

# Chapter 19

## Indigenous Communication and Traditional Health Practices Among the Yoruba During Pregnancy, Child Delivery, and Baby Caring

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### ABSTRACT

*Communication is a vital aspect of human existence. It pervades man's existence and society, forming an integral part of human life. Communication is the means through which human beings express their feelings. Indigenous communication serves as the traditional means of conveying messages, all social and value exchanges of indigenous practice like the health practices. Traditional health practices include the use of knowledge skills, practices based on indigenous belief, experiences of culture used in maintenance of health-prevention, treatment and diagnosis in traditional health practices. This chapter examines and documents traditional health practices on how Yorùbás care for pregnancy, child delivery, and their babies. Such traditional health practices have existed since before the advent of modern health practices, thereby using indigenous communication for preservation and dissemination of valuable information that is significant for Yorùbá generations.*

### INTRODUCTION

The Yoruba speaking group forms one of the prominent cultural heritage groups in present day Nigeria. As Oyesomi and Salawu (2019) note that Yoruba is one of the ethnic groups in Nigeria; it is a collection of people bound together by same language. The Yoruba inhabit the south western part of Nigeria but has sizeable population in Benin Republic, Togo, Cuba, Brazil and some part of USA. They are also found in some parts of Kwara, Kogi, Edo, and Delta States within Nigeria in addition to the core Nigeria

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south western states like Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti and Lagos. By virtue of its spread, the Yoruba speakers also settled in some parts of West Africa neighbouring countries like Republic of Benin, Togo, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Ivory Coast respectively. Speakers of the language could equally be found in places like Brazil, Cuba, United Kingdom, United States of America, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago (Olatunji, 2013; Makinde, 2004; Ogungbemi, 2017; Adedina and Taiwo, 2018). In this regard, the population of the Yoruba people as estimated “in West Africa is forty million. This makes them one of the largest groups in sub-Saharan Africa” (Ogungbemi, 2017, p. 309 quoted Abimbola, 2006). Nevertheless, one key feature that marks the Yoruba people is their culture and communication systems. The Yoruba people are prosperous and rich in culture and communication (Adédínà and Táíwò, 2018).

Culture is part and parcel of every individual and people in the world. Culture, according to Tylor cited in Adélékè (2003) is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, law, art, moral customs and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society. Sewell Jr. (2005, p. 80) sees culture from social life perspective as the learned behaviour. In essence, it is the whole body of practices, beliefs, institutions, customs, habits, myths, and so on built up by humans and passed on from generation to generation. A fact Lewis (2012, p.34) supports when he opines that culture is the total way of a particular group of people that distinguishes them from other groups. It is the totality of what makes up the life and living styles of a group of people living in the same geographical area. Culture can be ‘shared’ and ‘learnt’ in a community as it serves as a communal property and gives its people peculiar identity (Adélékè, 2003).

Culture could be adjudged from two aspects, tangible and intangible. The tangible includes the concrete materials like wood or artefacts, tools, shelter, dress: clothing, make-up, facial marks and food. The intangible culture comprises of the non-concretes like mythology, literature (both written and oral), ‘the inner’ culture or ‘the sacred spirit’ like religion, knowledge, philosophy or beliefs of the people which are values and norms like hardworking, honesty, greeting, interaction, respect, conjugal relations inherent in individual images with symbolic nature as communication within the community or society (Irele, 1991; Adélékè, 2003 and Lawal, 2015).

It is a way of sharing knowledge and schemes designed by a group of folks for interpreting, preserving, expressing and responding to the realities that emanated with their society. Dyslva (2006, p. 4) citing Hofstede (1997) describes culture as the collective programming of the mind that distinguished the member of an organisation or country from another. He further states that culture is the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations from individual and the striving group striving. In other words, the ideas, meanings, values, beliefs that people learn as members of a society determines the culture of the people. In the view of Akangbe (2008, p. 6), culture is “the summation of both individual and collective life of a society which comprises its ideas, behaviours, social, religious and political peculiarities, sentiments and expressions.” Culture is connected with human cognition, that is, what people’s brain identifies as their culture is also their culture. These permeate through consciousness of the people about certain things about themselves, other people, or things that are common from generation to generation.

Culture is however linked with “ancient origin”, connected with art, communication, language, tribes, individuals, transmission and interactions, (Danesi and Perro, 1999, p. 3). The authors further allude to the facts:

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