



Interrogating the Efficacy of Therapeutic Drama for Treating Mental Disorders in Oyo Town

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Abstract

Original Research Article

Over the years, theatre has painted various vistas of mental health issues across strata of society. This is usually not given the right publicity, thus blurring the relationship between the theatre and mental health. Scholars have made persistent attempts at interrogating the link between theatre and mental health. Therefore, this study established the nexus concerning Oyo as a local environment with various issues of mental disorder. The study employed in-depth interviews, observations, and focus group discussions as qualitative methods. Findings revealed that the prevailing type of mental health issues was environmentally inclined. Also, Spiritual affliction was revealed to be the major cause of mental health disorders in Oyo town, with unemployment, low self-esteem, depression and suicide as the consequences. The main therapy used to treat mental health in Oyo town is spiritualism. The use of drama as a healing therapy was made potent through purgation (catharsis), relaxation, and supplication. The use of drama as therapy in Oyo town has been subsumed in some of the spiritual interventions commonly used to treat the mentally retarded. However, a conscious and practical use of drama/performance in the selected mental facilities has shown an ideal level of effectiveness as a healing therapy, which can be further explored for the treatment of mental illness in Oyo town. Drama/performance as therapy, in the form of Theatre for Development (TFD), should be formally introduced into treatment measures in Oyo State.

Keywords: Drama therapy, Theatre for Development, Healing therapy, Mental health.

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Introduction

In recent times, mental health has dominated scholarly and clinical spheres, being a global health concern. In view of the above, several interventions have been initiated to address mental health challenges and secure society's future. Several scholars have used theatrical performance for development purposes in hygiene, safe water,

environmentalism, and related areas. However, a handful of such research seems to have bordered on mental health disorders, let alone focus on the subject matter within Oyo town. Therefore, conducting this research and intervention is important. Oyo town is an ancient civilisation that seems to have focused on traditional therapeutic practices across various health domains. Although there is meaningful development



and expansion in modern civilisation, communication methods for making people know about mental health is deficient. Various mental disorders exist and continue to evolve, but little effort is made to educate the people, perhaps sublimated. Given this, a combination of traditional and people-centred theatre initiatives would, to a large extent, engender serious reflections on the issues of mental disorder. Our target sample falls within the proto-Yoruba community in Oyo, the traditional and political base of the Yoruba Empire or kingdom. Oyo town is the actual geographical area of study. Oyo town and Oyo State have often been used interchangeably. However, we must create a distinction here. Oyo town is popular in Oyo State, along with Ogbomoso, Saki and Iseyin. Being the seat of the Alaafin, it is a Yoruba cultural and political heritage (Ibrahim, 2022).

Oyo State is one of Nigeria's six Southwestern states, with Ibadan as its capital. It is mainly an agricultural region, producing cassava, cocoa, and tobacco. The state borders Kwara State to the north for 337 km, Osun State to the southeast for 187 km—partly across the River Osun—and Ogun State to the south, with the border to the west shared with the Republic of Benin for 98 km. In 2022, the population was estimated at approximately 7,976,100, ranking it as the sixth most populous state in Nigeria.

Mental health currently encompasses disorders like depression, anxiety, stress, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder. All the aforementioned disorders have varying degrees of effects and are interrelated. Their effects have implications for individuals, families, and the larger society. Perhaps its negative impact serves as cogent reasons why efforts have been made to address mental health disorders on a global scale. In many cases, people experience some of these disorders frequently, while others might experience them only once in a while. Some may recover after a certain period, and many more experience enduring symptoms and possible escalations, which require the support of a specialist and other forms of interventions

Some of the mental disorders are hereditary, while some are known to emanate from social-

environmental factors. Jrang, Alizadeh and Cui (2022:2) assert that “political crises, economic, security, ethnic and religious crises have triggered off depression, anxiety and disorders as a result of behavioural changes and emotional anguish. It is pertinent to note that any mental health disorder issue will affect the well-being to the extent of not being able to “connect, function, cope or flourish effectively. Theatrical performance and mental health have always intersected. However, many are ignorant of the benefits of drama and its performative impulse in enhancing healthy living. Theatre includes music, dance, and spectacles. For instance, dancing helps to release energy, communicate, celebrate, express emotions, sense of inner fulfilment, self-realisation, and education. Music helps to educate, transform, make political comments, express, communicate and promote economic

Theatrical performances mirror society and therefore serve as a platform for promoting social discourse, learning, dialogue, and social change. As a cultural phenomenon, it demands that society examine itself in the mirror. Given this stark truth, theatre can initiate conversations and personal reflection regarding mental illness, reduce stigma, foster empathy for those affected, and potentially motivate activism. Therefore, this paper examined the efficacy of drama therapy on mental disorders in selected mental healing facilities in Oyo town. In addition, the cardinal objectives are: to identify types of mental disorders in Oyo town, ascertain possible causes of mental disorders in Oyo town, identify available healing strategies/therapies used in the selected mental healing facilities in Oyo town, and ascertain the efficacy of drama as a healing therapy for treating mental disorders in the selected facilities. This study will be of immense benefit to several groups, including researchers in psychiatry, mental health, and theatre artistes; policymakers in public health; and traditional healers.

Conceptual Clarifications

Mental health is a global phenomenon that we cannot overemphasise. Scholars have defined mental health in different ways. According to WHO (2022), it is:

a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realise their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. It is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in. Mental health is a basic human right. And it is crucial to personal, community, and socio-economic development.

Similarly, various typologies of mental health have been recognized, including mood disorders (like depression or bipolar disorder), anxiety disorders, personality disorders, and psychotic disorders such as schizophrenia (Humeed, 2020). Moreover, mental health is one of the cardinal objectives of SDG 17, which seeks to help maintain the well-being of humanity, recognising that without sound mental health, people may not be able to contribute successfully to the development of the immediate or broader society. People with retarded mental cases find life difficult and unbearable; unable to take cognitive steps in addressing various challenges of life (Landry, Bianchini, Maguire, and Worpole, 1993). Mentally balanced person can contribute meaningfully to society. Several factors contribute to mental health disorders, such as stress, poverty, depression, emotional damage, spiritual influences, drug abuse, etc. (Landy & Montgomery, 2012).

Theorising Performing Arts

Performing Arts is a discipline in the Faculty of Arts/Humanities. Students' education in this field is designed to develop their creative skills across specialisations such as playwriting, directing, acting, stage management, set design, costume design, lighting design, sound design, dance, make-up, film, and related disciplines.

The list continues to expand as the field evolves with social transformation and technological innovation. Thus, the performing arts are dynamic and complex. The performing arts are often used interchangeably

with theatre arts, and several scholars have defined them in various ways. Burns (1973:5) amplified theatre to be "an arena in which it is possible to study manifestations of the social values, forms and conventions of society and also the images of social reality which people of different kinds at times have construed for themselves". Ayakoroma (2012) reiterated this, stating that theatre is a mirror of society. This assertion demonstrates a close affinity between it and the society. In other words, society understands what it is by those issues theatre brings to the fore on stage (Obot, 2026).

Furthermore, Fagbemi (2012) defines theatre arts as performances enacted with the intention of entertaining, informing, educating and communicating salient information to society. Illah (1992:4) takes the argument further by revealing that "as much as theatre entertains, it also has the capacity to provoke thought or action about significant issues". From the foregoing, it becomes obvious why the performing arts have cast a spotlight on mental health and related issues, which are among the central social issues today (Obot, 2025). Having established the fact that theatre and society are inseparable, it is also important to note that the performing arts is a collective art. Collective in the sense that it requires the inputs of various art forms such as dance, mime, music, songs, storytelling, acrobatics, sound, dialogue, light, design, make-up, etc. This assertion should not be seen as transporting professionals from other disciplines to contribute to the success of a theatrical production; rather, they are trained in their discipline to emerge as professionals in their area of specialisation.

For the purposes of this paper, various aspects of the performing arts that directly affect people's well-being will be discussed. These areas include: costume/makeup, dance and music. At this point, it is pertinent to note that performing arts have been identified from time immemorial to be a potent tool for therapeutic prescription for mental illness besides medicine. For instance, music, be it instrumental or vocal, is an art form that perturbs a listener's emotions. Thus, it is commonly used in every facet of spiritual and secular spaces to influence emotions, leading to the experience and even healing of a dejected and demented mind toward sanity (Iortyom

& Obot, 2025). For example, it is recorded in the Biblical book of 1 Samuel Chapter 16, Verses 16, “let our Lord now command thy servants which are before thee, to seek out a man, who is a cunning player on an harp; and it shall come to pass, when the evil spirit for God in upon thee, that he shall play with his hand, and thorn shall be well”.

Studies and research over time have also revealed that dance is an integral part of human expressive nature and that art forms that employ rhythmic gestures and postural transitions are powerful elements in psychotherapeutic healing. Sara Lindberg states that “Dance movement therapy is a Therapeutic use of movement to promote emotional, social, cognitive and physical integration.” She explains that, beyond helping people with physical health by reducing muscle tension and boosting strength and flexibility, dance therapy also aids mental health healing. The employment of dance therapy helps to diminish anxiety, low self-esteem, and depression that could degenerate into extreme dementia that could result in insanity. Katie Bolin states that “dance therapy is a form of creative art psychotherapy that uses dance to promote an individual's physical, intellectual, and emotional well-being. Similarly, Erica Horntail explains that “dance therapy incorporates movement and non-verbal communication alongside talk therapy to tackle psychological and behavioural issues that words alone cannot resolve.”

The influence of clothing is evident in many aspects of life. Dressing well can significantly improve mental well-being by increasing confidence, self-esteem, and readiness to interact with others when dressed nicely. Seeing oneself in a great costume in the mirror can foster pride and self-assurance. A positive mood can enhance social interactions, boost the ability to face challenges, and shape one’s outlook on life. Clothing is more than just a covering; it impacts how individuals think and feel about themselves. Fashion also serves as a means of self-expression and social communication, with colors evoking specific emotions. For example, bright shades like yellow or orange can lift spirits and promote happiness, while cooler tones like blue and green offer calmness and tranquility. The field of fashion therapy recognizes that certain colors and

patterns can trigger positive feelings and help manage anxiety, depression, or low self-esteem. Studies indicate that wearing joyful colours such as yellow or green can elevate mood and happiness. Additionally, clothing choices reflect confidence and self-perception. Feeling good about one's size or feeling insecure can influence self-esteem levels. Overall, fashion significantly affects our thoughts, emotions, and well-being. Wearing clothes that make us feel good can improve mood, enable self-expression, and enhance the overall quality of life.

Music has played a vital role in human history as a means of expressing and influencing emotion. Many cultures have rich musical traditions. It can shift mood, act as a stimulant or sedative, and affect physiological responses like heart rate and breathing. Music enlivens the environment and can influence one’s emotional state. Alperson (2004) notes that the perceived health benefits of music for patients in Veterans Administration Hospitals after World War II prompted its investigation and recognition as a complementary healing method. Musicians were employed to continue performing in hospitals. By the late 1940s, degrees in music therapy emerged, and in 1950, the first professional organisation for music therapists was established in the U.S. The National Association of Music Therapy merged with the American Association of Music Therapy in 1998, forming the American Music Therapy Association (AMTA, 2004).

According to Austin (2004), music therapy is often defined as a profession and practice focused on treatment. This treatment involves systematic and predictable interventions by music therapists as a key part of people's lives. Well-established practices include special education and neurological rehabilitation, music psychotherapy, recreational music activities, teaching self-care strategies for relaxation and stress reduction, community music therapy, and the use of music in medical settings to support physical health (Thaut et al., 2005). Music therapy is a form of complementary medicine where trained therapists prescribe music to help patients address physical, emotional, intellectual, and social challenges. Programs aim to improve wellbeing in settings such as nursing homes, hospitals, and community centres, from helping

geriatric patients to reducing labour pain and stress. It is also used in schools, rehabilitation centres, hospices, nursing homes, and sometimes at home (Wade, 2004). Music can be an effective tool for individuals with mental or emotional health conditions, with autism being a well-studied example. Music therapy has helped autistic children improve social interactions and learning skills. It may also benefit those with substance abuse issues, schizophrenia, paranoia, personality disorders, anxiety, and affective disorders by promoting participation and social engagement, enhancing reality orientation, developing coping skills, reducing stress, and enabling emotional expression (Wallace, 2004). For terminally ill patients, whether in hospice or not, pain, anxiety, and depression are significant concerns. Music can provide relief by releasing endorphins and inducing relaxation. It offers opportunities for reminiscence and discussing fears related to death, and can help regulate rapid breathing and soothe the mind during anxiety.

Interfaces between Mental Health and Performing Arts

Mental health and performing arts have long influenced each other. Historically, drama, a key part of the performing arts, has played a significant role in raising awareness about mental health issues. In the Greek Classical era, drama and music were used to treat emotional distress, with Greeks believing that tragedy could help manage painful feelings. Tragedy aimed to depict life's realities and provide catharsis, allowing audiences to reflect on their surroundings. It acted as a mirror to pain, trauma, emotional stress, and suffering (tragic theatre). Aristotle believed that tragic theatre could help individuals process painful emotions through "catharsis." He viewed tragic theatre as a musical form similar to opera, which creatively addressed mental health concerns.

Furthermore, the Greeks believed that music and religious rites could aid those suffering from emotional distress. For example, these rituals involved 'sacred melodies' that provided aesthetic pleasure and helped soothe people's nerves (Thumiger, 2017). In essence, certain melodies offered psychological comfort. An additional aspect

linking drama and mental health was dance as a therapeutic practice. It is important to note that in Ancient Greek culture, dancing and therapy had a complex connection with various mental health issues. Dramatic performances played a significant role in key rituals in Ancient Greece. Sophocles is said to have introduced the cult of the healing god Asclepius into his household. Similarly, in Nigeria and other parts of Africa, dramatists have used drama and theatre to explore mental health topics. Some Nigerian playwrights have adapted or integrated classical plays to address contemporary mental health challenges in Nigerian society. Plays like *Spellbinder*, *Our Husband has Gone Mad*, *Otailo*, and *The Gods Are Not to Blame* depict various mental disorders. Through elements like language and characterisation, these dramas reflect social issues contributing to mental health problems.

In traditional African settings, total theatre is a blend of various performance genres combined into a seamless event. Many oral folkloric stories across Africa recount how music, dance, and drama have played roles in healing individuals with mental health issues. Modern psychiatric medicine also recognises that performing arts can offer comfort to those with mental health challenges. Throughout black African regions, traditional healers have regularly used mystical rituals involving dance, instrumental music, and singing as part of their mental health treatment methods (Landy & Montgomery, 2012; Obot & Obasuyi, 2025).

For example, among the Hausa people of Northern Nigeria, the Bori spiritual dance functions as a therapeutic practice for mental illness (Somers, 2008; Obot & Obasuyi, 2025). It is also well known that the performing arts are widely used for mental healing among communities practising voodoo and others across West Africa, including Benin, Togo, Ghana, Ivory Coast, and beyond. Likewise, the biblical story of King Saul being delivered from evil spirits by David's music illustrates the power of the performing arts in mental healing. However, much existing research has not thoroughly explored mental health through performative arts, particularly in Oyo town. This highlights the importance of the current research.

Types, Triggers and Consequences of Mental Disorders

Different types of mental disorders have been identified over the years. They include: anxiety disorders, depression, and eating disorders. These disorders can inadvertently affect people's mood, behaviour, thinking, and perceptions. Anxiety disorders are rather common among people irrespective of age and gender. It is pertinent to note that people with anxiety disorders have severe fear or anxiety about certain situations or objects (Corrigan & Miller, 2004). Furthermore, people with anxiety disorders often try to avoid exposure to what triggers their anxiety (Vic Health, 2005). Another type of disorder is Depression. People with depression may experience lasting sadness or low mood. Postnatal depression is an ongoing feeling of hopelessness after childbirth (WHO, 2001). Eating disorders refer to a type of mental health condition that can affect a person's eating habits. Dissociative disorders: People with dissociative disorders may experience involuntary escapes from reality. Dissociation can involve a disconnection of thoughts, memory, identity, and consciousness—a feature of neurodevelopmental disorders, which often begin in childhood or infancy. Examples include autism spectrum disorder, ADHD, and learning disorders. Other types of mental health conditions include: Bipolar disorder, Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), Schizophrenia, and Substance use disorders (Corrigan & Miller, 2004).

Mental disorders have many causes, including genetics, brain chemistry, life experiences, and social factors. Genetics: Inherited traits can increase the risk of mental illness. Some rare gene variants can increase the risk of developing mental disorders. Brain chemistry: Chemical imbalances in the brain can contribute to mental illness. Neurotransmitters are brain chemicals that carry signals to other parts of the brain and body. Life experiences, such as stress, abuse, or trauma, can increase the risk of mental illness. Negative childhood experiences, such as abuse or neglect, can increase the risk of some mental illnesses. Social factors, such as social isolation, domestic violence, relationship breakdown, and

financial or work problems, can impact mental health. Having limited financial means or belonging to a marginalised ethnic group can increase the risk of mental health disorders. Other factors include prenatal exposure to viruses, toxic chemicals, or other substances such as alcohol and drugs; having a serious medical condition like cancer; and personality factors such as perfectionism or low self-esteem. If you are experiencing symptoms of a mental illness, it is important to get help.

Methodology

A post-performance research design was employed to generate qualitative data. The essence of this research design was that the study is performance-based. This means that data can be generated during a performance or after a performance. The performance serves as a communication tool between the performance (facilitators) and the audience. Observation is a way of gathering data by watching production videos and other material that can generate information and data for the study (Patton, 1990). Instruments for data collection included interviews and participant observation. All the facilitators were present during the performances, taking notes and observing. The idea of observation is important, especially in mental health studies, because most of the mentally unhealthy persons may not have the ability to express or communicate effectively. Thus, the best way is to observe their mannerisms, gestures, participation and mood. In view of this, 20 PLMD were observed (schizophrenia) – those who could not respond to questions)

An interview was carried out with staff and facilitators at some of the mental homes selected for the study. Face-to-face interviews were conducted, which allowed for interpersonal discussions. Through this method, many revelations were captured and used in the analysis. (Lee and Ormrod, 2005). These are capable of expressing thoughts and feelings (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). In practice, In-depth Interviews (IDIs) were conducted with 10 Prophets, 5 Sheikhs, 2 Ifa Priests, 13 Caregivers, and 15 People Living with Mental Disorders. It is important to note that PLWMD used during the in-

depth interview fall within the B category, which means that they can respond to a series of questions and can communicate effectively to a large extent. The total population for IDI was 45 participants.

Being that this study is qualitative in nature, the data gathered were qualitative. They required a narrative format, with transcriptions of recorded interviews and focus group discussions organised according to the study's thematic focus, in line with the key variables and the research objective. In addition, an analytical approach was applied to data retrieved through Participant Observation. Furthermore, quantitative and qualitative analyses were employed to provide parentage representations of responses (IDIs and FGDs).

Data Presentation, Interpretation and Analysis

The paper identifies types of mental health in Oyo town. This objective was borne out of the lack of concise scholarly research identifying types of mental health within Oyo Alaafin. Interestingly, there have been sketchy findings about the typology of mental health in Ibadan, the capital of Oyo and other parts of the state, which is seen to be the fourth largest in Nigeria. During the interview session, a good number of them were mentioned. According to Interviewee A:

There are several reasons why we have mental disorders or health issues in Oyo State. In the first instance, the town's saturation and the country's socio-economic realities have given rise to some of the issues I will mention (*In-depth Interview, 2024*).

In the same vein, interviewee C also added that:

It would not be out of place for me to say that some of the conditions of mental illnesses in Oyo town are neurotic in nature. This means that diseases or natural factors do not necessarily cause such illnesses. They include: depression, anxiety, obsessive, behavior, depression, anxiety, emotional disorders, fear, obsession, etc. In view of the

aforementioned, it is also important to state that these types of mental issues do not mean that people suffering from them have lost touch with reality or are out of their minds, as in the case of complete disorder (*In-depth Interview, Oyo, 2024*).

The above statement shows that mental health challenges emanate from non-natural causes. It emphasises psychological influences that result in an unstable state of mind, such as fear, anxiety, emotional disorders and many more. They can be linked to environmental, social and cultural realities.

Additionally, the interview session and FGD showed that most mental health challenges in Oyo were associated with metaphysical and spiritual orientations. To buttress this point, participant D during a FGD session stated that:

It is particularly interesting to note that mental issues in Oyo town are associated with spiritual factors. What I am saying is not that spiritual influence is the major factor, but the majority of them are treated in spiritual churches and spiritual centres. What I am saying does not negate other sources in an actual sense (*FGD Session, Oyo -2024*).

In respect of the above, it can be observed that spiritual sources may be considered as a key factor in this equation. The statement further adduced appropriate mental illness to churches in terms of treatment; meaning that the first point of call when there are issues of mental health is the church. Perhaps this statement aligns with some of the interviewed prophets, who say that mental health is environmental in nature. In respect of the above, Prophet A attested thus:

The environment determines a lot about mental health issues. What I mean by the environment breeding mental health issues is that every place or town has its peculiarities, and in the case of Oyo, it has always been regarded as a spiritual touch-bearer town. It is the seat of the Yoruba

heritage, and one cannot expect anything less. One thing that is common here is the fact that injustices are usually meted out with spiritual punishments, including mental health issues. Therefore, it would not be out of place to observe that the first step in addressing health challenges is to turn to the church, local healers, and traditional Babalawos (FGD Session, Oyo, 2024).

The above statement emphasises Oyo town as the custodian of Yoruba cultural heritage, where many daily activities are woven into the complex tapestry of spiritual operations.

Another type of mental health, as identified in the course of the study, has to do with genetics or heredity. An in-depth interview with an Ifa priest suggested this assertion.

We cannot also negate the fact that some aspect of mental illnesses, especially full-blown madness (schizophrenia), is actually hereditary. That is gotten from parents and forebears in the family. It has also been argued that many families were under a curse that resulted in madness as a result of bad acts or the other.

To buttress this point, a prophet admitted during an in-depth interview that:

Yes! We have had several experiences where most of the mentally sick persons brought to the church were from parents or siblings. Further investigation clearly revealed that madness runs in the families of those persons. To avert this curse, we have also had to carry out deliverance for family members.

Another Sheikh, during an in-depth interview, submitted that:

Generational curse of madness is a reality in Oyo town and even other

Yoruba towns. I mean, there is a practice, as old as the Yoruba tradition, in which a whole family is under a generational curse. Because of the lingering spirit of madness, one person in that family must, at one point, manifest in that light. The only way out has been through rigorous deliverance ministries. No amount of medical treatment can cure those manifestations.

The above assertion supports the argument earlier made that spiritual types of mental health are plausible in Oyo town. Moreover, that could explain why spiritual interventions are often sought once manifestations occur. This, however, does not negate the fact that some mental illnesses are natural without any spiritual inclinations. A lot of the possible causes of mental illness have also proven this fact.

Possible Causes of Mental Disorders in Oyo Town

Several scholars have posited different causes to mental health challenges across the globe. However, each clime has peculiarities, and the essence of these research objectives is to unravel possible causes in Oyo town. It is also noteworthy to state that environmental realities differ significantly.

Focus group discussions revealed quite a good number of causes of mental health challenges in Oyo. In view of this, participant F stated that:

I feel that some of the full-blown madness of young men and women in Oyo are attributed to drugs such as Indian hemp, Cocaine, Kolos, Igbo and other harmful substances that fly around in the town. These hard drugs are found everywhere if you care to find out and are rather cheap to purchase (FGD Session, Oyo, 2024).

It was further added that:

A substantial amount of these drugs are peddled by young people who are not gainfully engaged and are idle. There are several of them dotting the landscape. Have we not heard that an

idle mind is the devil's workshop? A bunch of these young men fall into the temptation of politicians and those who intend to use them for various heinous crimes around town (*FGD Session, Oyo, 2024*).

During an interview with inmates in one of the healing facilities in Oyo town, it was revealed thus:

Well, I have been into drugs for some time, and that resulted in me being here for rehabilitation. The major problem that brought me to this facility was that I took an overdose and I could not understand myself again. I think there are several people in my condition, and there will be a lot more if these drugs are not banned and totally removed from society.

This settlement brings into sight drug addiction as one of the major causes of madness. This is a social case that can be handled differently from other causes, and there seemed to be some hope that medical and psychiatric care could help in this direction. Moreover, other causes have been revealed.

FGD participant reiterated:

I think there is a need for us to mention economic hardship as one of the many causes of mental health issues in Oyo. It seems Oyo town is very different from other towns and cities. With epileptic power supply, poor road conditions, unemployment, terrible working conditions, stress, and poverty-driven lifestyles, why would anyone not be mentally unwell in the first instance? We may want to view these issues from a learned perspective, but the truth is they contribute significantly to mental health challenges (*FGD Session, Oyo, 2024*).

The aforementioned issues seem to justify a neurotic type of mental health. That is, mental challenges as a result of non-natural causes but psychologically driven conditions such as anxiety, depression, anger, and emotional disorders. Depression alone is a serious mental health challenge that has caused

several health challenges, even death. According to WHO, Nigerians are at risk of depression, with 30% reported episodic depressive symptoms. Additionally, WHO (2013) observed that depression is now the leading cause of disability in the world. This, obviously, correlates with other physical illnesses and chronic conditions.

Another submission that is worthy of attention is that which was made by a Shiek and which says that:

Honestly, for some people in Oyo, survival is the only thing that comes to mind when they wake up. The economic hardship in the town is such that it can make one temporarily mad. I mean, if you do not have a strong mind with strong belief in God, there is every tendency for someone to witness anxiety disorders and emotional instability which could ultimately lead to depression and other related illnesses that may eventually cause death (*In-depth-Interview, Oyo, 2024*).

Another cause of mental health issues is spiritual affliction. An Ifa priest observed during the in-depth interview thus:

Spiritual affliction is a tangible cause of mental illness, especially in Oyo town, from what I have observed. Many of the FGD participants here can also attest to this; as a matter of fact, spiritual affliction is an act of using supernatural manipulations to cause physical deformity. The act is usually evil-oriented and uses dark powers to operate. The issue is that while the act is performed in the supernatural realm, its results manifest in the physical realm and can only be addressed there. Any medical treatment or attention is never helpful to anyone suffering from such afflictions (*In-depth-Interview, Oyo, 2024*).

Additionally, Post-Partum Stress Disorders (PSD) were also mentioned as a possible cause of mental

stress in Oyo town. During FGD, participant G stated thus:

PSD is a serious contributing factor to mental health in this land, and it must be acknowledged. This usually happens to women who have gone through labour stress, especially those who had very uneasy labour pains that affected them psychologically. It is important to mention that a whole lot of women in this land have gone through this, and it is still happening. We must not exclude it at all (*FGD Session, Oyo, 2024*).

Available healing strategies/therapies used in the selected mental healing facilities in Oyo town

It seems that, to a large extent, local or traditional approaches are the available healing strategies. What has enforced this drift is the fact that medical facilities for treating mental illness in Nigeria are rather few, with few healthcare professionals and fewer facilities. This is coupled with financial constraints and, oftentimes, little social support and stigmatisation. However, interviews and FGD sessions have shown several healing strategies in Oyo town. According to participant D during an In-depth Interview session, self-care was mentioned as a healing strategy.

Self-care remains one of the strategies for mental illness. What this means is that an individual comes to understand his or her illness and what it entails when it is about to play out or manifest. Sometimes, individuals who have a mental disorder can feel one way or the other before full escalation (*FGD Session, Oyo, 2024*).

In addition, participant H said that:

For those who have the opportunity to feel pre-something before the eventual setback, I think it is a good thing, as it gives them room to act before escalation. For instance, those who experience acute depression

cannot say that the issues come on them all of a sudden. It usually begins somewhere and builds up until it leads to a more severe illness (*FGD Session, Oyo, 2024*).

The above submissions emphasise self-care as a healing therapy; even when patients are kept in a healing facility, self-care is essential because it helps healers know when to start treatment. However, this strategy may not be applicable in all cases, which makes it useful for specific people, especially those with neurotic tendencies.

Furthermore, it is pertinent to note that relaxation is an important healing strategy used in some healing homes in Oyo town and in other places beyond the state. In the light of this, participant F, during an FGD session, averred thus:

Relaxation and entertainment can contribute meaningfully to reducing mental disorders. We observe at this facility that inmates are often excited when it is time for any form of entertainment, which obviously brings about mental relaxation. Once the mind is separated from all the worries of this world, then the impact of certain negative influences on the mind is reduced, and the body becomes soft and tender without the usual symptoms of such disorders (*In-depth Interview session, Oyo, 2024*).

In respect of relaxation and entertainment, a priest also added thus:

In our healing home here, we are often conscious of the benefits of relaxation and entertainment. So, we make a conscious effort to provide them with exciting entertainment, such as games, dances, music, and chants. We realise that all the inmates here crave such moments and are happy before and during the sessions (*In-depth Interview session, Oyo, 2024*).

He further added succinctly that:

Spiritual exercises, medication, healthy eating, and proper hydration have also contributed immensely to the healing therapies we offer here. We also tell them to maintain a positive mindset, knowing they will be healed eventually. Through these therapies, many have been healed and have left here normal and never came back for any further manifestations. So, I know that a couple of other healing homes deploy these therapies in different ways to treat inmates (*In-depth Interview Session, Oyo, 2024*).

The Efficacy of Drama as a Healing Therapy

The efficacy of drama as a healing therapy for

treating mental disorders in the selected facilities.

The essence of this study was to examine the efficacy of drama as a healing therapy for mental disorders in Oyo town, using two healing centres or homes, namely Power Line and Atingisi, which fall under traditional healing facilities, distinct from medical centres and hospitals. To achieve this aim, data were drawn from participant observation and performance enactments, such as dance, drama, song, drumming, and chants. In respect of drama enactments, two scripted plays: “Breaking the Chains” and “Iyanu” were staged using the concept of *theatre in the round* or what Peter Brook called ‘the Open Space’. There were also improvised Dance Drama, spiritual performances, chants, and prophetic words. The following are pictorial representations of the scripted plays, dance drama, chants and prophetic words:



Figure 1: a picture showing a mentally ill boy manifesting strange attributed, Scripted Drama, 2025.



Figure 2: a picture showing a man undergoing spiritual healing method. Scripted Drama, 2025.



Figure 3: a picture showing group prayer session. Scripted Drama, 2025



Figure 4: a picture showing a mentally ill person recovering after a prayers session. Scripted Drama, 2025



Figure 5: a picture showing chants and words of prophecy. Spiritual performance, 2025

The following observations were made during and after various performances carried out in the two healing centres:

- i. People living with mental health disorders (PLWMH) were relaxed during song performances.

- ii. Some participated by singing and dancing during the sessions
- iii. A few were complacent and just watched the performances without zeal
- iv. Some were excited during the performance session but became moody after watching the performances.
- v. Some yearned for more dance and song after the sessions
- vi. A few cried during the performance of *Breaking the Chains*
- vii. After the *Iyanu* drama performance, some showed evidence of self-consciousness

Conclusion

The use of Drama as therapy in Oyo town has been subsumed in some of the spiritual interventions commonly used to treat the mentally disabled. However, a conscious and practical use of drama/performance in the selected mental facilities has shown an ideal level of effectiveness as a healing therapy, which can be further explored for the treatment of mental illness in Oyo town. Drama/performance as therapy, in the form of Theatre for Development (TFD), should be formally introduced into treatment measures in Oyo State.

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