties with philosophy, religion and belief systems.

Detecting the root cause of ailments in traditional medication entails a systematic quest for answers to the origins of a particular disease to determine, who or what caused it and why it has affected a particular person at a particular time (Mahame, Busia, Kasilo & Mhame, 2010). This is a key part of African traditional medication. According to Yawar (2001), human beings can be regarded as having two realms of existence, which may conveniently be labelled inner (spiritual) and outer (physical). These traditional healers (the diviners) are able to address both the physical and the spiritual aspects of the patient while orthodox practitioners address or concentrate only on the naturalistic aspect. Similarly, Abdullahi (2011) affirms that diagnosing to identify the cause of disease among traditional Africans is reached through spiritual means. The idea behind the use of divination to find the root cause of diseases, emanates from the practitioners philosophy. The view is that infirmities are not seen as chance occurrences but are believed to arise from the actions of individuals and ancestral spirits according to the imbalance between the individual and the social environment (Anyinam, 1987; Hedberg, Madati, Mshigeni, Mshiu & Samuelson, 1982; Ngubane, 1987; Staugard, 1985; WHO, 1976). With similar arguments, UNESCO (2013) states that traditional means of diagnosing diseases are very effective and they are based on theories that see human beings as inseparable from their social, natural, spiritual

and cosmic environment. With this holistic approach, disease is considered and diagnosed as a phenomenon that arises when an imbalance affects the vital powers governing the patient's health; these powers range from the most powerful deity to the smallest living organism. Buor (2002) suggests that the fundamental theory in traditional medicine is that, there is a triune nature of man, that is, physical, mental and spiritual and the diagnosis and therapeutic approaches should be buttressed on that basis. May and Mead (1999) state that recognizing a patient's spiritual concerns is viewed as an essential part of the patient-centered medicine increasingly seen as crucial to high-quality patient care. For this reason, the traditional healers delve much into the entire system of the client holistically to scrutinize him or her.

The traditional healers are able to reveal hidden things which the spectacles of orthodox practitioners cannot see. A perusal made by Yawar (2001) on the standard general medical textbooks similarly affirms that spirituality is not considered in medical teaching. D'Souza (2007) also added that in academia, little attention has been paid to spirituality. In view of this, most medical doctors do not regard spiritual issues as very important in their practice. Yawar (2001) further established that medically trained doctors cannot claim special knowledge or insight into the spiritual condition of patients as in the case of traditional healers. Educating medical personnel on how to deal with the spiritual or personalistic aspects of medical care is not a typical part of medical school or college curricula, yet evidence is emerging that it is something patients want and expect medical personnel to do as part of the care they provide (D'Souza, 2002, Mathai & North, 2013 and Beer, 2000). The World Health Organisation (2000) reports that in the United Kingdom (UK) almost 40% of the physicians make some referrals to alternative medication. It is for these reasons why African member states are encouraged to uphold and incorporate traditional medication in their health care system.

Accordingly, most people including doctors, health practitioners and Christians, in most cases, continue to shun the effective indigenous ways of identifying the causes of ailments despite their contribution to providing the health needs of the population (Kusi-Bempah, 2011). It is important therefore to make the indigenous cultural ways of diagnosing diseases known through this study in order to remove the mystery and superstition associated to them. This paper concentrates on the diagnostic practices of the traditional diviners (Priests and Priestesses) and spiritual healers in the Ashanti region, Ghana. Information provided in this paper were obtained through primary data and other relevant published papers and books. Researching into this area of study will help serve as a wakeup call to the general public to further embrace the effective indigenous cultural ways of identifying the cause of diseases and to shun the negative attitudes towards the traditional methods of diagnoses. This will go a long way to attract the necessary attention of traditional cultural ways of unearthing the cause of ailments.

## **2. Methods**

Specifically, the studies were conducted in four Traditional Medical Centres in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. They are the *Bongari* Shrine at Adumakasekese, *Asuo Abresua* Shrine of Ahwirewam, *Bokankye Akua Gyabon* Shrine (currently situated at Mankranso Peposo), and *Apomasu Kwao* Shrine of Ntensere. These medical centres were purposively selected because they have successfully been practicing the indigenous cultural ways of diagnosing diseases.

The study was driven by the qualitative research method. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005), qualitative research is typically used to answer questions about the complex nature of phenomena, often with the purpose of describing and understanding the phenomena from the participants' point of view. This research approach was used to solicit insiders' perspectives in

order to identify and describe the indigenous cultural ways of detecting the various causes of diseases as well as its relevance for the development of the nation. The research methods employed in successful accomplishment of this study were descriptive study, case study and phenomenological study which are under the qualitative approach. Interviews and observations were the main instruments designed and used by the researcher to solicit data from respondents on their opinions relating to the major concerns of the study.

The population for the study consisted of four (4) traditional priests/priestesses, seven (7) spokespersons as well as twenty (20) elderly persons from the four local communities selected for the study and twenty (20) clients. The populace were first purposively sampled after which they were randomly selected and interviewed. In-depth personal interviews were conducted with the traditional healer (traditional priests and priestesses) as well as spokespersons in the traditional medical centres. The elderly persons and the clients were engaged in focus group discussions where their time-tested experiences regarding the indigenous cultural ways of diagnosing diseases were accrued. In-depth interviews were extensively used to allow the researcher to understand deeper with the participant, and gain more extra knowledge and insight about the traditional modes of identifying diseases. The researcher rigorously observed the various activities performed by the healers in the course of diagnosing ailments. The direct observations helped the researcher in noting for himself the diagnostic methods employed by the healers. The observation also gave the researcher the chance to collect live information from live situations.

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **Diagnoses of Ailments in Traditional Medication in Ashanti Region**

Among the traditional medicine practitioners in the Ashanti region, the ability to diagnose illness is considered as a gift from God the Supreme Being. The study revealed that ancestors, dwarfs, gods and other spirits who are believed to be the messengers of God can also invest powers into man or manifest through man to diagnose all kinds of diseases.

In diagnosing, a major emphasis is placed on determining the underlying **cause of** the illness. The study brought to light two main ways of diagnosing in traditional medicine administration. In affirming this, Dime (1995) strongly argues that the diagnosis of diseases in an African traditional healing system is a two-fold event. They are the physical and the spiritual. In relation to this finding, Hewson (1998) also noted a passionate ambivalence towards the two main forms of diagnosis. According to him, illness may be caused by physical and/or spiritual factors that relate to African cosmology and thus, threatens the health of individuals. This study is based on the spiritual ways of identifying diseases, since the diviners and other spiritual healers incorporate the physical ways of identifying diseases in their diagnostic processes.

#### **Spiritual Diagnoses in Traditional Medication**

Spiritual diagnoses is the consultation of the 'spirit world' to find the root cause of disease and also to discern whether there is infringement of an established order from the part of the sick person. According to Agbor and Naidoo (2011), the spiritual healers usually consult spirits for diagnosing diseases, their causes and treatments especially when an illness fails to respond to treatment, whether home remedies or western medication. From the foregoing, the traditional

healers strongly base their healing method on the personality disease theory which addresses the physical and the spiritual aspect of mankind. They believe that man does not wrestle against flesh and blood but against other unseen spirits and for this reason, man needs diviners to reveal to them the unseen problems.

All the 51 respondents amounting to 100%, engaged in the study stated categorically that certain diseases have spiritual connections and these diseases are the main reason for seeking spiritual medical care. According to them, diseases that have spiritual underpinnings can only be diagnosed and treated or reversed by spiritual means. This is related to Newton's third law of motion which states that action and reaction are equal and opposite. That is personalistic diseases must be treated by spiritual means while naturalistic diseases must be treated by natural means. It can be observed that this law is conveniently practical in diagnosing and treating health problems in traditional African societies.

The study brought to light that in spiritual diagnoses, maturity on the part of the practitioner is very significant in order to prevent misuse of some mystical powers. The respondents stated that as diviners, they are able to hear, understand, interpret and respond to voices and images of the supernatural beings which is not in the case of orthodox healers. In a related argument, Agbor *et al.*, (2011) and Truter (2007) contend that diviners are believed to have extra-sensory perception and can see beyond the ordinary. This enables the traditional healers to diagnose holistically as compare to the orthodox healers.

In spiritual diagnosing, ancestors, dwarfs, gods and other spirits who are strongly believed to be the intermediaries between man and the Supreme God are consulted about the cause of a patient's illness or problems. If favoured responses are granted to the practitioner, the cause of the disease is revealed and the possible remedies are shown by the spirits. The purpose of the

consultation is to seek the express permission from the ancestors, dwarfs, gods and other spirits to treat the case.

The study unveiled that both methods of diagnosing (spiritual and physical) diseases and other problems are used integrally and interchangeably by some traditional healers depending on the problem at hand. In order to achieve total balance in the patient's life, the healers embrace the two methods (spiritual and physical) of diagnosing ailment and other cases. Below are the modes of diagnosing diseases that came out of the study:

### **Casting of Cowries**

Casting of cowries is **one of the** mediums of diagnosing diseases and other problems among some traditional healers in Ashanti Region. It was explained that before throwing the cowries, special incantations are invoked in order to salute and invite the spirits in charge. The study revealed that the number of cowries used depends on the instructions given by the dwarfs and the other spirits in control. Sometimes shells, money, seeds, dice, and other objects that have been appointed by the spirits to represent certain spiritual elements are added to the cowries. These cowries are sometimes cast on a prepared table or in a basketry tray and in some cases it is cast in a sacred circle of kaolin on the floor. In affirming this, Lindsay (2005) and Thorpe (1995) stated that in some African cultures, casting of cowries is performed, using sacred divination plates made of wood or performed on the ground, within a circle.

The informants stated that the cowries talk to them when they cast them and they also have the power to read and interpret the meaning of each cowry depending on the pattern of its orientation. Related to the above narration, Luna (2019) stated that the cowries are the doorway through which one can access the world of the ancestors, the world that holds infinite knowledge



and wisdom and a timeless view one cannot otherwise tap into. According to the traditional priests, there are male and female cowries and they are consecrated before they can be used. The study revealed that healers who throw cowries to identify the cause of various diseases and misfortunes operate with the power of dwarfs and are initiated by them before they can cast the cowries.

Interestingly, Nana Akwasi Asare the priest of *Bongari* shrine at Adumakasekese (Personal Communication, March 2018) stated that if a patient doubts the result of cast cowries, he or she has the privilege to request the diviner to cast them again. The patient may tell the healer that if his divination is authentic, he should for example, let five of the cowries intersect. And surely five of the cowries will intersect to the conscience of the patient. Moreover, Okomfo Adutwumwaa of Asuo Abresua Shrine also pointed out that when the client is not convinced of the outcome of the cowries, the priestess with the assistance of her spokesman slaughters a local fowl and asks the deity to accept it if really the outcome of the cowries she threw is correct. The deity instantly accepts the fowl by allowing it to recline at its back if the outcome is right. Aside slaughtering a fowl, an egg can be thrown to confirm the result of the cowries. When the priestess throws an egg and it bursts and all the broken shell lies at its outer part (back) it means the outcome of the cowries is correct. A similar act of confirmation was exhibited when the researcher was about to enter the shrine room to take photographs.

The throwing of the cowries helps the medicine man to determine the root cause of diseases especially those that emanate from spiritual means.

Respondents' validation of this method of diagnosing was positive. Out of the 20 clients interviewed at the centres, twelve (12) of them, representing 60%, admitted that the cause of their ailments were perfectly revealed to them through the casting of the cowries. Eight (8) of the respondents representing 40% also stated that the cause of their illnesses were revealed to them

through different diagnostic methods. All the respondents interviewed self-proclaimed their belief in this diagnostic method.

Now a critical question is what ailments are diagnosed by the cowries etc. In qualitative aspects we need to incise the outcome. At present authors relate to what cowries are able to do not what they did (e.g. let us have a scenario where flues, headaches and blood clots are identified through these). This will allow better comparison with other yardsticks throughout Africa and elsewhere. Without this aspect the study has no solid assertions but rather strong beliefs which it may not explain adequately just as all other belief models. At present there is no disease diagnosed in this example.

### **Diagnosing with Special Leaf**

According to the priestess (Personal Communication, Asuo Abereasua Shrine, 24<sup>th</sup> October, 2018), early in the morning she fetches a special leaf and performs rituals on it (that is she puts the leaf in her palm and while standing with the hand containing the leaf opened, she stretches it forward to make incantations to call on the spirits to activate the leaf to function effectively in the diagnostic processes). She then puts the leaf on her stool and sits on it or sometimes hides it around her to prevent people from seeing it. After this act, she is able to detect the root cause of every problem clients come with, even without telling her. The priestess explained that the moment she sees the patient or the client coming, she gets to know the entire problem he or she is going through.

What diseases were they able to see. This is the critical part which is missing and further needs to be compared with other findings elsewhere so that triangulation is done properly.

All the respondents at the Asuo Abresua shrine were of firm conviction that diagnosing by the use of the leaf is very effective. Respondents' confirmation of this method of diagnosing are presented in Table 1 below. The Table indicates that out of the 20 elderly men and women interviewed, ten (10) of them, representing 50%, affirmed that they had been informed and they knew that some traditional healers are able to diagnose and uncover the root cause of people's

problems by the use of a special leaf. Six (6) of the respondents, representing 30% also stated that they had witnessed such a diagnostic act by their close relatives who were traditional healers and they know leaf they used in this act. Four (4) of the respondents, representing 20% who were once traditional healers declared that they used to diagnose with the leaf when they were in active service. All the respondents interviewed admitted their belief in this method of diagnosing.

Table 1: Respondents confirmation to diagnosing by the use of leaf in percentage

Confirmation statements	Number of Respondents	Percentage %	Diseases Diagnosed
Have been informed by some healers	10	50	
Have diagnosed with leaf before	4	20	
Have witnessed this method before	6	30	
Total	20	100	

Source: Fieldwork, October, 2018

### Diagnosing by the use of money

Interviews and observation revealed that the priest of Bongari shrine diagnose various cases through the use of money. In a related argument, Okonkwo (2012) confirmed that diagnosing through divination or by spiritual means can be done through the use of money, sand, cola nut and other objects valuable to the deity or spirit. When a client consults the shrine, the priest does not physically delve into the client's problem or reasons for consulting him but rather asks the client to take an amount of money and whispers out his or her problem on it. This practice is very

similar to what most Christians do when requesting for something from God. The elders of the church normally ask the congregation to verbalize all their problems on the money and offer it to the Lord and he will answer their request. There is a strong belief that spirits hear the requests of their devotees when they speak through valuable items like money, cola and gold and offer it to them.

After speaking on the money, it is then presented to the traditional priest who at this time is fully possessed by the spirit or deity. The possessed priest just looks at the money and reveals everything the client said or requested; how the client got ill, people or a particular person responsible for the client's illness and also prognosticates what is ahead of the client. A typical example was what the researcher experienced for the sake of authenticity when he wanted to dialogue with Bongari, the deity of KuneGyendu/Bungari shrine at Adwumakase-Kese in the Ashanti Region. The researcher took an amount of money and spoke on it with a very low tone at distance away from the shrine thus "I want to see you and discuss with you how you diagnose and treat diseases". About an hour later the money was presented to the possessed priest, he observed the money for some time and stated "*You want to see me and discuss with me how I diagnose and treat diseases?*" The possessed priest began to disclose hidden things about the researcher which he did not even ask for. For more proof, the possessed priest ordered the spokesman to call the next person on the line. In the presence of the researcher, the moment the person entered the room (shrine) the possessed priest stated

Antwi your illness is as a result of a curse invoked by a lady who used to be your girlfriend. In fact many people are accusing you that your illness is as a result of theft but that is false accusation. Antwi, you have been to a lot of hospitals and

taken a number of scans and x-rays but the doctors are unable to even identify the illness.

Afterwards, **Bongari**, the deity who is manifesting through the priest told the researcher to ask Antwi if what he has revealed to him is false. The patient boldly testified that everything said is the truth.

This avowed to the fact that these traditional healers with the assistance of the deities are able to diagnose diseases and see the future of people through the use of money and other valuable items of their interest. All the testimonies that came from the clients as well as the researcher testify that the deity's means of uncovering the unknown through the priest by the use of money indeed is not manipulated in any way. Such acts psychologically builds a very potent trust in the deity and his priest and also goes a very long way to attract more people to consult the shrine.

### **Diagnosing by Carrying the Image of the Deity**

This is a way of consulting the spirit world to identify the cause of the problem and also to discover whether there is violation of an established order on the part of the client at Bongari Shrine. Libation and incantations are made by the priest and the client's reasons for consulting the shrine are presented to the deity. With the assistance of the spokesman, the image of the deity which is housed in a brass pan is carried by the priest on his head. The moment the priest carries it, he becomes unbalanced and acts as if the brass pan containing the image of the deity is falling from his head. At this point, the spokesman supports by holding part of the image of the deity the priest is carrying to help him. It may be that the spirit is too heavy to balance the priest's body weight. Even though he is in trance and unstable, the image of the deity will not fall from his head. This is because when the image is carried, it is believed the spirit takes absolute control of the priest and he starts to disclose hidden things associated with the patient. The image of the

deity in the brass pan then gets stuck on the priest's head and nothing can separate it from the head unless the deity has finished operating. From the aforementioned, it can be deduced that mere human beings do not have the power to stop deities when they are operating through beings. Through this activity the deity unveils the cause of the problem through the priest.

Similarly, the priest of Asuhyiae Tano and his spokesman also explain to the researcher when the priest also carries the image of the deity. According to the researcher's informants, after performing libation, three eggs are presented to the deity. With the assistance of the elders, the deity which is said to be housed in a brass pan is carried by the priest with the help of the linguists. The moment the priest carries the deity on his head, he starts to behave as if the brass pan is falling from his head as in the case of the priest of KuneGyendu/Bongari shrine which has been discussed above. The spokesmen then help the priest to sit in an *asipim* chair while the image of the deity in the brass pan is on his head. It was revealed that he sits on the *asipim* chair used by Asante chiefs because the deity is believed to be the King of the Tano gods. One of the spokesmen throws white kaolin or powder on him continuously while he is seated with the maximum support from the other spokesmen. The client is then permitted by the elders to kneel before the possessed priest. The possessed priest then takes one of the eggs brought by the client and moves it around him or her and critically observes the egg and starts to disclose the root cause of the problem to the client. From the above discussions, it is realized that even though there are similarities in carrying the image of the deities at the healing centres visited by the researcher, there are slight differences in their acts.

### **Diagnosing through Trance**

At Bongari shrine the priest (Personal Communication, 11<sup>th</sup> March, 2018), stated that he sometimes enters into trance when a patient is brought to his shrine. While he is in trance, words

spoken by him are noted in a book by the secretary of the shrine. This is because when he is out of trance, he cannot remember a single word he said. Similarly, Schmidt and Huskinson (2010) offer a useful dialogue on deity possession. According to her, deity possession is a complete but temporary domination of the priest or priestess' body, and the blotting of his or her consciousness by a distinct alien power of known or unknown origin. The pronouncement made during this time is usually bizarre and unclear as observed (18<sup>th</sup> of March, 2018). The practitioner uses this medium not only to diagnose illness, but also to find the necessary treatment.

The practitioner **while** in trance is thought to link up with his divine being and the spirit of the sick person to find out the one responsible for the problem or the root cause of the illness. In the course of this, the divine spirit narrates the root cause of the illness through the practitioner, and indicates as well the sacrifices necessary to appease the gods. This piece of information is also acknowledged by Sofowora (1993) in his study of Medicinal Plants and Traditional Medicine in Africa Spectrum.

The priest stated emphatically that he serves as a horse that is mounted by their deities and use them as they want. According to Coffie (1996) this expression points out the fact that gods mount human beings, just as a rider mounts a horse. From the above manifestation, the priest or the priestess is a "horse" while the deity is the "rider." The researcher's informants further added that while the priest is possessed, he throws white powder on his face and head. Sometimes a fowl is sacrificed for the deity when he mounts on the priest. At this time, they command with power and authority and **unearths** all the secrets behind people's problems. According to the respondents, while the possessed priests are displaying, they sometimes reveal concealed issues about the audience

The informants of the present researcher were absolutely convinced that the trance is indeed helping in diagnosing diseases and other problems at the shrine. Twenty (20) of the healers' clients at the shrines representing 100% of those interviewed about trance stated emphatically that the deity through the priest was able to uncover the unknown about their problems. In a testimony to prove a point, a member of a focus group discussion had this to say;

‘I and my husband brought our daughter who had been ill for a year to this shrine some weeks ago. When the priest went into trance, he told us that the illness of my daughter was spiritual and he mentioned the one behind it. It was my junior sister who stays with us under the same roof. The deity instructed us to perform some rituals when we went home. We did what we were instructed to do and my junior sister started shouting ‘I will say, I will say everything’. She stated that she was behind my daughter’s illness. According to her, she was being whipped by some spirits and was shouting all over the house. I brought her here and she was freed and my daughter too regained her health. We are even here to thank the priest and his god for what they have done for us. Look my brother I will not waste my time here ooh if he is not potent (TMAFC 1, Personal Communication at Bongari Shrine, 18 March, 2018).

This and other experiences shared by the clients with the researcher confirmed their belief in the effectiveness of the deities’ powers and their total trust in the priest and their deity. Testimonies like this attract more people to consult the gods since many people have great trust in this kind of divination. This explains why many people consult diviners before taking any action in their lives.

### **Diagnosing through Dreams**



According to the priests interviewed, dreaming on the cause of a client's illness is very vibrant in traditional medication. In affirming this, Mettle – Nunoo (1990) stated that the deities teach and inspire through dreams and guide the traditional priest in his daily activities which include diagnosing various diseases. The priests further stated that in most cases the gods and the ancestors come and divulge everything about the cause of a particular sickness to him through dreams. Scientifically, Freudian theory of dreams state that dreams reveal insight into hidden desires and emotions (Carey & Norton, 2009). From the above assertion, it could be inferred that what the priest desires and thinks about is what he may dream of. But this may not always be the case. One may also dream about something he or she has not thought about before.

The priests again declared that in most cases the gods and the ancestors reveal to them the patient who will be coming to the shrine, the type of problem the patient will be coming with, the cause of the problem and how the problem can be solved. Sometimes this information is revealed to him some days or even weeks before the person comes. One of the spokesmen stated that there have been several instances in which the priest (of Bongari Shrine) told them that a patient will be coming to the shrine and further stated the type of illness the patient will be coming with.

The traditional healers again disclosed that they sometimes grind some herbs and smear it on the client's body and leave him or her to sleep. In the patient's sleep, the cause of patient's illness is revealed to him or her. A client who had such experience thus shared his sentiment;

I am someone who is doubtful, so when I came to Nana, he just ground some leaves and applied it on my body without asking me why I came to him. In the night, I dreamt and found out that it was my co-worker who was using 'juju' on me. Everything on how he used it to cause my illness was revealed to me (TMAMC 2, Personal Communication, 18<sup>th</sup> March, 2018).

Similarly, the priests also made it known that sometimes they squeeze the leaves and drop the sap into the client's eyes and leave him or her to sleep. In the course of his/her sleep, the root cause of the illness and anyone associated with the illness are revealed to the client.

### **Staring at the client**

Another means through which the traditional healers use to diagnose diseases and other problems is by just looking fixedly at the client with her eyes widely open. They stated that the deities had opened their eyes and ears to see and hear beyond the ordinary. Likewise Parish (2003) in her study found that special herbs are squeezed into the eyes and ears of the traditional priests and priestesses so that they can see and hear things that an ordinary person cannot. This means of diagnosing helps the priestess to identify all kinds of problems the moment she sees the client. An instance observed at Asuo Abresua shrine was when priestess by just looking at a man disclosed to him that he has been cursed. The gods revealed through her to the man that he fought with his wife when the wife accused him of committing adultery with another woman. She further unveiled to the man that he whipped the wife with paddle and as a result the wife called on a river deity to curse him while he was not aware of the curse. The man confirmed that the priestess' revelation was correct but declared that he did not know his wife had cursed him.

Moreover, the priests and the priestesses also stated that the deities mostly come and stand by them during diagnostic processes and tell them hidden things about clients the moment they see them. In some cases too, they sit in deep concentration, in front of the client and through that the gods reveal to them everything about the client. It is for this reason that Scott (2005) contended that the deities interact with humans in ways that carry humans to new level of consciousness beyond the grounded preoccupations of ordinary life.

## **Diagnosing by the use of Talisman**

My informants said that they sometimes diagnose by wearing a special prepared talisman (*bansre*) around their waist wrist. They added that this talisman has been empowered by the deities and it performs a lot of wonders. In a related matter, Varner (2008) states that the secret powers and magical effects of amulets and talismans come from the special ritual done over them. It was unveiled that before wearing the talisman, special incantations are recited over it in order to activate it. Varner (2008) further supported this claim by stating that the effectiveness of the amulets and the talisman depends on the incantations made during the ritual process. Inferring from the researcher's observations, the use of talisman and amulets bring about contact between the traditional healers and the divine beings.

According to the traditional healers, with the talisman on their waist, they are able to reveal the problems affecting the people who come to them. The talisman when worn around their waists and wrists open their eyes and gives them the power to see beyond the ordinary. In similar but different dimension, Whitehurst (2016) opines that the use of a pendulum helps her to access the akashic records (a compendium of all human events, thoughts, words, emotions, and intent ever to have occurred in the past and present, and to happen in future.), or the omnipresent energy field that links everything about the client. Whitehurst explained that the pendulum tool helps her tune into the client's place and situation even when she is not in close physical proximity to the client.

One of the clients indicated how a traditional healer asked him questions that surprised him when he went there because the healer had not even met him before and did not even know the town in which he lived:

The moment I entered the shrine room, she pronounced my name and welcomed me with a beautiful smile, then she asked me, “Why did you fight your mother on Thursday three weeks ago?” Now you are not in good terms with your mother. Your father even came in to resolve the issue but you didn’t agree. Why? I was shocked because all that she was saying was correct. I just had a very strong belief in her (TMAMC 3, Personal Communication, 17<sup>th</sup> October, 2018).

Such revelations psychologically send a strong signal to the client making him or her believe every information given by the priestess.

### **Diagnosing with a pot of water**

Stirring a pot of water to identify the cause of diseases and other problems is mostly used by some traditional healers in the Ashanti Region. According to a priestess (at Bokankye Akua Gyabon shrine), the pot has been spiritually sanctified and contains special water from River Tano and other substances. The reason for using water from River Tano is because the deity is one of the Tano deities. The priestess stated that during diagnosis, she knocks the pot three times before she opens it. This is a sign of alerting the deity that she is about to enter into her abode. The priestess then performs libation alongside incantations to invite the deity into the client’s matter and also presents to the deity the reasons behind her invitation. In a related matter, Lawal (2012) in his study of Traditional Medicine practices among the Yoruba people of Nigeria established that incantations are made before the medical history of the patient and the events leading to the imbalance of the patient are revealed through the pot. In the process of stirring the liquid in the pot with a special made paddle, the deity speaks out of sight issues concerning the

client's problem to her. The deity through the priestess unveils the nitty-gritty of the problem to the client.

The deity, according to the priestess of Bokankye Akua Gyabon, makes sure that all the news about the clients' problems revealed through her, always gets to the clients without distortion by the priestess. She further stated that if she changes the statement given to her by the deity, the deity repeats the same statement and if she does not provide the client with the correct statement made by the deity, she at that instance enters the priestess and possesses her. Without her knowledge, the deity rectifies the false information given by her to the client. The moment the deity finishes, she leaves the priestess and she becomes normal again. The deity according to the researcher's informant is a white god (*bosom fufuo*) and does not condone to lies.

The respondents interviewed stated categorically that they were diagnosed to know the cause of their worries and troubles by the use of the pot. For instance one of the respondents disclosed to the researcher that;

My seven year old son was suffering from epilepsy. While seeking for remedy for him, one medical doctor hinted me to send him to a spiritualist since the illness had spiritual affiliation. When I came to Nana, she was able to disclose of the problem by stirring the water in the pot. The priestess as she stirred the pot asked me; "Do you remember a day your neighbour in the compound house gave your son a hot plantain which scalded his hand?" I remembered it and said yes, and the priestess continued by saying that was when she gave the illness to your son. She performed some ritual for my son and instructed me to sacrifice some items.

When I completed all the rites, my son got healed (TMAFC 4, Personal Communication, 20<sup>th</sup> September, 2018).

This statement and other claims given by the respondents suggests that all what the priestess says is divine since they come from the deity. In relation to this case, Azongo and Yidana (2015) affirmed that the individual diviners have no influence on the outcomes of divination consultations even though some of them have been accused of being quack diviners.

### **Diagnosing with Egg**

Egg is another medium through which the priests and the priestesses use to identify and expose hidden things about clients. The egg according to Miro (2014) has long been regarded as a symbol of life, the idea is that it takes on energy. The deity sometimes directs them to pass the egg around the client and then throw it on the floor. The moment the egg bursts, they look into the egg which has been split open with their maximum concentration. Through that they see everything troubling the client and begin to tell the client his or her problems. Miro (2014) adds that when using the egg, the diviner is essentially going through the client's aura, and body, pinpointing specific areas and allowing the eggs to absorb the energy. The egg traps the energy and the negativity transfers from the client to the egg.

The priest Asuhyiae Tano Shrine (Personal Communication, 13<sup>th</sup> October, 2018) also explained how he uses the egg to uncover the unknown. Stressing the same point he stated:

When someone comes with a problem, an egg is given to him or her to speak onto it and stating the reasons for seeking the deity's assistance. Afterwards, I collect the egg back and draws it to my ears and act as if I am listening to something from the egg. I then throw the egg on the floor for it to burst. Afterwards, I look

into the broken egg and tell the client the root cause of his or her problem. I have tried this method of diagnosing for so many years and I have never failed (Personal Communication, the priest of Asuhyiae Tano Shrine, 13<sup>th</sup> October, 2018).

It could be observed that egg plays tremendous role in divination and has the power to do wonders only when it is used very well.

### **Mirror Gazing (Scrying)**

The mirror is a surface, usually of glass coated with a metal amalgam, which reflects a clear image. Mirror gazing is also called crystallogancy, and it refers to the use of reflective surfaces for the purposes of divination. The healers revealed that mirror gazing is another way they use to diagnose hidden illnesses. A priestess of Bokankye Akua Gyabon shrine stated that she mostly goes by this method when she is possessed by ‘Naaho Zugu’ (a deity from Northern part of Ghana). She explained that the moment the patient enters the consulting room, she (priestess) who at that time is fully possessed by ‘Naaho Zugu’ just looks into her mirror and discloses everything about the client.

According to some of the healers, when a patient consults them to find out the cause of his or her problems, they sit in front of the mirror with their maximum concentration and makes some incantation to invite the spirits and instantly, everything about the sickness is disclosed to them. Even though the mirror is a normal one like what we have been seeing and using, it has been imbued with power (*ye adwira*) which helps the priest to see hidden things.

More so, during crystallogancy, the traditional healers are able to see the future of their patients. Similarly, Regal (2009) and Guiley (2010) affirmed that mirror gazing is practiced in many

cultures with the belief that it can reveal the past, present, or future. Worstell (2018) also points out that the outcome of gazing through the mirror may emanate from the subconscious mind or imagination of the priestess. Regal (2009) **rebutts** by stating that, there is no systematic body of empirical support for such view in general.

## **Conclusion**

The indigenous cultural ways of diagnosing ailments were successful and are still successfully used by many traditional healers for identifying diseases which in most cases the orthodox medication cannot identify. Most people perceive the indigenous cultural modes of diagnoses as fetish, idolatrous, pagan and are less progressive and as a result, many groups of people especially the educated, Christians and the younger generation are influenced to devalue their natural culture and adopt new life style and technology. **But this study has brought to light the significant roles these indigenous diagnostic measures are playing in health care.** The ability to diagnose illness is considered as a gift from God, the Supreme Being since all powers belong to him and every good thing is from him. These traditional healers also use their divine powers to unearth the cause of all kinds of ailments to help mankind which are part of the good deeds of the Supreme Being. In diagnosing of diseases the traditional healers take a holistic approach which are the social, natural, spiritual and the cosmic environment which is not in the case of the orthodox medication.

The diviners and some people believe that the neglect of the indigenous cultural ways of identifying the cause of diseases in the public health care centres has resulted in increasing **the** rate of mortality, infertility and other problems in the country which could easily be identified and treated by the traditional healers. The best solution to this issue is that the government and



the stakeholders should give recognition to these diviners and spiritual healers by putting up nice buildings (clinics and hospitals) and providing them the necessary needs like what they have been doing for the orthodox health centres and if possible integrate the traditional medication into the orthodox ones. By so doing people will fully patronize it and this will go a long way to sustain and sell our culture.

### **Acknowledgements**

We wish to express my profound gratitude to God almighty for the strength He gave us throughout the study. Our deepest appreciation goes to all our key respondents for their commitment and dedication to this work. We will like to single out Nana Akwasi Asare, Okomfo Akosua Adutwumwaa, Okomfo Fati Haruna, Okomfo, Kofi Fofie and Okomfo Kofi Basuah for their unflinching assistance and immense contribution, our deepest thanks extend far beyond what this paper permits.

### **Competing Interest**

We declare that we have no significant competing financial, professional, or personal interests that might have influenced the performance or presentation of the work described in this manuscript.

### **Authors Contributions**

Author A initiated the study and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Author B and Author C managed the methods and the analysis of the study. All the authors read and approved the final manuscript.

### **Consent Disclaimer:**

As per international standard ,Respondents' written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s)

## REFERENCES

- Abdullahi, A. A. (2011). Trends and challenges of traditional medicine in Africa. *African Journal of Traditional, Complementary and Alternative Medicines*, 8(5S).
- Agbor, A. M., & Naidoo, S. (2011). Knowledge and practice of traditional healers in oral health in the Bui Division, Cameroon. *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine*, 7(1), 6.
- Anyinam, C. (1987). Availability, accessibility, acceptability, and adaptability: Four attributes of African ethno-medicine. *Social science & medicine*, 25(7), 803-811.
- Azongo, T. B., & Yidana, A. (2015). Spiritual diagnostic laboratory: The role of diviners in the management and resolution of life crises. *American Journal of Sociological Research*, 5(1), 7-13.
- Barimah, K. B. (2016). Traditional healers in Ghana: So near to the people, yet so far away from basic health care system. *TANG*, 6(2), 3-8.
- Beer, G. (2000). *Darwin's plots: evolutionary narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and nineteenth-century fiction*. Cambridge University Press.
- Buor, D. (2002). Distance as a predominant factor in the utilisation of health services in the Kumasi metropolis, Ghana. *GeoJournal*, 56(2), 145-157.
- Conserve Africa. (2002). Africa: Overview on Medicinal Plants and Traditional Medicine. Conserve Africa. Pambazuka News.
- Dime, C.A., (1995). African Traditional Medicine Peculiarities.
- D'Souza R. (2007). The importance of spirituality in medicine and its application to clinical practice. <https://www.mja.com.au/journal/2007/186/10/importance-spirituality-medicine-and-its-application-clinical-practice>. Retrieved 11th July, 2018

- Hewson, M. G., (1998). Traditional healers in southern Africa. *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 128(12\_Part\_1), 1029-1034.
- Kusi-Bempah, M. (2011). *Spatial analysis of the use of traditional medicine in urban areas of Ghana: a case study of Kumasi Metropolis* (Doctoral dissertation).
- Lawal, B. (2012). Board dynamics and corporate performance: review of literature, and empirical challenges. *International Journal of Economics and Finance*, 4(1), 22-35.
- Leedy, P. D., & Ormrod, J. P. (2005). *Practical Research—Planning and Design* 8th edn Pearson. *Upper Saddle River, NJ*.
- Lindsay, J. (2005). *Encyclopaedia of religion*. New York, NY: Macmillan.
- Mathai, J., & North, A. (2003). Spiritual history of parents of children attending a child and adolescent mental health service. *Australasian psychiatry*, 11(2), 172-174.
- May, C., Mead, N., Dowrick, C., & Firth, L. (1999). General practice and ethics: uncertainty and responsibility.
- Mettle-Nunoo, E. A. Jnr. (1990). *West African Traditional Religion*
- Mhame, P. P., Busia, K., Kasilo, O. M., & Mhame, P. P. (2010). Clinical practices of African traditional medicine. *The African Health Monitor*, 13, 32-39.
- Miro, S. (2014). The Gypsy's Tricks for Spiritual Cleansing and Protection: Limpia With An Egg <https://shaheenmiroinsights.com/the-gypsys-tricks-for-spiritual-cleansing-and-protection-limpia-or-cleansing-with-an-egg/> (Retrieved 17th March, 2017)
- Ngubane, S. E., (1987). *The Tembe Dialect* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Zululand).
- Parish, J. (2003). Antiwitchcraft shrines among the Akan: possession and the gathering of knowledge. *African Studies Review*, 46(3), 17-34.
- Regal, B. (2009). *Pseudoscience: A Critical Encyclopedia*. Greenwood. ISBN 978-0-313-35507-3, 55-56

Scott L. C. 2005. *Gods, Goddesses, and Mythology*. New York: Marshall Cavendish. ISBN 978-0-7614-7559-0, 378.

Sofowora, A. (1993). Recent trends in research into African medicinal plants. *Journal of ethnopharmacology*, 38(2-3), 197-208.

Staugård, F. (1985). *Traditional healers* (Vol. 1). Ipelegeng Publishers.

Thorpe, S. A. (1993). *African traditional religions*, Pretoria, ZA: University of South Africa, Pretoria

Truter, I. (2007). African traditional healers: Cultural and religious beliefs intertwined in a holistic way. *South African Pharmaceutical Journal*, 74(8), 56-60.

Twumasi, P. A., & Bonsi, S. K. (1975). Developing a health care system in Ghana. *Journal of the National Medical Association*, 67(5), 339.

UNESCO, (2013). Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage: Decisions, Available at: <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00473>. (17th September, 2018)

Whitehurst, T. (2016), Tess 4 Divination Tools and How to Use Them <https://tesswhitehurst.com/my-4-favorite-divination-tools-and-how-i-use-them/>. (Retrieved 12th March, 2018)

WHO, (1976). *African Traditional Medicine*. Afro Technical Report series No. 1, World Health Organization, Regional Office for Africa, Brazzaville.

WHO, (2000). *General Guidelines for Methodologies on Research and Evaluation of Traditional Medicine*, WHO /EDM/TRM/2000.1, Geneva, Switzerland.

Worstell, R. C. (2019). The Mirror Technique for Releasing the Subconscious. <https://livesensical.com/podcast/magic-of-believing/mirror-technique-releasing-subconscious/>

Yawar, A. (2001). Spirituality in medicine: what is to be done?. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 94(10), 529-533.