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Modern Funeral Rites during COVID-19 Pandemic: the Socio-Psychological Implications

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Abstract

Covid-19 pandemic brought about changes in our normal lifestyles and cultural practices. Modern funeral rites for the dead have been altered as a result of the impact of the pandemic. It is important to note that modern funeral rites in the South Eastern part of Nigeria is an expensive ceremonial show in the guise to give the dead a befitting burial. It is devoid of emotional and physical support that was given by relatives, it has become a strategized, subordinating and institutionalized economic venture by the rich who have made it look real. This paper looks at the psychosocial implications of covid-19 pandemic on funeral rites. This study is historical and used oral stories, self witness, literatures, and comparative time analysis as its methodology. It is the contention of this paper that the exploitative system of funeral can be checked through government intervention as was seen during the covid-19 pandemic lockdown. There is also need for alternative social and psychological support system for the bereaved to enable them cope with grief and pain of losing a loved one since the traditional support system of people gathering for condolence visits have been restricted for fear of covid-19 outbreak.

Keywords: Bystander effect, Covid-19 regulations, Funeral rites, Grief, Poverty, Nurturance,

Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared on March 11th, 2020 that the COVID-19 outbreak, caused by the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), characterized a pandemic situation (WHO, 2020). It is estimated that 80% of the infected individuals develop mild or moderate forms of the infection while 20% manifest the severe version of the disease. Of these, 5% manifest the most severe form, which can rapidly progress to severe acute respiratory syndrome and other complications that may lead to death (Strabelli & Uip, 2020). There is a great concern worldwide with the novel coronavirus' high rate of transmissibility, which has caused different and devastating impact (Freitas, Napimoga & Donalisio, 2020; Silva, 2020), forcing local governments to establish, in addition to health emergencies and states of calamity, exceptional administrative measures for funeral services. As a result of the crisis, traditional rituals to honor the dead and comfort mourners needed to be abbreviated or even interrupted. Therefore, the COVID-19

pandemic has demanded many aspects of the dying experience and its rituals to be reformulated around the globe (Wallace, Wladkowski, Gibson & White, 2020).

Sociology and Psychology have long recognized the emotional value and structuring role of rites and rituals in different societies and cultures. Rites comprise a broader category, including rites of passage or healing, while a ritual is a set of gestures and actions that make up the rites. Human rituals are common to all peoples and are symbolic actions, repetitive, standardized, and highly valued behaviors that help individuals to channel emotions, and share beliefs and transmit values (Santos, Crespo, Canavarró & Kazak, 2018; Crepaldi, Schmidt, Noal, Bolze & Gabarra, 2020). Marking the transience of life, funeral rituals have always been present in history (Nascimento 2020; Tavares & Brahm, 2016) to demarcate a state of mourning, acknowledging the value and importance of those who have passed away, favoring change of roles and allowing the transition of the cycle of life (Souza & Souza, 2019). One should also consider the role funeral rituals play in psychological maturation, as they help individuals to face concrete loss and trigger a grieving process, allowing people to publicly manifest their grief (Souza & Souza, 2019).

To a living organism, life is the most important thing which starts at birth and ends with death. In the case of human beings, between both of these phases, they go through several developmental stages, from which they learn many things and are practiced in life. Being a social animal, man forms attachments and relationships with others and makes emotional connections during the course of their life. And then death comes! If the death is caused by geriatric diseases, most can console themselves by saying that it is an expected and a natural process. However, in the case of unexpected deaths, family members and relatives experience chaos and deep sorrows which may affect their body, leading to stress disorders and other panic conditions.

Death is a natural phenomenon yet the activities that surround death are social and are according to each society. After the demise of loved ones, people related to the deceased feel pangs of sorrow and pain, feeling of frustration, helplessness and disappointment. No one can control their feelings, especially if the deceased is intimately related. People tend to burst into tears and may cry for several hours. Continuous shedding of tears increases heart rate, causes heavy sweating and slows the rate of breathing. According to Chandran (2020), crying or weeping is actually a reaction of the Sympathetic Nervous System to the stress experienced by the body. Prolonged crying causes a runny nose, sore throat and disturbance in the larynx. These tears are called psychic tears. The tears are produced by the secretory system of lacrimal apparatus which has another function – release of the tears by drainage. The excess tears make the lacrimal punctum unable to drain the tears and ultimately cause problems to the eye lids (Chandran, 2020).

As per biological theories, mood and anxiety disorders occur due to the chemical imbalances of neurotransmitters such as serotonin, dopamine, nor epinephrine and Gama-aminobutric acid and so on. All these physical and psychological changes occur in mourners due to the demise of their close ones. The mental status and the equilibrium of the mourners may change, creating panic and stress disorders. The imbalance of neurotransmitters in the brain may spoil the conditions of

hormones. The result is body-ache, sprains, loss of appetite, insomnia, nausea, vomiting, headache, abdominal pain and so on (Chandran, 2020).

Funeral rites are relative significant social activities that accompany burial of the dead. Starting from the idea of death to death itself to burial rites to funeral rites, it is meaningful and sacred to each society. Burial rites are quite different from funeral rites as traditionally burial rites are performed during burial while funeral rites are performed for the dead some days after burial, though most times in this modern, era they are performed on the same day. With increasing globalization, westernization, etc the meaning of death, the activities and how and when these activities are conducted have taken a new shape. This has become impactful in the lives of citizens and the society as a whole. The traditional societies saw death/funeral rites as sacred and treated it as such but today it has become a commercial venture that has led many into poverty. The effect of burial/funeral rites have not gained academic or political attention as a possible salient factor that contributes to underdevelopment and loss of gross domestic product. There is no empirical work that shows the attendant psychosocial impact of funeral rites during the pandemic in the South-Eastern Nigeria.

The Philosophy of Death

Death is a powerful human concern that has been conceptualized as a powerful motivating force behind much creative expression and philosophic inquiry throughout the ages. Leo Tolstoy, renewed 19th century Russian moral thinker and novelist, aptly illustrated the human challenges in confronting the inevitability of death and the anxiety it provokes as he vividly describes the last three days Ivan Ilych's egocentric, seemingly meaningless existence in the *Death of Ivan Ilych*".

With the existence of living things, death was inevitable. Man was no exception as man also dies. To the adherents of Christianity death came as a result of God punishing man for disobedience (Genesis: 3¹⁹⁻²⁴, Romans: 5¹⁴). The philosophy of death and funeral mean different things to different groups (Isiko & Maate, 2019). Among the Igbo death is called "*onwu*". When man, a higher animal dies, what happens next? There are ways the dead (*ozu*) is disposed respectfully according to each group. The process of disposing the dead is called burial (*iliozu*). Burial could be defined as a rite of passage where the dead is given the final respect and disposed accordingly. Bible records depicts death as significant as it states that it is better to be in the house of mourning than to be in the house of feasting: for it is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to heart (Ecclesiastes⁷²).

Death is significant to man that it is noteworthy that man plans for his death right from time, according to Mondin (1985) as quoted by Izunwa (2016), "man in his intuition transcends himself and without having experimented with death, reaches out beyond the graves to shape his next life". Likewise the bible tells us that Simeon had Jesus buried in the tomb he had prepared for himself. Death brings pains, sober reflection, sorrow, quietness, etc. Anytime a member of the family dies it becomes a period of darkness, sorrow and not a time for merriment or show of wealth. Izunwa

(2016) noted in his findings that the right to a ‘befitting burial’ is next to the right to life in the hierarchy of customary rights, this corroborates the bible saying in Ecclesiastes (7^{1b}) that the day of death is more important than the day of one’s birth. What constitutes a befitting burial is in the fulfillment of all customary burial rites and/or funeral rites relative to societies.

Attitudes and practices towards death are determined and influenced by the people’s religion, society and culture, other factors include physical environment, age, sex, marital status, family background, title of the deceased (Isiko & Maate, 2019). The dead body can be burnt as in India and other parts of Europe (cremated, though not practiced among the Igbo as they believe it disrupts reincarnation and prevents the deceased from reuniting with their ancestors), buried underground as done amongst most groups of the world including the Igbo (who are mainly Christians) and sometimes thrown into the sea among the river line communities (Nigerian Funerals, 2019). In cases where the dead is thrown into the forest in Igbo land, it is considered that the dead had committed a taboo and throwing it into the forest for birds to feed on is significant as such is believed not to reincarnate with such forbidden character (Hauser, 1990). In some other cultures what constitutes taboo may be acceptable or treated with simplicity in another culture. In parts of Ebonyi state it is a taboo to die as a single (unmarried) person. Therefore what constitute ‘a fair burial rite’ is dependent on each group.

When one dies and after it is buried, further ceremonies are performed to help the dead rest in peace. This is called funeral rites (Ikwa Ozu). Funeral is an age long culture universal as noted by Filippo (2006). The Greek word for funeral means taking care or attending to someone, it is to prepare the dead for afterlife (Adebowale, 2019). Funeral is an age long practice where the children of the dead and other relations were expected to give the dead befitting burial and proper funeral rites. Izunwa (2016) referred to funeral rites as a customary right which an African is entitled to. Though the type of funeral undertaken for the dead is dependent on the status of the dead, in Africa, you may be more important dead than living (Krystyna, 2019). There has always been inequality in the funeral rites accorded the dead (Hauser, 1990) starting from positioning of the corpse to where the corpse is buried whether in front of the house or at the back of the house or near the kitchen to funeral ceremonies. The status of the deceased or the deceased family determines the level of mourning and category of mourners. For most young, single, etc it was most painful because it is seen as a life that was not duplicated as traditional Nigerians believe in reproduction as replacement and as a system of revolving life on earth, it was buried immediately and without ceremonies, it was not stressful, did not involve much family consultations nor much money, and even burial/funeral rites.

As mentioned earlier, funerals are gender specific whether for married, single, young, old, titled and untitled. When a young and single girl dies the burial ceremony associated is usually of lesser value compared to a male of equal status, likewise for married and aged, both male and female. For instance, when an aged woman dies the ceremonies bequeathed her is usually of lesser value as some social functions which are considered relevant are not performed, as such functions are considered male oriented or specific like masquerading unless the woman has been considered a

male through her initiation into the cult. Age in Igbo land likewise is an important factor in females' initiation into the cult. Certain traditional dance group such as the 'igede' does not perform except for an 'exceptional' woman, ceremonial killing of five animals (horse, cow, goat, ram and dog) which is significant, though this is community specific, also there were different number of gunshots or gong strikes to announce who died. These were traditional experiences, much of these stratifications in funeral in this era have become silent and have been overtaken by social change.

Funeral rites in the traditional era

In the traditional society when one dies, there is a process of burial from lying in state to actual burial. The lying in state which could last from one to nine days depending on society is significant. According to Plato the rationale for lying in state was to ensure that the assumed dead was really dead and not unconscious (Adebowale, 2019). When death is ascertained a series of other activities related to death (relative to status and society) ensues such as cries in high tones, informing the deceased relations from both the father's and mother's sides with crying which is done by the deceased daughters for parents with the help of family relations. The corpse is left to lay-in-state for a period with relations staying in watch which sometimes is in turns. At the end of the lying-in-state the dead body is buried and the funeral takes place almost immediately (after izuasa: that is the traditional seven weeks) because the things traditionally required were almost within reach. There was no need for keeping dead bodies even as there was no advanced technology available to preserve the body as long as one wanted.

Death is not a pleasant experience for those who are bereaved, because of the feelings of loss, shock, confusion, depression, anxiety, weakness and in some cases illness and even death. Knowing this, people around such as kinsmen and kinswomen, friends and well wishers rally round the immediate family of the dead, such activities like household chores: fetching of water, sweeping, washing of clothes amidst others are done by those around the bereaved. During the period of mourning the bereaved are not expected even to cook as people around get them assorted food and drinks, sometimes in turns. They come personally or in groups from time to time to stay and console the bereaved. During burial they do not cook for mourners instead people especially close relatives bring drinks and food (cooked and uncooked) which are used to serve those who come to commiserate with them. After interment and funeral they are still being provided for, for days or weeks ahead when the bereaved would have become strong emotionally and physically. Except for certain traditional burial rites, the immediate family of the dead spends almost nothing as expenses are shared within the group and much is also not expected from them by the extended family members to give the dead a 'befitting burial and funeral rites'. The planning of both burial and funeral rites were the prerogative of the family that is immediate extended family. The family or community chief priest conducts the rites with only a few provisions to the shrine such as fowl, palm wine, kola and that settles it. The consolers supply the consoled with material and emotional support to go through the trying time. In the traditional Igbo land this constituted a befitting burial and funeral rite.

Modern funeral rites

Perspectives about death and funeral rites changed since cultural values and traditions changed over time (Isiko & Maate, 2019). The traditional funeral rites have become individualized just as other aspects of life such as politics, economy, family pattern, etc due to factors like colonization, modernization, westernization, and educational development. Funeral rites in Igbo land have become extensive, expensive and competitive in nature. The style of consoling a mourner with both physical and material assistance has changed drastically with the advent of Christian religion, education, white collar jobs, migration, change in family and residential pattern, technological advancement; easy financial vertical mobility, etc. When death occurs, the dead is no longer buried immediately or few days after death because the head of the family is far from home, also with the proliferation of embalment centers and mortuaries the corpse can stay as long as when the head of the family is ready. This arrangement invariably alters the system of social relationships as relations, friends and well wishers coming to stay with the bereaved family, getting them food and other helps are no longer consistent with the modern pattern. With acculturation and economic upward mobility the bereaved can afford to keep the corpse in the morgue until he/she has made enough money for a 'befitting burial' and 'funeral rites' which usually is a fête. Such 'well-to-do' individual does not want the help of others and even gives more than is traditionally required to the kinsmen and this has gradually determined the expectations of kinsmen and women from the bereaved and has become a cultural consistency. Burial/funeral activities have become a thing of affluence and show of wealth which is accustomed with costly and luxurious ceremonies. Funerals are no longer done according to one's status rather it is another system of wealth acquisition as the bereaved makes financial projections from expected proceeds from many dignitaries within and without, groups such as clubs, religious organization one belonged to, which were invited and expected come with gift items and cash for condolences. To this extent these groups are determinants of burial date(s) instead of the kin group who previously had the final say.

Apart from these out groups the kin group (both male and female) who before now helped as custom demanded in easing the burden of funeral rites by providing for the burial of their kin are expectant of their shares from the deceased immediate family, without much regards to the mourners' health, social and psychological needs. Family members who fear being haunted by the dead's spirit or feel that their dead may not become an ancestor go extra miles in providing the excessive demands of the kins people (Nigerian Funeral, 2019). Sanctions of such are usually not easy for the defaulters so they go to any extent including selling, leasing, etc of property like land, (which in most cases the lessor loses to the lessee) and even borrowing to meet these demands. These loans taken have in certain cases especially among the poor led them more into penury ((Krystyna, 2019). This funeral extravaganza is seen as giving the dead respect which bolsters the dead to mingle with the dead boldly therefore the urge to bury their dead respectfully.

During the burial, parties are held. Much money is spent engaging gospel musicians, musicians are no longer traditional musicians as they are seen as agnostic. Since Christianity has dominated the traditional faith of the Igbo, and the Christian clergy officiates in the funeral of their member

and to a greater extent decides the burial period for dead members. Most traditional rites which were limited in expenses have gradually fizzled out as Christian doctrine has taken over taking these traditional rites as fetish. Mainstream churches for instance would insist that all that the dead was owing must be counterbalanced both home and abroad, if the family is well to do, there are projects in the church that they have to make contributions to (optionally compulsory) with 'other countless must' that must be settled with the presbytery before the clergy comes to say the burial mass. The Christian faith insists that both burial and funeral rites be done at the same time. So for Christians burial and funeral rites seem to be one and the same. This moment in time, posters, fliers, television and radio announcements are undertaken to announce death, burial and funeral, souvenirs of all sorts provided to say thank you to sympathizers, brochures printed for order of service (Ogbuagu, 1989). Many pre-burial activities which include wake-keep(s) at home and abroad depending on how many clubs the deceased or deceased children belong to (which usually involved closing/blocking street roads meaning paying to the state ministry in charge) where the church comes to conduct prayers/services, groups come and all are provided for by the deceased family according to the group's constitutional rights. This novel method has impoverished a lot as they hardly recover the amount they spend and are usually in debt. Krystyna, (2019) gave a good analysis in their explanation of the relevance of the enormous activities that accompany funeral that the activities include lavish meals to dancing pallbearers and animal sacrifices, expensive casket; money saved to plan a Nigerian burial.

Funeral during covid-19

Covid-19 refers to Corona Virus which started in December 2019 in Wuhan China, which has become world epidemic. This has given it a global concern considering the spread rate which is fast and also the death rate which is astronomical. Therefore world governments irrespective of status of country took to measures to combat the spread. Such measures include social distancing, no crowding, use of face mask, washing of hands every 20 minutes, no social gathering, no body contact, lockdown, etc. These measures invariably affected funeral rites even among the Igbo people. Covid-19 measures affected the nature of burial and funeral rites with respect to behaviours that are expected. This period though witnessed suspension of burials so as to give 'befitting burial' to the dead after the pandemic with its concomitant measures which was expected to last a few weeks but endured than expected. Mortuaries overflowed with corpses: morticians rejected dead bodies. This invariably forced people to bury their dead almost immediately it occurred. Though people buried their dead during covid-19 pandemic because morgues rejected corpses; they left the funeral for a later date (that is post covid-19 pandemic period) but then the mortuary fee was escaped. Burial rites during the covid-19 pandemic witnessed social change as the 'new burial' pattern has taken a new shape with stringent measures for defaulters. The implication is that burials were done without ceremonies, no pall bearers, no time wasted, no wake keeps to keep with covid-19 regulations. That means no more groups, crowd, music, dancing, exposure of dead bodies to be seen by sympathizers, within a few hours the burial was through and everyone present mostly

family members (because no more burial announcements through the mass media) went home as if nothing happened, expenses reduced to the minimum.

In Enugu State, during the period of covid-19, most burials were conducted with simplicity of time and “creativity” as Ikwuemesi and Onwuegbuna (2017) would refer to activities at funerals. It was also surrounded by systems of ensuring order as the law enforcement agents were always patrolling the environs to ensure compliance. It was no longer a matter of days but hours, no pall bearers, no praise singers, no club or such groups, no money spraying, no advertisement of any kind, no expectations on the part of umunna and/or umuada to get part of the animals killed for funeral rituals or a life one from the direct family of the dead, no more delays from the church. Church service was very brief, no more church projects to pay for. This has positive influence on the attitude of the bereaved towards sourcing fund for burial, though some other burial activities necessary in keeping with the belief that they are necessary to ensure passage of the dead to the spirit world and reincarnation were still intact but on a low degree as they were before modernization. Food and drinks were served to sympathizers who were few who leave the environment almost immediately. It is served as “take away” to those who cared for food, reducing the stress of serving more than one meal to sympathizers. As there are no advertisements announcing death and burial arrangements, most supposedly sympathizer may not really be aware, so when an intending sympathizer is not seen as usually the practice of no love lost follows as no strain is found in such social relationship contrary to what it was before the covid-19 pandemic. This therefore contradicts the proposals of Bower (2020) who noted that the current situation of covid-19 pandemic in UK of banning funeral entirely does not allow families and communities to be involved in the process of death in ways in which they would normally hope or expect to be.

The absence of these expensive burial activities during covid-19 reduced the stress experienced to get the huge amount of money needed by the bereaved, majority of who are less than average economically to give a ‘befitting burial/funeral’. For the sympathizers in attendance, their whole day is not spent mourning as formerly would be customarily expected, as they go out to attend to their needs immediately after burial ceremony. This implies that funeral activities that are exorbitant and are financially negatively impactful can still be curtailed. The rationale here is that their economic power is not limited by burial/funeral activities which before now took days to be accomplished, invariably impacting positively on their individual economy and indirectly on the community and national economy. This study therefore examined the psychosocial implications of ‘modernize funeral rites’ in South East Nigeria and also proffers solutions.

The Social Consequences in the Funeral Rituals

The negative consequences of this modernized style of funeral rites is poverty, debtors with corresponding fights, court cases, illnesses, death, etc. The issue of funeral rites should be an issue of public concern (socially, religiously and politically).

Poverty in Nigeria is persistent even though so many poverty alleviation programmes have been undertaken over the years, poverty is a development challenge (Aliyu & Dansabo, 2017). Examining poverty index in Nigeria; National Bureau of Statistics (2019) as reported by Adesoji (2020) who noted that between September 2018 to October 2019 about forty percent of Nigerians lived below poverty line. In the South-East in particular one may say comparatively the index is low but they could have been better off without unnecessary expenditure which funeral rites carry. That notwithstanding there is still a progressive poverty index which the cause is structural (Yunusa, 2008) affecting the state and the people. Poverty has been explained from many dimensions like Adam Smith defined it 'as the inability to purchase necessities required by nature or custom (Davis & Sanchez-Martinez, 2014). According to Aliyu and Dansabo, (2017) poverty is better understood in general terms as a condition in which its victims are unable to have access to basic needs of life. These needs include having enough to eat, safe water to drink, adequate housing, and health care. Quoting Mood and Jonsoon (2015), UN's definition following the Copenhagen's summit of 1995, 'Overall poverty' in addition to lack of economic resources is said to be "... characterized by lack of participation in decision making and in civil, social and cultural life". Determinants of poverty have been attributed to factors such as corruption, unemployment, non-diversification of the economy, inequality, laziness, poor education system, dept, etc (Ailyu & Dansabo, 2017; Omoniyi, 2018; Ucha, 2010). Maestre (2015) quoting Robert Knox opined that poverty is a process of relationship that people are involved in. Mood and Jonsoon (2015) explained poverty to mean 'a lack of economic resources that have negative social consequences'. Poverty has devastating effects and as an economic issue can easily be transformed to social issue (Mood & Jonsoon, 2015). With increasing poverty rate the nation becomes sick as the consequences range from negative effect on social life to more harmful effects for relations with friends and relatives; even on political participation; it also leads to social exclusion both primary and secondary (Mood & Jonsoon, 2015). Mood and Jonsoon(2015) opined that secondary relations which involve cost, inability to live up to the membership fees can trigger redundancy. Poverty may lead to political instability, increase risk of war, mass emigration leading to brain drain, terrorism, (Dineshbakshi, 2020), family problems such as divorce and domestic violence, poor health and medical care, homelessness, etc are other consequences of poverty, and it also intensifies underdevelopment.

The Psychological Elements in the Funeral Rituals

There are several psychological elements implicated in the funeral rites as practiced in the South East part of Nigeria. Unfortunately these supposed psychological benefits seem threatened and lost during this covid-19 pandemic because of the strict protocols that must be adhered to during the funeral rites. Such include: immediate burial of the dead especially those who died as a result of covid-19, few attendance, social distancing, no hugging and others.

Others include:-

- i. *Deindividualizing the mourners by visualizing the emotionally matured facial expression of the other participants:* In funeral ceremony, rituals are carried out in the presence of other relatives and loved ones. The signs of consolation from their facial expressions and body language provide rich visual stimuli to the mourners, which may ultimately help to bring chemical balance in the brain. Individuals other than the close relative of the deceased may be in a calm and peaceful mood. By transferring the positive mood, the mourners also become calm themselves. However, during the pandemic lockdown, this benefit was lost due to the absence of loved ones and well-wishers who were restricted from attending
- ii. *Releasing the mental agony, sadness and repressed emotions and providing relief:* In close relationships, memories occasionally come back to a person, making them experience various emotions and feelings. All these feelings add to their deep agony which is again reinforced with the thought of losing someone forever. This puts the individual into a moderately depressed state. In this respect, all the relevant stimuli in the ritual practices work as a catharsis that relieves stress and anxiety and makes the mourners empathetic.
- iii. *Bystander effects through visitors' non verbal cues such as signs and symbols which create a healing power:* The facial expression and body language of relatives during rituals may be considered as some healing visuals. By processing the visuals in a silent and holistic manner, the mourners get positive energy, reducing their stress and increasing their feeling of possession.
- iv. *Music therapy through Chants and rhymes:* The Chanting of the preceptor comes as a source of pleasure and content. Its melodious and musical quality creates good thoughts, feelings and behaviours. The body automatically copes with the stress to attain a state of well-being.
- v. *Aroma of incense stick, frankincense, camphor etc. (Olfactory):* Aroma plays an important role in changing distressed moods to calm and peaceful moods. During rituals, the incense stick, frankincense or camphor is used, which produces a pleasant scent. The aroma has the power to bring the individuals to a relaxed mental state and to feel their surroundings positively.
- vi. *Nurturance through cherishing, pampering and hugging of others during these moments:* Hugging, cherishing and pampering reduce feelings of depression and fatigue. During or after the rituals, if a mourning individual is hugged by his/her

relatives, the individual returns to a normal state with reduced blood pressure levels. This helps to stimulate psychological growth by the release of oxytocin.

Funeral rituals can be considered as therapeutic because they help the individual to be exposed to healing stimuli and activate the healing power. Those who are involved and participate in holistic ritual activities in funerals are found to be released from their stressed state and reach a normal state and reality sooner. Rituals performed correctly have the power to reaffirm social order and a moral component to bring the mourners back to reality. Thus, funeral rituals seem to be more for the living than the deceased. Rituals act as basic life-supporting tools for the suffering individual.

Interventions

In dealing with the cost implications and poverty situations caused by modernized funeral rites several social strategies and possibilities can be adopted. The community and church authorities such limit the demands and expectations imposed on the mourners. Communities should have new reduced demands for funeral rites which will have very low cost implications. This is very important because most wailings when people loss their loved ones is more of the financial cost of conducting such burials. The church must play a big role in making their members know that no amount of funeral rites given to the dead will make any difference because the dead are no more aware of what is happening. Rather people should be made to celebrate their loved one when they are alive than dead. There should also be some kind of government legislations that will regulate the issues of funeral rites. Such laws will guide the quantity of what kin groups are entitled to and sharing of posters, and brochures, etc. All these measures are geared towards reducing the negative financial consequences incurred during burial/funeral ceremonies and to certain extent it has saved the mourners the embarrassment and difficulty funeral rites cause and social nuisance it causes the state.

Psychologically, there is need for government to adopt new measures of assisting people overcome grief during the loss of a loved one. Naturally, loved ones, well-wishers and acquaintances will converge at such times, but because of the covid-19 pandemic and guiding protocols these teeming population will not be available. This poses a new mental health and wellbeing risk. People can get into depression because they feel abandoned and left alone at such time. The government can offer tele-therapeutic interventions to such bereaved family members through Psychologists, Sociologists, Social workers and other mental health professionals.

Theoretical Framework

The family is an important and integral part of human existence. The family has the function of integration and when a member dies the living members see it as their duty to ensure that such deceased is given the last respect through funeral. For instance Bower (2020) noted that in UK, funeral allows families and communities to be involved in the process of death in ways in which they would normally hope or expect to be. Anthropologists explained that the rational for certain

practices in traditional societies which includes sharing such as animals killed is that it is basic to continued association of families in any human group. While also writing on stratification, they noted that the reason for sharing seems to be the same as that which underlies insurance systems in industrial societies: it is an effective method of sharing risks (Lenski & Lenski, 1987). During burial in Igbo land, well to do members of the community condolence with materials like cloth, yams, drinks, etc and animals such as cow, horse, goat, etc which are recorded. It is a kind of insurance which is expected to be replicated when the sympathizer loses anyone or dies. If it is not forthcoming the bereaved family can go to recovery it. Funerals have the functions of bringing family members together and to strengthen community. Like Izunwa (2016) noted, funeral rites has a unique way of building the community in return. Yet the modernized exploitative funeral rites in Igbo land seem to be crashing the community and needs to be changed because of the social problems it factors such as poverty and its multiplier effects. According to Talcott Parsons theory of social change (Munch, 1981) any social action that brings or initiates change which brings about disequilibrium, in order to bring equilibrium again to the system certain measures can be introduced which will with time bring the system back to order. Poverty with its concomitant ruinous vices factored by funeral rites is preventable. Therefore to adjust this social maladjustment it is necessary that other parts of the system political, religious, cultural, etc should create regulations to monitor and keep down the excesses of funeral rites through the creation of enforcement agencies, enlightenment, education, seminars, programmes, etc by both government and non-governmental organizations and even civil society organizations. In this way the essence of family members being together and strengthened will still be maintained and sustained. More importantly, the government has to intervene by putting regulatory rules and forces to monitor the rules as was evidenced in the ‘during’ covid-19 burial. Possibly, to reduce the economic hardship caused by “modernized funeral rites”, there is need for political will to bridge the gap between the poor and the rich occasioned by befitting funeral rites and economic drawback to the nation.

The modernized method of funeral rites before covid-19 is a system where the rich keep subordinating and sustaining the poor’s position. Regulations to sustain this system has been perpetuated and supported by the rich of each community through traditional norms; in other words, such expensive, unnecessary funeral rites have become institutionalized as Igbo (2008) noted norms become defined, allocated status positions and role functions in relation to any given behaviour or practice. According to World Bank there is high inequality between the rich and the poor in the South-East which ranges from 0.37 - 0.38, it also noted the high vulnerability of about half of the households falling into poverty one time or the other. Modernized funeral rites help the rich to exploit the poor and restrain the poor from getting out of poverty through the system that keeps the poor borrowing and even from the rich without the ability to pay back. The modernized idea of funeral rites in the guise to give a befitting burial is the rich (ruling class) ideology. In Marxist perspective, this is a distortion of reality by the rich to keep being in charge or sustain their position (top) in the community. Marxist would argue that this ideology blinds members of the society to the contradictions and conflicts of interest that are built into their relationships thereby accepting their situations as normal and natural, right and proper. That is why members of

the society would accept the ‘new’ institutionalized system of funeral gala as proper rites that portend a befitting burial. Marx calls it a false consciousness of reality which is produced to help maintain the system. For Marx it is poverty of the mind (Burawoy, 2018) and to enrich the mind he proposed a radical change which is revolutionary therefore, for change to take place; change which will liberate the poor from the ideologies of the rich and from further fall, deep into poverty, this can be done through education or enlightenment, rallies, conferences, etc to create class consciousness. This agrees with the evolutionist thinking that for society to move forward, it will involve advancement in human thought that is intellectual development.

Conclusion

For culture that has been and assimilated for years by members, change is usually not ease but can be attained as culture lag is expected. Though cultures are peculiar to groups and since it does not infringe on the rights of others, it may not be easy to make general laws to such beliefs/behaviours that are circumscribed by culture. Poverty level is increasing and may further be deepened by activities of funeral rites. It is noteworthy to say that apart from diversification of the economy, improving transport and power infrastructure, humanitarian assistance to reduce poverty level in the nation, proper policies if made and implemented will reduce unnecessary activities underlying funeral rites that reduce one financially and further increases the negative effect on the socio-economic and psychological conditions of the nation. The life that the bereaved lives after funeral rites should be devoid of difficulties, trauma, stress and penury that go with repaying debt incurred as a result of funeral rites. This paper submits that life after funeral can be made simple by abolishing those “modern traditional” norms that have people imprisoned financially and emotionally after funeral rites. These unnecessary rituals should through jurisprudence be purged to improve the financial and health status of citizens, though those traditional rituals to sustain afterlife as believed should be sustained since it influences the peoples understanding of way of life. Also this change can be achieved through the systems of socialization, social control and psychotherapy. The periods of covid-19 have shown that to control poverty level and other socio-psychological problems caused by expensive funeral rites can be achieved. This corroborates the findings of Aliyu and Dansabo (2017) that what is needed to solve the problem of poverty in Nigeria is seriousness in terms of implementation of policies. Therefore if the consequences of poverty mentioned are to be reduced then the issue of extravagant funeral rites should be tackled as a government policy.

Recommendations

Empirical research should be carried out on the contribution of funeral rites to the declining economy of the nation which will endear political will to combat or control its enormous negative impact on the nation's economy and the people in particular.

There should be re-socialization process, educating the masses on the negative implication of extravagant spending during bury and funeral of the dead which includes suffering economically by the living. That is where all stakeholders' especially Non-governmental organizations that are involved in poverty reduction should advance to making a step away from theory to practice advocate government involvement through policy implementation. When laws are made there should be in-built modalities for enforcing them, for instance traditional rulers should be involved in remodeling these funeral rites and also held responsible for disobeying of the laws by community members, this will sustain it.

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