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Perception of Mental Illness in Ancient Greek and Contemporary Yoruba Religious Beliefs

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Abstract

Mental illness is one of the most dreaded illnesses in human societies. Recent studies have investigated the phenomenon as neurosis with psychotic manifestations in individuals across societies. However, there are diverse opinions on the cause(s) of mental illness. Therefore, interrogating the subject from the worldviews of two traditional societies— Ancient Greece and Yoruba - the study classifies the causes of mental illness into three: natural, physical and supernatural. It further investigates attitudinal correlation between societies in the classical era and modern times in the perception of mental disorders. The aims to determine if prejudices or biases are proximal or distal in both societies and to highlight the social implications for interpersonal relationships, especially as bases for the acceptance and social instability of those who experience mental illness. The study, which is basically descriptive, adopts philosophical and cultural analytical methods to foreground textual explication, using the works of Plato, Hippocrates, Oluwole and Jegede. The paper shows that both in Ancient Greece and Yoruba societies, mental illness is attributed to retribution from the gods and accounts for the preponderance of Greek mythologies and tragedies, contextualising madness as inflicted by wrathful or envious gods or goddesses. It concludes that the stigmatisation of affected persons often emasculates them as they are deprived of proper healthcare during the period of illness, and denied social protection and recognition if they are fortunate enough to receive treatment. Invariably, the society is impoverished through this latent brain drain.

Keywords: Ancient Greece, mental illness, prejudices, Yoruba, religion

Introduction

Throughout history, some people have been identified by their societies as being significantly different due to certain abnormal behavioural and emotional traits. In ancient Greece, according to Kenny (1973), Plato was

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the first person to coin the word “mental health” (p. 68). Mental illness, in many societies of the world, is a form of illness faced by many people; its nature, perception and treatment have been subject of debates. The supposed causes of mental illness vary from one culture or religion to another. In some religious beliefs, the mentally ill individuals are thought to have been overtaken by spirits, either good or evil. Some also believe that their 'strange' behaviour is caused by inner conflict because of their sins; or that it is a gift from some god (Thompson, 2007, p. ix); or that supernatural or magical powers had entered the body; or that they had been dispossessed of their souls, and that the only way wellness could be achieved was if the soul returned (Townsend, 2000, p. 14); or that they might have broken a taboo or sinned against another individual or a god.

In ancient Greece, like every other society, there were divided opinions about the causes of mental illness. Some believed that it was a punishment of the gods while others considered it to be caused by physical and emotional problems (Ahonen, 2014, p. 30). The Yoruba people, like the ancient Greek, believe that mental illness can result from natural, supernatural, preternatural and inheritable sources. Therefore, in both Greek and Yoruba societies, mental illness appears to have been culturally schematised. Cultural schematism, perception, attitudes toward mentally ill individuals and treatment of mental illness in the Classical Greek society and among the contemporary Yoruba people are here interrogated. This paper is a descriptive study of mental illness among Greek and Yoruba societies. Although a library-based research, this study does not deliberate on the records of medical advances in the treatment of mental illness in both cultures. Rather, it dwells on the socio-religious beliefs or perceptions of the people to the illness. This is with particular reference to the works of Plato, Hippocrates, Oluwole and Jegede.

Ancient Greek Perception and Attitude to Mental Illness

The Greek word, *μανία* (*mania*), according to Marke Ahonen, was the most common word used for severe mental disturbances in Classical antiquity. *Mania* was described as a 'distortion' (*εκστασις*) of the mind, and further defined as a chronic ailment, occurring without fever. *Mania* could manifest itself as a drastic change in the behaviour and mental state of a person so that she or he lost control of himself or herself, deviating both from the accepted norms of rationality and from his usual disposition. *Mania* manifests through hallucinations, delusions, bizarre fears and other inappropriate moods (Ahonen, 2014, pp.13-14). Xenophon typically represents the behaviour exhibited by mad men when he says:

Some mad men have no fear of danger and others are afraid where there is nothing to be afraid of, as some will do or say anything in a crowd with no sense of

shame, while others shrink even from going abroad among men, some respect neither temple nor altar nor any other sacred thing, others worship stocks and stones and beasts (Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, book 1, chapter 1, section, 14).

Foolhardiness is suggested by having “no fear of danger”, whereas, paranoid fear, “where there is nothing to be afraid of”, may conjure some unhealthy obsession. Similarly, it is hardly difficult to perceive a socially discomfoting state of abnormality when caution is thrown to the wind to “do or say anything in a crowd with no sense of shame” (Ahonen, 2014, p. 27). Rather than simply categorising this as lack of piety, when “some respect neither temple nor altar nor any other sacred thing,” Xenophon sees it as an eccentric picture of lunatics (Ahonen, 2014, p. 71). However, there is more to consider on the Greek people's perception of mental illness, such as what they believed to be the causes and cure of mental illness.

The concept of madness plays an important role in Greek mythology. In Homeric and archaic Greece, madness was believed to have been caused by the gods or demons. It was believed that those who had lost the favour of the angry gods could be struck with madness. As the Greek proverb states: “those whom the gods wish to destroy they first make mad” (Pietikainen, 2015, p. 17). Greek mythologies and tragedies are replete with stories of madness inflicted by some wrathful or jealous gods or goddesses as a form of divine punishment. For example, the goddess Hera, angered at Heracles, sent Lyssa (madness personified) to him in revenge, and in a fit of madness, Heracles killed his own sons, thinking they were those of his enemy, Eurystheus. Heracles also killed his wife and was about to kill his own father but for the timely intervention of the goddess Athena (Hard, 2004, pp. 252-253). Another example is Orestes, who in avenging his father's (Agamemnon's) death, at the command of Apollo, killed his mother Clytemnestra. Orestes, having incurred blood-guilt, was pursued ruthlessly by the Furies, the female spirits of justice and vengeance who drove men mad (Tzeferakos, 2014, p.6).

Homer, the famous Greek poet, attributes insanity to the gods. According to Thompson (2007), Homer believes that the mind of mentally ill persons had been taken away by the gods. Dodds (1962, p. 70), exploring the concept of *atē* in Homer, states that *atē* is a state of mind, a temporary clouding or bewildering of the normal consciousness, a partial and temporary insanity and it is ascribed to supernatural agency. Agamemnon blamed a divine being for his irrational decision of compensating the loss of his own mistress by robbing Achilles of his: “Not I, was the cause of this act, but Zeus and my portion and the Erinyes who walks in darkness: they it was who in the assembly put wild *atē* in my understanding, ... Deity will always have its

way" (Iliad, book 19, line 86). Hence, this general statement in Homer's *The Iliad* (book 12, line 254) and *Odyssey* (book 23, line 11) that "the gods can make the most sensible man senseless . . ." is an ascription of the cause of madness to divinity.

The Greek tragedies also presented madness as being of divine origin. However, unlike the mythologies, in the tragedies, madness is portrayed not as a permanent condition or illness but as a temporary state. For example, the Greek tragedian, Sophocles, in his work titled *Ajax*, tells the story of Ajax who contested with Odysseus over Achilles' armour after the warrior's death. He, however, lost and sought revenge. Athena, drove Ajax temporarily insane in a bid to protect Odysseus who was her favourite, and because Ajax had earlier spurned her help. Ajax attacked sheep and cattle that were taken by the Greeks as spoils of war, thinking that they were Greek leaders (Ahonen, 2014, p. 184).

Another tragedian, Euripides, in his *Bacchae*, presents two forms of divine *mania*, as pointed out by Guettel (2007, p. 329). The first form of madness is the aggressive and frenzied behaviour inflicted by a god or goddess on those who opposed him or her. The other is the ritual experience of identification with the god, Dionysus. The *Bacchae*, on one hand, gives a vivid description of madness as a punishment for impious action committed by Pentheus. Here, Dionysus struck his mother's sisters (Ino, Autonoe and Agave) and other Theban women with madness for spreading false rumours about his mother, Semele, thereby denying his divine paternity. Believing that Dionysus was an impostor, King Pentheus opposed his observing rites. The women were led to roam over Mount Cithaeron as Bacchantes (followers of Dionysus) where they brutally slaughtered Agave's son, Pentheus (Lambert, 2009, pp. 29-31). The story of Pentheus and Agave is one of a series of cult-legends which describe the punishment of humans who refused to accept the religion of Dionysus.

Hard (2004, p. 175) opines that the ritual madness reflected in *Bacchae* are in connection with women followers of Dionysus known as *Mainades* (Maenads), which literally means 'mad women'. Dickie (2007, p. 353), on his part, states that the Maenads are of two kinds. The first consists of women whose Bacchic experience is induced by willing participation, where the worshippers yield to union with Dionysus. The second set of women comprises those inflicted with *mania* as a divine punishment in which Dionysiac *mania* is no longer stemming from communal ritual, but a result of delusion originating with the god.

Ancient Greek medical practitioners, philosophers and even writers have all attempted to define, categorise and even prescribe a cure for mental illness. For instance, Plato, through his interlocutors, Socrates and Phaedrus, argues that madness should not be seen as being necessarily bad; rather, madness should be considered a divine gift. Hence, when discussing *mania* in

the *Phaedrus*, he presents two broad classifications:

Μαν?ας δ?γεε?δηδ?ο,τ?νμ?ν ?π? νοσημ?των
 ?νθρωπ?νων, τ?νδ? ?π? θε?ας?ξαλαγ?ς τ?νε?ωθ?των
 νομ?μωνγιγνομ?νην.

There are two types of madness, one caused by human illnesses and one by a divine impulse that does away with habitual rules (Jacques, 2013, p. 103).

Here, Plato identifies two causes of madness. To him, madness can result either from human illness (natural) or from the supernatural (act of divinity).

On naturalistic madness, Plato relates mental health to the soul and divided the soul into two parts, rational and irrational. According to Plato, the rational soul existed in its present form in human nature while the irrational soul was made up of jealousy, fear and anger. In his work, *Timaeus* (lines 86b-e), Plato states that mental illness and abnormal behaviour could be attributed to bodily imbalance. To him, balanced mind and body education are responsible for good mental health. Plato believes that the problem of mind originated from the disease of the body along with the lack of balance of emotions and interventions of god. To cure this kind of mental illness, Plato suggests that the patient be talked to and threatened with confinement or shown good behaviour in order to restore the balance of emotions. He then groups divine madness into different classes, namely: prophetic, ritual, poetic and erotic (Plato, *Phaedrus*, lines 265a-c). In *Phaedrus* (lines 244c-265b), Plato explains in detail that each divine madness has its own patron-god who sends it to people. The prophetic madness, according to Plato, is from Apollo and is experienced by “oracle-uttering priestess of Apollo and Zeus. While ritual madness inspired by Dionysus is experienced in rites and purification that involved prayers capable of delivering people from danger, both present and future.” The third form of madness, poetic, is attributed to the Muses. This form of madness, to Plato, “seizes and stimulates” the poet to “rapt passionate expression, especially in lyric poetry, glorifying the countless mighty deeds of ancient times for the instruction of posterity”. With this inspiration from the Muses, the inspired poets attain greater achievements than those of their calm colleagues. Erotic madness, the fourth form of madness, considered as the highest form of madness, is described by Plato as “the madness of lovers” caused by Aphrodite and Eros.

Apollo, being the patron of prophetic madness, did not only strike people with madness but also inspired them with prophetic vision of the past, the present and the future as seen in the cases of Pythia and Sibyl, at the famous sanctuary in Delphi, whereby he communicates to humans. The myth of Cassandra is an example of prophetic madness. Apollo cursed Cassandra

with the gift of prophecy because she spurned his love and many did not believe he did. The Apollonian madness, according to Manea (2017, p.15), contrasts the Bacchic which only offered people the opportunity to engage in a “collective experience of ritual pleasure” without the mantic or mediumistic element.

Prescribing how people with mental illness should be treated, Plato, in the *Laws* (lines 934c -d), suggests that people with mental illness should not be “allowed to be at large in the community; the relatives of such persons shall keep them in safe custody at home.” Here, Plato implies that the responsibility of caring for the mentally ill rested with their families who would keep them from doing harm (Ahonen, 2014, p. 88). This is an indication that a person with mental illness can become violent and should be kept in check. Besides, Plato's measure can also be understood as a way of preventing mad persons from bringing reproach upon their families by strange conducts. It should be noted that Plato's prescription is for naturalistic *mania* and not divine *mania*.

Aristotle, the prominent disciple of Plato, does not define or classify mental illness, but labels the word '*mania*' disease (Ahonen, 2014, p.101). He believes that the origin of mental illness is physical in nature. The physical cause, according to him, is due to the overheating of the area of the heart which disturbs the movement of the soul, thereby affecting the “sensitive and rational functions of the soul that resides in the heart. When this happens, the acts of sense perception and intelligence” become disjointed and inept (Ahonen, 2014, pp. 101-102). This heating, according to Aristotle, may be caused by various factors, such as corrupt bodily humours, anatomical abnormality or emotional upheavals. Aristotle also suggests that the mentally ill people rely more on fantasy than reason and this fantasy is responsible for the hallucinations experienced by mentally ill people. In his *Eudemian Ethics*, he refers to physical treatment of mad persons and suggests that they are in need of 'medical or civil correction, since medical treatment counts as correction as much as does flogging' (Ahonen, 2014, p. 71).

The concept of madness as a mental illness emerged with the birth of Hippocratic medicine in the fifth and fourth centuries BC. This novelty is attributed to Hippocrates, a Greek medical doctor from the island of Cos who flourished between 460 and 370 BC. In his treatise, *On the Sacred Disease*, mental illness is said to be caused by the moistness of the brain. Seeking to refute the common perception of mental illness, he states: “Men regard its nature and cause as divine from ignorance and wonder because it is not at all like other diseases” (Hippocrates, 1923, p. 175). He went further to say that all diseases had their natural causes, and the cure had to accord with the cause. The doctrine of four humours or bodily fluids was fundamental to Hippocratic medicine. This humoral doctrine accounted for human physical anatomy and physiological phenomena. such as disease and mental illness,

based on the four essential humours. These humours were black bile (*melanchole*); yellow bile (*chole*), phlegm (*phlegma*) and blood (*haima*) (Pietikainen, 2015, p.18). Both physical well-being and mental health depended on the balance (*eukrasia*) between these bodily fluids. Pietikainen further explains that the state of imbalance (*dyskrasia*) was a consequence of surplus amount of a certain humour in the human body. This humoral imbalance can cause various diseases, including mental illness.

According to Ahonen (2014, p. 11), in Hippocratic medicine, two forms of madness were identified. One was known as *mania*, and the other melancholy. *Mania* is also of two types: raging *mania* and quiet *mania*. According to the humoral doctrine, a person could be struck with raging *mania* when there was a cerebral overflow of yellow bile; while those with raging *mania* were frenzied and mischievous. Those whose mania was caused by surplus of phlegm were quiet and decent. Melancholy was a result of surplus of black bile (*melanchole*) and its distinct symptoms were sadness, fear and despair. The Hippocratic treatment of mania and melancholy included proper diet, and therapy to make the patient sweat, vomit or suffer from diarrhoea. It was believed that the wretched physical condition caused by the powerful drugs and herbs may make maniacs and melancholics forget their wretched mental condition for a little time (Pietikainen, 2015, pp.19-21).

Since mental illness, as seen above, was largely perceived to have a divine cause, the mentally ill in Classical Greece were shunned because they were viewed as persons subject to divine curse. Contact with them was considered dangerous as it was believed that the gods were angry with the afflicted individuals and that they could receive a similar fate through association with the mentally ill (Dodds, 1962, p. 68).

Mental Illness in Greek Drama

Beyond social alienation, the mentally ill were also physically maltreated. People spat on sighting a mad person. In the *Characters* (16, 14, 1) by Theophrastus, a man spits into his bosom on seeing a madman in order to avert the bad omen. Furthermore, bodily assault is found in the *Wasps* and *Birds* as Aristophanes suggests that passers-by could throw stones at madmen. But no evidence exists of a practice of putting the mentally ill to death. However, the enigma over the mentally ill was evident: they were regarded with awe as much as they were shunned. Their being ill-treated was because they were thought to have connection with the supernatural world and could on occasions display unusual powers, while their being revered stemmed from their social estimation.

The Classical Greeks believed that mental illness had a divine cause and so they thought about its cure. If the god or goddess causing the trouble is known, he or she could be appeased with the appropriate rites. For instance,

as expounded by Hard (2004, pp. 114-175), when the Calydonians were afflicted with madness by Dionysus, they were told that his anger would be allayed only if a human was sacrificed; and when the daughters of Eleuther, the eponymous founder of the town, Eleutherai, were driven mad by Dionysus for scorning a vision of the god, their father founded the cult of Dionysus in order to appease the god and bring an end to their madness. As Dionysus could inflict madness, so also could he provide release from it. Bacchic experience is thought to cure mental illness; also, the Corybantes, priests of the goddess Cybele, were said to have been able to cure mental illnesses by inducing ritual madness; the flutes, tympana or kettledrums used in the cults of Dionysus and Cybele could cause madness and could be cured using homoeopathic doses. This homoeopathic cure could be seen in the story of Melampus, the seer who healed the Dionysiac madness of the Argive women "with the help of ritual cries amid a sort of possessed dancing" (Dodds, 1962, pp. 273-274).

The god of healing, Asclepius, was also believed to be able to cure mental illness. People spent the night in his temple in the hope of getting cured. In the *Wasps*, Aristophanes tells of the procedures Bdelycleon tried on his old father adjudged to have gone mad. The old man went through purification rites, attended Corybantic rituals and was finally made to incubate in Asclepius' temple. When the divine being causing the illness is not known, other gods or goddesses could be consulted, and they could either make known the divinity responsible for the illness or provide cure.

Yoruba Perception of Mental Illness

Yoruba is one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria. The people inhabit the south-western part of the country and speak the Yoruba language which has many dialects. The Yoruba, like people of other African societies, were predominantly traditional worshipers of various gods and deities with Olodumare, the Supreme Being, as the head of the pantheon. Although Christianity and Islam have replaced most of the traditional religions, the thoughts and beliefs of the people about life, and their attitudes towards it, are still influenced by this worldview. This is especially so on issues related to health. Often, the Yoruba trace the sources of illnesses, to enemies (*otá*). Enemies could manifest in the forms of witchcraft (*ajé*), sorcery (*oṣo*), gods (*òrìṣà*), or ancestors (*alálẹ̀*) and hereditary sickness (*àìsàn idilẹ̀*) (Jegede, 2002, p. 322).

Erinoso and Oke, cited in Jegede (2002, p. 328), classified the Yoruba view of the causation of illnesses in general into three groups: supernatural, preternatural or mystical and natural causes. The Yoruba are aware that certain illnesses have natural or physical causation. For instance, they know that inappropriate food can cause diarrhoea, stomach-ache and other forms of diseases and that the appropriate treatment of this category of illnesses is by

physical measures. However, if the illness does not respond to the usual measures or if it recurs frequently or under suspicious circumstances, a supernatural cause is suspected (Oyebola 2010, p. 68).

In many Nigerian cultures, mental illness is attributed to aggrieved ancestors and being possessed of a spirit or by punishment meted by a retributive god. In other words, the activities of supernatural beings or powers (gods, goddesses, good and bad spirits, and witches) are considered to be the sources of mental illnesses (Oluwole 1995, p. 55). In this light, the issues concerning mental illness are seen as being underpinned by supernatural factors.

Mental illness, unlike other sicknesses like malaria, yellow fever, stomach ache and other pathological illnesses, is an illness that triggers a phobia in many. Leighton and Lambo (1963, pp. 106-108), consider mental illness the most dreaded illness among the Yoruba. The concern, really, has nothing to do with whether it is curable or not; rather, it is the social and psychological stigma that affects not only the mentally ill person, but also the members of the family that raises serious concerns.

The term *wèrè* is commonly used for all forms of insanity, particularly chronic forms. Jegede (2016, p. 15) says that mental illness is also referred to as *arun opolo* or *isín win*. He classifies the term *wèrè* into three: *wèrè amútorunwá* (mental illness that one is born with), *wèrè iran* or *wèrè idilé* (hereditary or lineage mental illness), and *'wèrè afise'* (afflicted mental illness) (2005, p. 117). Generally, the symptoms associated with the word *'wèrè'* include obvious hallucinations, aimless activity, refusing food because it is thought to contain poison, sleeplessness, tearing of one's clothes, lack of personal hygiene, eating all sorts of dirty food, spontaneously attacking people and experiencing loss of memory. Epithets usually come after the word *'wèrè'* to indicate its gravity. For instance, *wèrè aláṣọ* (that wears clothes) refers to a patient who is normal most of the time but becomes mad periodically; *wèrè agbà* is the psychosis of old age; *wèrè idilé* (of the lineage) is hereditary psychosis. In this case, it is believed that if any member of one's family has suffered from mental disease, it is natural that a child from such family would have mental illness since the disease can be passed on from parents to children.

However, various researches conducted by Raymond (1961), Osunwole (1989), Jegede (2005), and many others, have shown that the Yoruba, like the ancient Greek, also lean towards believing that mental illness is caused by supernatural and/or mystical powers. In the Yoruba classificatory system of causation of diseases, the supernatural and the mystical powers overlap. Osunwole (1989, p. 78) alludes to the fact that the Yoruba gods, though generally considered benevolent, can be invoked to do evil: they can bring afflictions even to their devotees if they are not worshipped in the right manner or if they are neglected. In other words, the

gods can cause mental illness. Whirlwind (*iji*) is also believed to be an agent of the causation of mental illness, because harmful spirits are believed to be in the whirlwind and could harm anyone who comes in contact with the wind. It is also believed that any mistake committed in some aspects of incantations (*ofò*) can make the chanter insane.

There are popular prayers among the Yorùbá that attest to the belief that mental illness could be caused by the gods or by a supreme being:

Bí ó sà, kò sà
 Bí ó sà, kò sà
 Ọlórún má fí wẹ̀rẹ̀ bá waja

Whether it will be cured or not
 Whether it will be cured or not
 God, do not afflict us with madness

There is also a prayer in the *odu Owunrindagbon*, in *Ifá*, a repository of the Yoruba oral tradition which highlights the fact that it is not only the gods that could be responsible for mental illness, but that malevolent persons could also inflict madness on another person:

Má jẹ̀ n sìn'wín
 Má jẹ̀ ká bínu tí n tu'le
 Má jẹ̀ ká ní suuru tí n pa'yan
 Má jẹ̀ kí orí wa odaru
 Má jẹ̀ kí orí wa ogboná bí ológun òru
 Má jẹ̀ ká rí eni tí yío fí wẹ̀rẹ̀ dan wa wo

Do not let me run mad
 Do not let us get angry to the extent that we will
 disorganise a home
 Do not let us have dullness that will endanger our
 lives
 Do not let us suffer mental illness
 Do not let our heads be as hot as someone with
 night madness
 Do not let us meet the person that will inflict
 madness on us (Jegade: 2016, p. 15).

The Yoruba believe that different categories of malevolent persons, such as witches and wizards, as well as certain *Ifá* priests (*babalawo*) or sorcerers who have supernatural powers could afflict people with madness. Sometimes, individuals with no supernatural powers, in seeking to punish

their offenders or being envious of the success of friends, could hire a diviner to afflict others with madness or make use of *èpè* (curses) and *afòse* (incantation).

It is not uncommon for mental illness among the Yoruba to be associated with witchcraft, and many have gone as far as accusing people, even their mothers, of being the witches afflicting their children with madness. Raymond (1961, p. 797) relates the story of a schizophrenic patient whose brother had died under unusual circumstances before he got into that mental state. The patient later attributed both misfortunes to his brother's meddling in the affairs of their town witches.

Treatment of mental illness is influenced by the perception of its cause. Natural causes are not always ruled out and so herbalists who usually administer treatment and psychotherapy are contacted when it is so perceived. However, the boundary between being a herbalist and a diviner is often thin since the notion of the mystical and supernatural slant to mental illness is ever present. Hence, traditional healers would combine use of herbal concoctions with invocation of the supernatural powers. The content of the therapy is not explicitly understood, but it involves incantations, rituals and sacrifices, and this religious approach to handling the problem is almost always immediate. The belief that witches and sorcerers who use supernatural powers are at the root of mental illnesses results in the performance of a lot of rituals to counter the forces of the mystical agents. Yoruba healers and laymen diagnose mental illness through direct observation, and *Ifá* divination. Using the knowledge based on mere observation and worldview, wrong diagnoses are inevitable and, more often than not, the conclusion that mental illnesses are shrouded in mystery is inescapable.

Seemingly in a combination of physical and psychic fights against the unseen forces, most traditional healers, along with girdles, medicinal sticks, incantations and herbal potions, use chains in the management of mentally ill patients. As a result of this treatment approach, victims of mental disorder also suffer a lot of corporeal afflictions as part of their therapy. Depending on the severity of the illness, some patients are tied to a wooden post, while others are chained around either their legs or hands or both to prevent them from running away; and when a patient proves stubborn, poses a threat to the healers, misbehaves, attempts to run away, or runs away, if found, the patient is beaten and re-chained. Jegede (2016, p. 18) explains that 90% of the traditional healers that were interviewed use chains, ropes and other forms of restraints in managing the mentally ill.

The view is also held among the Yoruba that some mental illnesses cannot be permanently cured and certain types of mental illness such as *wèrè amitorunwá* and *wèrè iran* (hereditary madness) cannot be cured at all. Madness is seen as a continuous process because unseen spirits, either due to

a natural factor or other factors that may be known or unknown, are controlling a mentally ill person. Hence, the concept of '*alawòkù*' (meaning semi-healed person) is a stigmatised perception of persons supposedly cured of mental disorders because they are prone to exhibiting traits of occasional mental disorder. Whether a mentally ill person becomes stable or not is not the issue. For the Yoruba, mental illness is dreaded and described as *àrùn tí ó n' san tí orúkò rẹ̀ kii' san* (sickness that may be curable but whose stigma is incurable). Hence, this Yoruba prayer:

Má fi'kù bá wa wí o
 Má fi wèrè bá wa já
 Bí o san kò san, má fi wèrè bá wa já

Do not punish us with death
 Do not fight us with madness
 Whether it will be cured or not
 Do not fight us with madness (Jegede, 2016, p. 15).

The social significance of mental illness for interpersonal relationships is also well known among the Yoruba as it forms part of the regulatory aspects of life. Jegede (2005, p. 28) mentions some of the difficulties faced by mentally ill people. Non-acceptance in the society and social instability, especially in marriage, are some consequences of this. For instance, one of the important investigations made by the family of a prospective bride or groom is to know whether any member of the family of the prospective mate has a record of suffering from mental illness at any point in time. When findings are in the affirmative, the marriage arrangements are automatically cancelled, even when the prospective mate has a clean bill of health at the moment. Jegede (2016, p. 14) asserts that "any family in which mental illness is known to have occurred stands the risk of being stigmatised and ostracised." For this reason, a mentally ill person is not yet referred to as *wèrè* or *alarún opóló* or *asínwín* until his condition becomes public knowledge. Most Yoruba people will do anything to make sure that the illness does not become public knowledge, and when a visitor comes calling, they would give the illness another name such as acute malaria or heat. They would make efforts to prevent outsiders from suspecting that they have a mentally ill person at home.

When, despite all efforts to repress progression of the disease, a mentally ill person degenerates and goes about nude, tattered or is always aggressive, he is referred to as *wèrè to ti já'já*: meaning the madness in the public square. Perhaps, the Greek's Agora gives some picture of the setting. The situation can be interpreted as the madness that has finally become public knowledge, which has implications for the prospects of cure.

According to *èwò asiwín*, the Yoruba taboo on madness, at the onset of mental illness, the patient must not display madness in a market place because doing so ruins the chances of recovery. Rationalising the motive behind it, Thorpe (1972, pp. 39-40) explains that the taboo results from the determination to avert the stigma attached to the illness and the shame that it would bring to the relatives of the mentally ill under those circumstances. The fear of the stigma is so strong that “even when a mentally disturbed person is healed, the stigma is incurable”. For this reason, the mentally ill person is kept at home untreated or poorly treated for too long, leading to cases of evidently benign mental problems becoming malignant. Then, the madness becomes irrepressible and its force drives the patients outdoors into the public glare. When this happens, the treatment, even from the family members becomes harsher. To protect their social status or avoid the stigma that would follow, Jegede (2016, p. 17) asserts that relatives begin to dissociate themselves from the patient and some would drive the patient to a distant land or the forest by hiring the services of medicine men who use *èpè* (curse) or *aṣe* (potent medicine) to banish the mentally ill.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it can be seen that the dominant religious perception of mental illness in both Classical Greece and Yorubaland conditioned attitudes towards the mentally ill and the nature of treatment for the disorder. The Greek notion of madness in the archaic and mythological era was somewhat different from what it became in the latter age of classical antiquity. In the classical era, people became mentally ill as a result of natural causes, and not because gods intervened in their lives. Until recently, the Yoruba, like the Greek, believed supernatural beings were responsible for all cases of mental illness. In both cultures, the mentally ill suffer both physical and emotional afflictions from members of the society, including family members. In some cases, particularly among the Yoruba, the social stigma suffered by the family members has resulted in some inhumane treatment of the mentally ill. As highlighted, abuse of the mentally ill among the Greek, included spitting on them when people encountered them in public. Similarly, abuse also takes place among the Yoruba. To them, flogging is part of the treatment for these ones. It is apparent that in both belief systems, the socio-religious perception of mental illness is one which views it as a form of divine punishment which comes with some relatively intense form of lingering social stigma.

Among the Yoruba people, the common perception of mental illness as an illness with causation often attributed to the supernatural or mystical powers has alienated many of those with such illness outright from currently available therapeutic practices that could have offered them reprieve on a short-term or long-term basis. Indeed, the stigmatisation associated with the

illness often leads to delays in seeking any form of help, whether orthodox or traditional. The mentally ill apparently often suffer low self-esteem, as do their family members.

This paper has provided insights on why family members dissociate themselves from individuals with psychiatric problems, especially in Yoruba communities. This explains to some extent why these ones are left at the mercy of rehabilitation services put in place by government, if applicable. As such, they are usually referred to as '*omo ijoba*' (children of government). From this, we can further deduce: the Yoruba society has a high prevalence of untreated cases of those with mental illness, and witnesses a higher number of lunatics roaming the streets. Although we might be inclined to extrapolate that this could also be the case in other societies in Nigeria and parts of Africa, studies along that line have to be carried out to satisfy the test of empiricism.

Interestingly, the Classical Greek and Yoruba belief systems share ambivalence in viewing and treating mental illness as a medical problem on the one hand, and a natural occurrence on the other hand. Hence, the need to provide them care is not totally jettisoned. While this study did not have as its main objective investigating the extent to which indigenous knowledge should be harnessed with the orthodox in handling mental health issues, it did indicate that shifts in perception and approaches to treatment should not preclude this synergy if warranted.

Therefore, we posit that, besides the immediate family, every member of society should be more sympathetic to the mentally ill for better handling of this embarrassing medical predicament. Rather than superstitiously attributing mental illness to supernatural causation or punishment, the orientation should be towards viewing it as a neurotic disorder for which available medical procedures and herbal therapy, using best practices, can be administered as with malaria or other chronic ailments. To foreclose the lingering stigma attached to the condition, family members should promptly seek medical attention for them before further complications present themselves. This will certainly impress on minds in the society generally that just like any other organ of the body, the brain could also be diagnosed as experiencing symptoms that manifest as mental disorder. Whether the remedy lasts for a short or long period before the ailment resurfaces, the attempts made to integrate these ones as members of society would surely bring a huge relief to friends and loved ones and prevent these ones from becoming victims of ostracism.

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