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# A Critical Look at Some Areas of Stigma and Stereotypes in Igbo Socio-Cultural Life: Traditional Religion as a Radiating Force

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## Abstract

The Igbo people's culture which is influenced by Igbo traditional religion accommodated some levels of stigma and stereotypes. Historically, those practices were observed without much concern on their effects to common man. At a time, complaints and agitations arose, prompting some adjustments in some areas of this problem. These perceptions affect issues relating to alcoholism, abortion, suicide, pre-marital pregnancy, leprosy, domestic roles, property ownership, school functionalities, Osu-caste, widowhood discrimination etc. It has been discovered in this paper, that while there are some adjustments, the issue has transcended to an alarming levels in the contemporary Igbo society that many schools within the South-East consider sex/gender in allocation of school functionalities, families encourage choices of higher academic pursuit based on the gender of their offspring, stigma against bastards and so on. The research therefore aims at discouraging both the traditional and contemporary forms of stigma and stereotypes. When it is discharged, it will foster economic growth and development, create a higher level of socialization, identify worth in every individual and demoralize inferiority complex. This paper recommends for development of people's potentials, elimination of obnoxious cultural perceptions among other things. The research adopts historical and phenomenological approach. Data were analyzed using descriptive style. Both primary and secondary sources were used for data collection.

**Keywords:** Stigma, Stereotypes, Culture and Traditional Religion

## Introduction:

Culture is an encompassing concept whose meanings and connotations are distinct to people and their perceptions. The word culture from the Layman's perspective could be described as a way of life of a particular people which guides their daily activities within their local milieu. Ahonsi (1997) defines culture as the totality of the way of life in a society as shaped by the material conditions in their history systems of beliefs, political organization and legitimizing. Culture

could be seen as the material and intellectual equipment of a people through which they satisfy their biological and social needs and also how they adapt to their environment. However, it is believed that the activities of people predicate the norms and values of a group of people which could be observed in their mode of dressing, worship, marriage, burial rites, naming ceremonies, among others. Based on this, it is obvious that African/Igbo traditional religion as a serious activity among the Igbo influences to a great



extent the social and cultural life of the people. It can be deduced from the above that culture is the distinctive characteristics of a group of people, which means that there is no community or nation without a culture. Culture could be assessed in terms of how people create and recreate their lives both in the material and non-material sense of their social existence (Ofonagoro, 1996). Igbo people's traditional religion has remained a cultural refinery. The culture is always consolidated with the traditional religion. These consolidated beliefs have remained pertinent in the thought of the contemporary Igbo people.

The Igbo are the largest group of people living in the South East of Nigeria. They are one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria. They consist of many subgroups and are known to be socially and culturally diverse. Although, Igbo are mostly Christians today, they have a deep rooted traditions, religion and culture which are distinct to them as a group. Igbo culture includes the various customs, practices, norms and values of the people. It was the traditional religion that was used to enforce and execute those customs, norms, values etc. It comprises of the ancient practices as well as the modern concepts added into the Igbo culture either through evolution or outside influences. The culture of the Igbo modify the thoughts, speech, actions and artifacts of the Igbo so much that the Igbo's are easily distinguished from other ethnic groups. How a culture survives depends on the people's capacity to learn and transmit it to succeeding generations. The Igbo culture expresses itself in the customs, beliefs, social norms, religions, social and material traits of the Igbo.

The cultural practices of the Igbo have endured centuries of years ago and it practically worked for the people. Not all the cultural /traditional practices are bad, however, some have stood the test of time and have positive values, others are uncertain and harmful. Cultural practices of the people fulfill certain purposes for the culture bearers (Idelen, 2007). The religious-cultural practices of the Igbo not only affect them

as individuals, but also affect all other aspects of their lives such as social relationships, attitudes, behaviours and how they function in the society. The Igbos are culturally endowed and a good grasp of their cultural anthropology and cosmology show the pride with which they uphold their distinctive way of life.

However, some of these cultural practices have been observed according to Chukwu (2006), to be very archaic, dangerous and damaging, mostly to the psyche of women. According to Iwe (1985), the perpetrators of these violent cultural practices against women were yet to acknowledge that the dignity of women are equal to that of men, for human dignity rests not on sex but on personality. Charles (2010) argued that man is socialized by learning and imbibing sufficiently the appropriate ingredients of a given culture to become a cultural being. In other words, to become a cultural being in any group, demands the assimilation of the ways of life of the group in order to be seen and accepted as responsible member of the group. There are a lot of violent cultural practices which have become items of bad culture and traditions. In the contemporary times, there had been some adjustments on those harsh cultural practices. For example, some fathers offer their daughters properties in their will. There is some recognition of economic values in Igbo women. Measures have been taken to reduce charges on marriage rites in order to also reduce the number of bastards. Igbo women assume both elective and appointment offices in politics. But all these are not enough to eliminate stigma and stereotypes.

Osu caste has been cancelled in the state laws yet so many communities observe it. More practical measures are needed. The contemporary society has on its own introduced another level of stereotypes. Today, traditionalists, herbalists, etc are stigmatized and stereotyped as a result of wrong perceptions by Christians and those that claim to the most civilized. The study adopts historical and phenomenological research methodology. Data collected were analyzed with



descriptive and historical analytical style. Data were sourced from both primary and secondary sources. It is finally envisaged that at the end of this study, a more standard sense of belonging will be developed within and outside Igbo society. It is the position of this paper that the major problem the research identifies is that even though some adjustments have been made on some behavioural patterns of Igbo cultural life, that constitute stigma and stereotypes, there is an advanced level of stigma and stereotype on sex, property ownership, school functionaries among other things. This research intends to address these issues with the aim to reconcile these types of insinuations, to foster rapid socio-economic growth and discourage unnecessary development of inferiority and superiority complexity. In this paper, we will be looking at how the cultural practices of the Igbos' have negatively affected us as individuals and as society in general. Therefore, the research recommends that people should be developed in their potentials, irrespective of stigma or stereotypes that affect them. Opprobrious cultural perceptions should be eliminated, etc.

### **The Concept of Stigma and Stereotypes**

Stigma, according to Summers (2001: 1416) is "a strong feeling in society that a type of behavior is shameful". On the other hand, Summers (2001:1413) defines stereotype as "a fixed idea or image of what a particular type of person or thing is like... to decide, usually unfairly, that certain people have particular qualities or abilities because they belong to a particular race, sex, or social class". When we juxtapose these two concepts, it is obvious they interwoven. They are all societal or group perception of abnormalities on certain behavior, persons or thing. This thinking traditionally was normal among the Igbo. But with time, people became much exposed, educated, and enlightened. More civilized way of presenting cases affecting humanity were developed. These channels assisted in reducing certain types of stigma and stereotypes. Time immemorial, there were stigma and stereotypes on alcoholism,

abortion, suicide, bachelorhood, spinsterhood, bareness, lack of male child, obesity, pre-marital pregnancy, bastard, leprosy, cripple/lame, blindness. Today, stigma and stereotype have transcended to traditionalists, medicine-men/herbalist, school functionaries, academic professional choices, domestic responsibilities and accessibilities (gender sensitive), ownership of properties, ownership and planting of certain crops, participation in certain cultural and traditional activities, certain political height for people from certain social class/gender, laziness and poverty. Ekeopara, (2005) points that death by falling from a tree (palm), drown into water, swollen body/stomach are bad death in African world view. Most of these stigma and stereotypes are built on traditional religious beliefs, while others emanated from social misconception of life and nature in a given society. Some are archaic, while some are contemporary experiences. Whether they were past practices or present practices, most of them do not conform to the right and freedom of man as a member of his society. Okwueze and Kanu agree to this when they assert that:

A citizen of Nigeria of a particular community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion shall not, by reason only that he is such a person be subjected either expressly or by implication any law in force in Nigeria to disabilities or restrictions.

In fact, stigma and stereotype of any form, either in Igbo land particularly, Nigeria generally, or the world at large should be condemned.

### **Issues of Stigma and Stereotype among the Igbo of South-East, Nigeria and their Implications**

#### **Blindness/Cripple:**

The idea of sight and seeing is paramount to Igbo understanding of life. It does not end at ordinarily, the sense of sight and seeing. In this vein, Opata (1998:119) states thus; "...As such, perception is much larger than the Igbo notions of



sight and seeing". The Igbo believe that good sight symbolizes and connotes the ability to see and understand. On the spiritual realm for example, the diviners embark on "*isa-anyd*" or "*itucha-anyd*" ritual that is washing the eye or picking out particles from the eye respectively to show that the diviners must see both physical and spiritual occurrences without asking clients any question. The eye enhances the mental capacity. Ama Chinago (personal communication 4<sup>th</sup> Feb, 2017), emphasizes that it is very difficult to see a traditional priest in Igbo land who is blind, because, the people believe that blindness is a curse.

Based on this believe, there are a lot of stigma and stereotype against the blind. In most cases, they are not invited to important village meetings. When anyone makes amorous advances to the blind, he is perceived as an abomination. Even when the blind happens to be the eldest in the kindred people hardly go to him for blessings. People avoid close body contact with them; while they pretend they go very close to them. When they offer items, nobody feels very free to accept such items. Historically, the Igbo believe that those who go blind must have committed several abominations that the gods can no longer condone. But today medical examinations have discovered health issues that can trigger blindness thereby reducing the stigma and stereotype on blindness. The cripple (lame) suffer similar stigma and stereotype especially those who are cripple from birth. At any moment a child is discovered to be cripple, a lot of people avoid carrying the baby. They see it as an action of a vindictive spirit. Mr. Amaechi Augustine from Awkuzu Anambra (personal communication, 11 March, 2018) said that cripple is a punishment from the unknown world to the known world. He added that some associations do not accept them no matter their level of affluence. The Igbo perception of such disabilities is terrible.

### **Alcoholism and Suicide:**

According to Summers (2001: 31) defines alcoholism as "the medical condition of being

alcoholic." It also defines alcoholic as "someone who regularly drinks too much alcohol and has difficulty stopping." Alcoholism attracts stigma and stereotype to the individual. At family level, his younger ones disregard him. Sometimes, they are denied their shares. In public gatherings or discussion, they are not allowed to air their views. People always conclude that excess alcohol has affected their natural wisdom and intelligence. In an informal conversation people fondly call them alcoholics, as a way of mocking them. Some communities allow children to sing mockery songs to them especially when they are drunk. In some cases, when they regain their normal senses, they feel rejected. Their names are expunged from the community or village register because they do not participate in community services. They are seen as a curse to their immediate families.

Suicide on the other side of the coin, is an abomination to Igbo communities. Madam Adaeze Chukwu (personal communication, 8 December, 2018) points that suicide is seen by the Igbo as extreme wickedness that prompts man to take life divinely provided by God. Suicide is derived from the Latin word *suicidium*. *Sui* means self, *Ocidere* means to kill. Therefore *Sui+Ocidere* implies self destruction. Ekwutosi has defined suicide as: "the direct taking of one's own life, done on one's own authority". It is deemed as self hatred. If man hates himself, by implication, he will not love someone else. Families that had their parent(s) or relation(s) committed suicide are stigmatized. It is always difficult for both their sons and daughters to marry within their immediate communities where the information circulates. People are meticulous in their dealings with the living members of such families. Mr. Chidi Okolo. (Personal Communication, 9 Jan, 2019) is of the opinion that suicide is self rejection condemned in Arochukwu and Igbo tradition to an extent that villagers grudgingly pay condolence visit to such family. The living members of such families' loose respect and pride in their communities respective of the social status they might have attained.



## Widowhood and Widowerhood Discrimination

A woman becomes a widow (*isi mkepe*) when her husband dies. As a result, she is addressed as "Nwanyi isi mkepe" (A woman without a head the deceased husband being the head). This labeling justifies her widowhood status. According to the cultural practices accorded to the dead, the wife of the deceased goes into traumatic wailing immediately, beating her chest, flinging around her arms and falling down, only to get up to repeat the cycle again and again until other women come to her rescue immediately to restrain her by forcing her to sit on the ground where they sit around her to commiserate with her. According to the Igbo culture, this kind of bitter wailing is expected to go on until the deceased is buried. Widowhood is not something any woman could pray for. It is a terrible stigma. The level of subjugation and oppression on them could warrant their death, but the unfortunate part of this dilemma, is that no one cares. If a widow dies, it could be a good riddance to bad rubbish because their death could be a confirmation of their guilt. In other words, widows were not regarded as prime suspects in the demise of their spouses, but guilty.

In the words of Charles (2010) he asserts that widows are labeled husband killers, husband snatchers, adulteress, problematic, destitute and women with ill-luck. Charles (2010) observes that, their innocence as husband killers was only established when they go through the diabolical ritual cleansing by drinking the filthy water used in bathing the corpses of their deceased husbands. Washing and bathing during this period called for punishment of the widows because they were assumed to be beautifying themselves (*icho mma*). They were expected to have only one set of black or white mourning cloth *Akwa mkepe*, which they must wear wherever they were in public. Chukwu (2006) stated that the most humiliating of all the cultural practices meted out to widows was the scrapping of their hair with broken bottles or a sharp razor blade by the "Umuada" (first born) daughters within the extended family system),

which usually left them with injuries on their skulls.

All these treatments meted to the widows was to make them more amenable to keeping silent over all other forms of oppression and subjugation including being coerced to marry any of the willing siblings of their deceased husbands against their wish. The human greed which manifested at the demise of a male member of the family offered the siblings the opportunity to confiscate the deceased assets without considering whether the deceased had wives and children when alive. Ahonsi (1997) remarked that it is unfortunate that widowhood marks the beginning of an extreme life crisis and a woman's dilemma. The discrimination, wickedness, hatred, segregation, stigmatization even by close relatives have been what widows face on a daily basis. Although these harmful cultural practices vary from one community to another as most widows are no longer subjected to these extreme conditions as was in the past, the reasons are that some enlightened widows and those with more economic endowment stand their grounds to resist oppressive widowhood policies (Oluwole, 2011). Empowering women educationally and economically will help to expose them to taking up the challenges to advocate for cultural change in an oppressive environment which they find themselves.

Widowers in some cases face a similar stigma and stereotype. In some Igbo communities, widowers are accused of being responsible for the death of their wives. Some are forced to drink the water used in bathing their deceased wives corpses. When they make some advances to marry another lady, it becomes difficult because of the speculations that they have hands in the death of their wives. The traditional religious belief of forcing the deceased wife or husband to drink corpse bath water is assign the spirit of all dead to administer justice.



## **Osu Caste System**

Osu as an outcaste has been explained by Okoli in Okwueze and Kalu (2003: 45) when he traces the origin of Osu caste thus: 'The system was introduced in Igbo land in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, when the God, "Kamalu" or Amadioha a Juju priest that the land had been defiled and needed purification... able bodied men were to be brought... and publicly dedicated to the gods and ancestors for atonement". Okeke in Okwueze and Kalu (2003) the same realm traced it to 14<sup>th</sup> century. He claims that it emanated as a result of the curse pronounced by Nri clan on persons or groups who were unable to meet up with the demand of the Nri, as a priestly class, their job for spiritual cleansing was a source of power and influence. At a time those who made the pronouncement could not be found and those people remained outcasts with time their descendants inherited the stigma. According to Akulue (2013) *osu* cast system created a lot of restrictions against the stigmatized.

*Osu* caste system is another harmful cultural practice which is predominant among the Igbo. The stigma which *osu* caste system brings is not only meted on the female folks but on those individuals who are labeled *Osu*. Discrimination of *Osu* caste system is a rock bottom attack on the personality of the victim. It is a virus which affects every other emblem of human rights as it seeks to separate, even alienate the affected from the membership of the human community. These names '*osu*', '*ume*' '*obu*', '*oru*', '*obu ume*' '*omoni*' '*umuarusi*' convey the same impression, though with insignificant variations in meaning. These persons labeled '*osu*' serve the deities that are revered, the natives related with them with caution to avoid any negative implications and consequences that may follow with such interactions. The other members of these communities are known as '*Diala*' or '*Nwadiala*', which literally means "son of the soil" or free born" The *osu* status may be acquired through the ritually transformation of *Diala* or *Nwadiala* as a punishment for his offences, by entering the shrine under duress or voluntarily.

*Osu* status could also be acquired by contact with an *osu*, or by birth to *osu* parents, intermarriage and any other direct contact with an *osu*.

Traditionally, the status of '*Osu*' may have resulted from the position which they occupied as servants of the gods or deities. This position demanded and had special mode of dealing with them different from the 'freeborn'. The class which they occupy now is definitely because of the advert of the Europeans and the church. The consequence of Christianity relegated the traditional worship to the level of inferiority and this compounded the status of the *Osu*. Our forefathers called an innocent man, "an *osu*", a thing given to the deities, and thereafter, he becomes the outcast, the untouchables, the strangers, and his generations forever. The *osu* are treated as inferior human beings in a state of permanent and irreversible disability and are subjected to various forms of abuse, stereotypes or segregation and stigmatization. They are made to live separately from the freeborn. They reside in most areas very close to shrines and market places. In extreme cases, they are not allowed to dance, drink, hold hands, associate or have sexual relation with *Nwadiala*. They are not allowed to break kola nuts at meetings.

At the level of spirituality, an *osu* cannot be allowed to pour libation or pray to the gods on behalf of a freeborn at community gathering. It is believed that such prayers will bring calamity and misfortune. An *osu* may find it difficult fulfilling a desire to occupy political position in Igbo land particularly, where a *Diala* has indicated interest. Evidence of discrimination against the *osu* includes: Disinheritance (a situation where a freeborn marries *osu*), Ostracism, heaping harvest offering separately in churches, denial of membership of social clubs, violent disruption of marriage ceremonies, denial of chieftaincy titles, deprivation of property etc. The discrimination and stigmatization are more pronounced in the area of marriage. An *osu* cannot marry a freeborn. The belief is that any freeborn that marries an *osu* defiles the family. Freeborn families are always



prepared against any of their own desiring to marry an *osu*. This fear is so feared that marriages in most Igbo communities are preceded by very thorough and rigorous investigations. Okafor (2009: 22) identifies a similar stigma he calls *osu* caste equivalent or traditional cultic slavery. He posits thus: "...they give out their daughters to deity. The girls become the deities' wives, bear children and own the children". The practice should also be seen as *osu* because, it is an outcaste system. The fact is that Igbo land is highly dialectical. In fact, there is need for a lasting solution. Akulue (2013:76) stresses that: "there is need for concerted effort of religious organizations and government agencies to strive towards eradicating these caste systems – people belonging to these caste systems suffer all unthinkable sorts of social discrimination, humiliation, and embracement"

## Leprosy

This is one of the oldest diseases of mankind with very unique social dimension where by victims and even their care givers are often rejected by the society. The traditional religious belief systems of the Igbo and Christian religion have negative interpretations of leprosy, consequently, persons afflicted with the disease are often perceived as if they have breached taboos of their locality, offended their gods or committed abominable offences in their present or previous existence. The Christian Bible contains verses which associated leprosy with being "unclean". This requires spiritual bath or cleansing for those afflicted to be made whole. Christ asked the leper to bath himself seven times at river Jordan

In the same vein, Nwankwo (2010) notes that even in the present era of science and technology, the definition of leprosy as a curse from the gods and the attachment of extreme social stigma and stereotype to it remain crucial elements of the conceptualization of the disease. Similarly, leprosy is conceived with loathing and aversion. Attitude towards the disease is the same in many African and Western cultures alike. To then low level of awareness and fear of the disease has remained

part of the characteristics and social attitudes towards its right to the present day. The stigma surrounding leprosy as a disease is terrible to the point that they are separated from the general public. In some cultures, stigma against people with leprosy are still widespread. Those with Leprosy attached bells at their waists to help alert people and passers-by that they were approaching, as the bell rings, people run away, out of their reach. The Leprosy people lived apart from the city population, settling around temples or shrines where they beg for charity. The stigmatization also affects the families of these leprosy patients, which lead to some patients committing suicide. As a result of the associated ideas about heredity and contagion of leprosy disease, children and families of person with leprosy also suffer stigma and stereotypes.

## Sex Stratification (Female Inheritance)

In Africa, the concept of patriarchy was entrenched due to its reinforcement by socio-cultural institutions and beliefs. In Nigeria, particularly since it is believed that the woman's domain was to be in the kitchen and cradle; their contributions to the male sphere were not seen as deserving of any attention. These socially and culturally ascribed functions of women had put them in a position and situation in which they were materially and psychologically dependent on the men.

In Igbo land, the traditional village comprises many compounds. Each had its foundation on patrilineal relations. In conformity with that, the male by seniority was accorded status, respect and recognition in the scheme of things irrespective of polygamous family and agnatic emphasis. In the family, the first son was the head and the custodian of the family heirlooms like *Ofo* (symbol of strength) and *Chi* (personal god of the family). Having custody of the *Ofo*, the first son known as *Okpara*, was invested with the symbol of the family authority. Consequently, this patriarchal perception put the female child at a disadvantage; she was denied formal education or skills as the case may be, even in the contemporary times



Attention has indeed focused on only the male child under whose headship, the female and indeed the women were placed. Inheritance and other issues relating to positions of authority in Igbo land were seen as the preserves of the male, though gender division was usually strict among the Igbo.

In the Igbo world view, importance was attached to a male child more than a female or indeed any full grown woman. The obsession for a male child in every Igbo family and in Africa generally stood a restriction to the efforts and further contributions of women. This cultural preference for the male child and restrictions against the female had hindered the development of women and denied them self-actualization. It is within this obsession for the male child that the 'pregnancy' of the concept of the female husband in Igbo land was conceived. As a result of this obsession for the male child, females do not possess the rights to inherit, neither do the wives, daughters nor the widows of the deceased have the right to inherit or partake in property sharing. This was held in accordance with Igbo general custom and cultural practices in built by the traditional religion.

#### **Abortion/ Pre- Marital Pregnancy/Bastard/ Bachelorhood/ Spinsterhood/and Barrenness.**

As could be seen among the Igbo, traditional religion remains the hallmark of African/Igbo traditions and culture. Issues relating to abortion, pre- marital pregnancy, bastards, bachelorhood, spinsterhood and barrenness have their traditional religious interpretations. People or victims of these traditional issues face some levels of stigma and stereotype. Ekwutosi (2008:42) states that: "In the past, abortion was not a common place probably because of our reverence for human life and our positive attitude to religion". In the history of Igbo perception of worth for human life, abortion is generally termed evil. Abortion here should not be misunderstood to include miscarriage which modern medicine presents as spontaneous abortion. Abortion here is specific

on any deliberate action or intention to terminate pregnancy at any level of conception. At times, such mothers are believed to be punished by the earth goddess, divinities, deities and other spirits. When a girl or woman has been unveiled to have committed this evil, sacrifices are performed to appease and ward off the wrath of the gods from the offender. At times, if anyone has been known for this evil, she faces a lot of stereotype and stigma to her peers, friends and most importantly, to the elders. Elders do not recommend her for marriage. If she is married, in some cases, her husband can divorce her. Their daughters are not recommended for marriage. Today, medical sciences are giving some justification to the act, though Christian religion gives some sense of belonging to them, especially when they repent. But in Igbo traditional religious society, they face severe degree of stigma and stereotype as agents of sexual misconducts.

Pre- marital pregnancy, on the other hand, is next to abortion. Girls are expected to preserve their virginity for their legal husbands. Any pregnancy before a girl or woman is legally according to the customs of the land married to a man is considered a breach of cultural norms and morale. Mr Eju Jonathan (personal communication, 27 February, 2019) said that pregnancy before basic marriage rites in many Igbo communities creates some stigma and stereotypes to the offender and her immediate family members. Some parents are bound from taking shares from any traditional marriage rite in their kindred. Whenever a girl is pregnant without marriage introduction, the bride pride or worth is affected. She is forced under this circumstance no opportunity of choosing husbands of her choice. Every man approaches her for marriage indiscriminately. If she refuses to marry, her parents have no powers to offer her any traditional rights; her children have no customary rights in the community.

Bastard is usually an outcome of an individual being unable to identify his legal father. Bastards are offspring of unmarried mothers. They do not



belong to any kindred. They do not own any property in the family where they were born. A foreigner to the families where they were born will easily observe the stigma and stereotype they suffer in the hands of the kindred. Challenges of bastard syndrome affect the male bastards more than the female ones. The females can marry anybody and go, but the males ought to be wealthy enough to acquire lands and other properties of their own, marry, and raise their own children who will form kindred of their own. In some Igbo communities they do not assume the status of bastard if the custom allows grandparents to incorporate them as members of their immediate family. Where the custom forbids their acceptance, no body worries to ask for their bride price.

Bachelors and spinsters are also victims of stigma and stereotype. They receive a lot of insult from villagers. Bachelors in this context are those mature male adults who are unwilling to marry throughout their life. Bachelors enjoy their rights as members of Igbo community but they suffer at old age as terminated generations. They suffer old age care because they do not have children of their own to take care of them. Enyiukwu Onyinyechi (Personal Communication, 10 May, 2018) reviews that they are seen as equivalent of morons and imbeciles. The society sees them as fools. They are devalued. They are not allowed to take traditional titles in most Igbo communities. Spinsters are female counterparts of bachelor. They receive their due rights. They are also considered in a similar way as bachelors. Spinsterhood is perceived as a curse from the gods. In some cases it is believed to be a generation punishment. Barrenness gives birth to childlessness. The barren are respected more than bachelors and spinsters as far as he/she is married. But they are still viewed as people with bad destiny. They are equivalent to the less privilege in communities. Intelligent ones among them struggle to make sure their husbands marry another wife but they are stereotyped, and stigmatized because people do not loan them due to fear of whom to hold responsible in case she could not redeem the loan contract. People offer

to them only what they can bear in case of insolvency. People intrude into their properties especially at their old age because they believe nobody will question any intruder. They are neglected.

### **Traditionalists/Medicine-Men/ Herbalists/ School Functionaries/Domestic Responsibilities and property Ownership**

Nowadays, traditionalists, medicine-men, herbalists are stereotyped or stigmatized. Modern or young people today stigmatize traditionalists, medicine –men or herbalists as evil. Christianity has proliferated to an unbecoming misinterpretation of people's background, belief, faith and professions. The new age youths with their heavenly assurance are convinced that whatever a traditionalist is doing is evil. For some, as far as any member of his extended family or village is a traditionalist, a medicine-man or herbalist, he has no business with them. Mr. Felix Ezeilo (Personal Communication, 20 April, 2019), points that some Pentecostal sons of his kindred and village have refused to join the age-grade system, village meeting, extended family meetings. Others have changed the surnames they share with their family members simply because they do not want anything in common with those brothers who are traditionalists, medicine-men or herbalists. They claim that light and darkness have no business to transact. They claim that those traditional herbalists etc are as a whole evil and uncivilized, therefore, should not be associated with.

On government or school functionaries, domestic responsibilities, the female ones are stereotyped. In schools, higher functions like: class prefect, senior prefect, etc, within the South-East are mostly boys. The girls are taken as weak gender that does not have much to offer. In the families, boys are given much attention that their sisters always feel subordinated to them. In many Igbo families, girls do not enjoy much opportunities. Some do not allow their daughters to drive their cars. Some families will persuade the boys to study science courses like Medicine and surgery.



engineering etc even when they are not as science inclined as the girls.

### **Recommendations:**

- Igbo forum(s) like “Ohaneze Ndi-igbo” should add more efforts in the development of people's potentials irrespective of the type of stigma or stereotype the culture has inflicted on them. This will help to add value to their personalities and subdue such inflictions. Finances could be provided to the weaker sex and the neglected.
- Certain cultural perceptions that are obnoxious to individual freedom and opportunities should gradually and systematically erased from the fabric of the societal livelihood.
- Government and its agents should seriously advocate and protect the right of its citizens in all ramifications amicably within various cultural diversifications.
- Religious bodies or practitioners should fight for ecumenical cooperation notwithstanding human physical weaknesses and cultural alliance.
- Communities should pay scientific attention to some medical or health issues rather than dwelling too much on superstitions.

### **Conclusion**

Despite the adjustments in the contemporary times, which should usher in improvements in the conditions which the Igbo cultural practices have stigmatized and stereotyped some individual groups. The Igbo ethnic group of South-eastern

Nigeria has not yet sufficiently provided strategies of drastically eliminating that culture based stereotype or stigma to enhance the socio-economic growth and development of Igbo society. Stigma and stereotypes have caused unnecessary social or class stratification, increase spiritual tension, reduces political participation, and encourages inferiority and superiority complexities.

Consequently, the surest ways out of these cultural practices: empowerment through critical education, access to credit facilities and enlightenment in order for Igbo women to acquire intellectual man-power to free themselves from these shackles of old times. In essence, women should take positive steps towards improving and transforming their minds. The culture is not totally wrong in observing some of their rules. Some were intended to control human excesses and weaknesses, while others came as a result of tenacious adherence to traditional religion and culture which are more or less superstitious in nature. In all, there should be compromise between the old and new for the betterment of mankind.

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