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Journal of Religion and Health

ISSN 0022-4197

J Relig Health

DOI 10.1007/s10943-020-01032-5



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“You Will Not Mourn Your Children”: Spirituality and Child Health in Ibadan Urban Markets

Mofeyisara Oluwatoyin Omobowale¹

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Abstract

The urban Ibadan market is not only important for its economic value, but also for its representation of the worldview of the Yoruba people of South-Western Nigeria. Yoruba urban markets are adorned with different spiritualists who also earn their livelihood in the market space. Hence, through the employment of observations and in-depth interviews, the study examines how spirituality shapes child health and mothers' health seeking behaviours in Ibadan urban markets.

Keywords Urban market · Spirituality · The Yorubas · Child health · Ibadan

Introduction

Spirituality is an important force to be reckoned with in Africa, especially as regards child health (Addai 2000; Ha et al. 2014). The overriding influence of spirituality on the African social and cultural fabric cannot be relegated to the background. However, it has been established by many studies that there is a sure and strong link between spirituality and child health (Addai 2000; Gyimah et al. 2006; Agadjanian and Menjívar 2008; Sabharwal 2011; Ha et al. 2014 and Maswikwa et al. 2015). Spirituality can serve as an organising principle in relation to aetiology, the treatment and management of child illness, health and healing (Barnes et al. 2000; Antai et al. 2009). Studies have suggested that spirituality cum religious beliefs and practices can reduce depressive symptoms in children and adolescents and lower substance abuse, thereby, promoting physical health (Barnes et al. 2000). It has also been reported to be a protective factor against a number of negative health outcomes in adolescents (Cotton et al. 2006).

However, the spiritual worldview and values of parents and other family caregivers or significant others can also shape the approach to be deployed during child-bearing, childcare, feeding and parenting (King 1990; Cotton et al. 2006). For

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instance, parents and significant others' spiritual beliefs and values may be used to understand and interpret their children's experiences of illness in life-threatening conditions, or to see sudden forms of disability as an act of punishment or a test in spiritual realities (Barnes et al. 2000). Their understanding and interpretation of reality from spiritual prisms may lead to wrong diagnosis, delay in seeking medical treatments, wrong treatments and even late presentation in the hospital, leading to high mortality rates (Van Ness 1999; Petts 2011). Hence, it is important that complex macro- and microfactors be considered in combating child morbidity and mortality in Africa, especially in Nigeria, as the country struggles to reduce the increasing child mortality rate in a bid to achieve the SDGs by 2030 (NDHS 2018). Many studies on spirituality and child health in Africa, particularly, in Nigeria, have concentrated on specific religious groups or spaces, but little or no attention has been given to how spirituality shapes the health of children in an informal space like the market. Therefore, this study examines how spirituality shapes child health in Ibadan urban markets.

The market is an informal economic space that transcends commercial exchange in its nature and roles in Yoruba land (South-Western Nigeria). The urban market space is a repository of women, parents, caregivers and significant others to many children who are born, nurtured and raised in the market (Clark 2018). The hallmark of a typical Ibadan market is shown in its rowdy nature, which is marked by fights, haggling, heated arguments, gossip, rivalry, cursing, impoliteness, cheating and pretensions. However, the market is not devoid of pleasantries either, though frequent misunderstandings and rivalries are bound to occur. The market is also marked by "Good-natured repartees; rich funds of jokes, an occasional burst of confidence in which intimate matters are disclosed and discussed, advice and prescriptions are given for ailments [of children, especially], interest shown by one party in the other's child, a threatening gesture on the part of the buyer to leave, an indication on the part of the seller that the lowest figure acceptable to her has been passed" (Fadipe 1976:98). The point is that extra effort is required to protect and guide young ones in a space which thrives on economic rivalry because many traders (parents) may fall back on their spiritual, religious beliefs and practices. For instance, the Yoruba culture sees children as a heritage; hence, they occupy a pride of place in societal continuity. Children are parents' "esteemed wealth" and are placed far above material prosperity and wealth. Thus, they are protected in every possible way, even "spiritually" (Omobowale and Omobowale 2019).

The market space in traditional Yoruba society of South-Western Nigeria is not only important for its economic values, but also for its representativeness of the worldview of the Yoruba people (Ogundeji 2006). The market as a commercial space is a location for entertainment and festivity; it also serves as a significant space where important rituals are performed, a space used in metaphors of the transience of existence. It is convenient to say that the Yorubas view the market as a spiritual being. The Yorubas believe that "gods, goddesses, and ancestors are interested in the marketplace as a nerve centre of the community, that is, a place where the earth has eyes" (Ogundeji 2006:4). The market is also seen as a space in which the spiritual and the physical are intertwined in reality and pseudo-reality. These views have not really changed, even in the contemporary

informal market system. In this study, the inter-relationship between the traders, the notion of child survival/protection and the spiritualists who come to the market are to be examined. Furthermore, it is convenient to say the presence of spiritualists in contemporary Yoruba markets has become a vibrant means of appropriating income by spiritualists rather than a solution to the spiritual yearning of the traders. This seems parasitic and depicts the ambiguous nature of the market. Therefore, the market is believed to be cunning, diabolical, dubious and unpredictable in its relationships and is thus likened to the world, as seen in the following excerpt:

Generally for the Yorubas, *aiye* [the world] serves as a key to a value system, conveying...self-conceptions, motivations and understanding relates to society. Indeed, with appropriate linguistic modifiers, it means pretence, time, tribal territory, the dominion of a political leader, a market, the whole world, the evil one, witches and sorcerers, unformed and dangerous characters, spiritual forces and a point on a journey. It represents the right and negative aspects of human development (Lawuyi 1997:150).

The supernatural judges all in the market as a result of these complexities in its nature; thus, this explains the notion that the world is a market and the market in itself is a world (*aye l'oja, oja l'aye*).

Another conspicuous imagery that characterises Yoruba markets is the presence of different personalities and spiritualists from different religious backgrounds. The belief is that the market is a value system which validates "the seen, the unseen, the known and the unknown", thus corroborating the spiritualisation of the market and its processes. The general belief is that the market represents the world and that both the world and the market are controlled by higher forces. When the unseen forces are not pleased, they allow mystical attacks like child morbidity and mortality, negative mobility and fortune change, loss of property, relations and even death (Lawuyi and Olupona 1988; Adéékó 2017). This interaction between the market and the unseen serves as a construction module for traders' values and realities. These cosmological beliefs, especially those concerning the vulnerability and protection of the children of traders, may have paved the way for the presence of various spiritualists in urban markets of Ibadan to some extent (Lawuyi 1988).

While one of the salient issues addressed in this study is the role of spiritualists in Ibadan urban markets, another is an evaluation of how spirituality shapes traders' notions of child survival, protection and prevention from morbidity and mortality. This study is an exploration of the health and survival of children born and raised in the market space and how a spiritual worldview shapes/influences this. In Nigeria, informal sectors like the market accommodate about 61% of women workers, and many of these women have children (Akpan and Sempere 2019). In Ibadan city, the market is a space where many children are natured and raised communally. It is also a repository of different categories of mothers and grandmothers who get to spend most of their hours in the market with their children and grandchildren. Therefore, it is pertinent that the role of spirituality in the well-being of this category of children be brought to the fore.

Method

An ethnographic study design was adopted to unravel the influence of spirituality on construction and the interpretation of child morbidity and mortality in the urban market space (Green and Thorogood 2018). The qualitative method of data collection was used to collect data from purposively selected markets. The selected markets are Bodija market (the biggest foodstuff market in Ibadan North Local Government), Aleshinloye market (the biggest ware market in Ibadan South Local Government) and Oje market (a traditional market). Aleshinloye market and Bodija market are government owned. They are relatively new successor markets to the Dugbe Alawo market and Oritamerin markets which were dismissed in the early 1980s, respectively. Oje is entirely different as it has been in existence for over one hundred years; the market is a traditional market which was established and owned by the Delesolu dynasty of Oje; the family still runs the affairs of Oje market till date. These three markets are melting pot of cultures, with varying populations of parents, caregivers and significant others. Additionally, they are well structured physically, spiritually and administratively (also see Omobowale and Omobowale 2019).

The two methods of data collection deployed in the study are observation and in-depth interviews. Observation was adopted in order to comprehend the activities of spiritualists in the market space and the effects on child well-being. Visitations to the selected markets were initiated in 2015, and the operations of the spiritualists were observed and recorded. As part of the observation, casual conversations were held with different traders and information was gotten through various pieces of information embedded in the talks. As a result, the diverse experiences revolving round spirituality and child health in the markets were noted. Thirty in-depth interviews were conducted with both traders and spiritualists in the selected markets. Totally, 2 spiritualists, 4 mothers and 4 fathers were interviewed per market. In all, 30 IDIs were conducted. All data were subjected to content analysis in line with the aim of the research. This study may be limited in its generalisations as its data and findings are peculiar to Ibadan markets; however, they still contribute to market discourse in Africa and spell out the centrality of the informal market space not only to the economic development of African societies but also sustainable beneficial maternal and child health.

Spirituality in Nigerian Context

Religion in contemporary Nigeria “has become ... deeply entwined with the tissue of everyday life ... its central and critical role in public life has been emphasised, explored, deplored and celebrated, both in academic and lay literature” (Adebanwi 2010:124). Since the early 1970s, spirituality, especially in the Pentecostal arena, has experienced an astronomical growth in Nigeria. Nigeria has produced the greatest explosion of Pentecostal spiritualism on the African continent (Marshall 2009). This explosion has birthed the emergence of different religious

sects across the nation, creating its presence both in high and low places, even politically (Adebamwi 2010). This increase in popularity was assisted by new mass communications technologies. Kramer (2005) asserts that these technologies reconfigured global, political and economic systems at the turn of the twenty-first century, a condition that altered the context of religious, traditional exercise (George and Tanabe 2007).

The change in the religious arena in Nigeria cannot be attributed to the globalisation of technologies alone, but also factors like mass retrenchment which cuts across African countries, including Nigeria. A classic example is the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) (Orubuloye and Oni 1996). The oil boom induced corruption and a disastrous political heritage which in turn “initiated a deep popular disaffection with the government and fundamentally destabilised many of the mechanisms that had enabled the great majority of Nigerians to confront the ordeal of everyday life” (Marshall 2009:96; Kramer 2005; Beyer 2007; and Dilger 2007). These events brought about a higher level of poverty, which also gave rise to increased child morbidity and mortality in the country. Thus, forcing many to seek solutions in the religious arena, one of such is finding explanations for the loss of a child or children in the construction of spiritual reality (Orubuloye and Oni 1996).

The fact is that the introduction of the economic adjustment programmes during the SAPS brought about a shift and destabilisation in the health system. The health system lost its welfarist nature and adopted a capitalist-like system. Many government hospitals were not funded, and access to healthcare became highly expensive, especially for the lower class. The crisis resulted in an increased childhood mortality and morbidity as depicted in Orubuloye and Oni’s submission:

Although infant and childhood mortality has declined over the years, the current economic difficulties and the progressive deterioration of the health care system may have put a stop to the continuing decline in the levels of infant and childhood mortality. A comparison of child survival estimates from the 1986 Ondo State DHS and the southwest component of the 1990 Nigerian DHS suggest a significant rise in mortality (Orubuloye 1994). Similarly, a comparison of the 1992 and 1994 UNICEF reports on the State of the World’s Children showed that infant mortality in Nigeria rose from 104 per thousand in 1988 (two years after the introduction of SAP) to 114 per thousand in 1992, while childhood mortality rose from 174 per thousand to 191 per thousand during the same period (UNICEF 1992, 1994) (Orubuloye and Oni 1996:303-304).

The SAPs era also witnessed the takeover and spread of the messages of prosperity and hope in the Nigerian religious landscape, especially Charismatic Christianity (Ojo 2006). Income inequality resulted in a distension of social structure, as evident in the affluent religious leaders and their wretched followers/members as shown on television, and the presentation of an extreme middle-class lifestyle as normative for the lower income audience (Kramer 2005; Marshall 2009). In contemporary times, the religious space has become synonymous with money-making and is viewed as a shortcut to prosperity. Since the introduction of SAP, things have never remained the same in the religious space of the country. There has been a rise of several freelance

religious leaders/spiritualists, both famous and infamous, who have introduced a wild array of doctrines.

It is imperative to pay attention to the fact that many religious groups have lost notable fundamental practice and values. For instance, in the 1930s, when the Aladura Church (Pentecostal Church) started Pentecostalism in Yoruba land, the creed of the movement was spiritual warfare, giving to the needy and breaking away from the materialism. One of their mottos was *ofe n'igbala*, that is, "Salvation is free". Another was *ofe l'egba, ofe ni ki e fun ni* which translates as, "you have received grace freely, therefore, minister unto others freely". However, when the wave of the "Born-Again" revival championed by the elites started in the 1990s (Ojo 2006), values began to change; salvation became a gift with conditions. At present, the motto is *owo ni keke ihinrere*, that is, "money is the vehicle of salvation". Ironically, many religious leaders feed fat on their members' income in the name of religion. Rather than embrace immaterialism which used to be the hallmark of pentecostalism, the fashionable mode is the "spirit of empire building" as referred to by Marshall (2009). This wave has reached every nook and cranny of the country, including the market space. Spiritualists are not "new" to the market space in the history of the market among the Yorubas; however, the dimension of their operations is a departure from the former.

Spirituality and the Urban Market Space in Ibadan

Some of the most conspicuous edifices in markets are mosques and improvised church spaces which symbolically represent the deference to spiritualism in the market space. This is also in tandem with the history of the spiritualisation of the market in the Yoruba worldview. One of the constructs around the market in the study sites is the view that sales are not determined by forces of demand and supply as presented by economic paradigms but by cosmo-economical/mystical forces, created and controlled by people usually referred to as *aye*. *Aye* in this wise connotes "a key to a value system, conveying those self-conceptions, motivations and understanding relates to society. Indeed, with appropriate linguistic modifiers, it means pretence, time, tribal territory, the dominion of a political leader, a market, the whole world, the evil one, witches and sorcerers, unformed and dangerous characters, spiritual forces and a point on a journey. It represents the right and negative aspects of human development" (Lawuyi 1997:150). *Aye* also signifies an unknown force that determines results or changes situations and punishes humans at will. This belief is made evident in phrases like *Aye ti gbe okuta fun* (mystical forces have handed him the "no sales syndrome"), *aye ti gbe agbaina fun* (the mystic devourer has been sent to him/her), *O se awo ero* (he/she got a mystic sales booster), *adura lo n gba, agbarako* (prayer is the solution, not physical strength). The notion of mystical forces, the fear of the unseen and unknown, the quest for huge financial gain (that will not be filtered away by misfortune especially that of children) in the midst of the economic crisis and political instability that has engulfed the country, create the need for individual traders to aspire to the "reinforcement of magico-materialist ontology of spiritual

powers'' used in spiritual market warfare for and to their advantage, especially the protection of their children (Marshall 2009:3).

Rivalry among traders is no news, especially among traders who sell the same goods. However, the concealed fact is that when two people sell the same goods which are of different quality, and one is superior to the other, the trader with the superior quality goods will certainly have more patronage than the other trader with inferior goods. Interestingly, comments like *o se aworo* (he/she procured spiritual charms to hypnotise buyers) become rife. Furthermore, a term like *okuta* (no sales syndrome) may also be deployed to describe the situation, while forgetting the physical/economic factor of the inferiority/superiority of the goods. *Aworo* (buyer hypnotiser) and *okuta* (no sales syndrome) are antonymous in context, while *agbaina* (the devourer) seems to be worst of them all especially in relation to child well-being. These terms are believed to exist in the spiritual world and manifest in the physical through market processes. They are believed to be forces which can be used for or against traders. When they work in favour of a trader, the trader makes timely decisions about what goods to purchase, yielding huge turnovers for the trader. Subsequently, statements like *ori la fi n m' eranlawo* (all is achieved through luck) are used to describe the ``good fortune'' of such traders. However, when they work negatively, the trader makes mistakes and runs into losses, or makes a huge profit and then spends it all on a child's ill-health.

All traders detest *okuta* and *agbaina* and do all they can to evade them, while they embrace *aworo* and do all they can to get it. Hence, some go far to get some of these spiritual totems to boost their sales while others simply depend on their advertising skills. One notion that cuts across the markets, as mentioned earlier, is that sales are controlled by some spiritual-economic forces. All traders involved in the study agreed that even when sales seemed to be moving in the desired direction for them, there was still a need for absolute protection both physically and spiritually to ensure the safety of their lives and properties, including their children. This belief has paved the way for the operations of the spiritualists in the markets. One of the observations was that the spiritualists also preyed on the view of the traders by appealing to their socio-religious construction of reality to get material and monetary gifts from them.

Spiritualism and the Notion of Child Well-Being in Ibadan Urban Markets

In the markets, there are two categories of spiritualists. The first group comprises of itinerant preachers. They are what I refer to as a ``one man army''. This means they have no specific religious base within or outside the market. The market space is their work field and they walk around the market praying for, and preaching to the traders and buyers. Some of them with ``special messages'' may tarry in an open space in the market; then, they would deliver their ``messages'' to the market population, drawing attention to themselves with the help of hand bells or a public address system while requesting monetary gifts, simultaneously.

The second category consists of those who claimed to have left their established spiritual bases outside the market and came to help the traders. Many spiritualists

who fall into this category are often in the company of other members of their religious groups. They also utilise open spaces or lanes in the market and get the attention of their hearers with their speakers or public address system. They hold services and preach about how God's blessings, protection and prosperity accrue to those who support their group financially. They also encourage the traders to give by citing many examples of those who had supported them in the past and how they became prosperous and enjoyed "divine protection" alongside their family members, especially their children and grandchildren.

These "services" usually end with a request for "offerings", alms giving, contributions of support to the ministry or/and sales of spiritual materials. This is evident in an extract from the speech of one of these categories of spiritualists in the markets as cited below:

You will pray and say Father don't let *aye* (*world*), the devil and the wicked ones get me. Whoever *aye* catches up with will experience low sales and their child/children will experience bad health. Whenever one's good fortune is reversed and sales start to drag like a snail; it means that the devil and the wicked ones have caught up with that individual. Therefore, pray vehemently against such now (a 2-minute congregational prayer is then observed)! The second prayer goes thus, bring out a N20.00 or N50 naira note and speak to it, say, 'Oh father, let my pocket be filled with money, money to take care of my children', because many of you are here trading because of your children... Now run out to drop that money in the basket in front of me, I assure you, you will never lack money for your business anymore (at this point, traders and buyers, more than twenty in number came out to drop their money). Please at the end of this service, make sure (with emphasis), I repeat, make sure you return the offering envelopes (this was given to the traders earlier) and try not to return it empty, put something in it. In fact, it is a sin to return it without putting your offering in it as it is unto the Lord (Alesinloye Market).

The extract above reveals that the well-being of traders' children forms an integral part of the spiritualist's message to the traders as it gives them the access to receive tokens from the traders. On the surface, it seems that an insignificant amount is given by each trader to ward off unseen forces from attacking his/her child with ill-health or death. But when these "insignificant amounts" are put together, it becomes a large sum for the spiritualist, and it may even double a trader's daily profit. The messages and prayers of the spiritualist are empowered by traders' belief in the mysteries of life, unseen forces, malevolent spirits and the need for spiritual protection against attacks on children and properties through "giving". Undoubtedly, the unsolicited spiritual performance/service which is then rendered to the traders to meet their spiritual needs is made possible because the messages are woven around the notion of child health or well-being.

It is also not uncommon for spiritualists to dig into history in order to convince traders and buyers of the need to give monetary gifts/buy their spiritually fortified products for healthy living. This is revealed in the extracts below:

If you are in this market this morning and you can move your body parts, I want you to know that it is by God's grace, and that, he gave you a chance to worship him. God sent me to you, mothers. Those of you who value their children shall not lose anyone of them. Sometimes ago, in the year 1989 to be precise, someone was told to give away the sum of N200 as an act of sacrifice for her children's well-being, but she refused, not too long after this, her three children died in a day! **YOU WILL NOT MOURN YOUR CHILDREN.** Take N20 and pray on it; one child is N20, N40 goes for two children and so on. In fact, you can pay and pray for your grandchildren too. Bring the money to me and bless this ministry. Those who give shall not lose their children. All those who envy your success and want to kill your children to bring you down will be as nothing, henceforth, just bring the cash. In 1985, I followed some of my spiritual fathers to a market, they were instructed then just as you are being instructed now, but some of them did not comply, unfortunately, within 15 days, they lost their children; children between one and eight years. (Bodija market)

The quote below also corroborates this:

I greet you all both males and females in this market. I also wish you a honey-like Friday. You might be wondering why we have been away for a while, well, we went upland town to worship. So, we have been busy. It was during this period of spiritual worship that God showed us that many of you had not made *saara* (an almsgiving practice in Islam) for their departed parents. It is lawful in Islam to do so. Some of you have run bankrupt; your businesses are not moving well, your children are sick and the little profit you made was spent on your sick children. Alas, some of you even lost them. What a pity! Let me ask you this question. When was the last time you did *saara* for your departed ones? Come close to me and make *saara* for your dead, listen, do not bring N20 here, we are not beggars; bring what is worth the kind of blessings you want. In addition, do not forget that we have oils and perfumes which can be used to drive away danger and protect your children from evil attacks here for sale (Bodija market).

The following speech made by another spiritualist was also recorded in Oje market:

Young man, Ogun (god of iron) will favour you, give me a gift and your path shall be smooth. Ogun(god of iron) will not bathe with your blood. As the day always breaks forth without obstacles, so shall your path and that of your children break forth without hindrance (Oje market 2016).

The extracts above reveal that many spiritualists capitalise on the belief system and values of the traders on child protection. Furthermore, the worsening negative effects of the economic hardship in the country and an appeal to the softer side of femininity aggravate the situation as many markets in Western Nigeria (and even Africa) are dominated by women.

It is not uncommon that when children are constantly exposed to the unhealthy conditions of the market space, they frequently fall sick and this has been adroitly constructed and interpreted as spiritual attacks by spiritualists who seize such opportunities to sell their own products, which in turn are labelled as protective measures against sickness. One of the grievous implications of this misconception is that many mothers purchase these products and use them as prophylaxes or first aid measures before considering modern medicine treatments. A mother narrated how she first applied anointing oil on her four-year-old child when the toddler developed a high temperature in the night and then gave analgesic, afterwards. Spiritualists' presence and messages have shaped mothers' approaches to their children's ill-health and have also led to delays in the appropriate treatment/management of diseases, late presentation of illness in the hospital, misconceptions about aetiology and the progression of ill-health in Ibadan urban markets.

A close examination of the extracts also shows certain unifying factors which link various categories of spiritualists and the market populace. One is an emphasis on protection for the traders and their children while another is financial prosperity. There is also subtle competition among the spiritualists. Spiritualists appeal to the constructed fears of the unseen and the unknown which traders fear could jeopardise their existence/survival, while the traders are also expected to boost the spiritualists' finances. The exchange is expectedly symbiotic, but looking at the number of spiritualists that appear in the market per day which is 15–25 on the average, and the nature of their messages, the degree of the symbiotic relationship seems weak. Furthermore, some traders are also aware that many spiritualists in the market are opportunists as submitted below:

Many of them are opportunists, just look at that one, he is very drunk and cannot even manage his speech well, but he claims to be drunk in spirit. I cannot give him a penny (Trader: Bodija market).

Another trader added:

They want to eat more than the owner (greed), about 10 of them can come to you per day, all asking for money, how much gain do I make per day? I give only a few of them who have genuine messages for me, not that liar over there [points] (Trader: Oje market).

The persistent presence of spiritualists in the urban markets of Ibadan is not only as a result of the economic crisis in the country which has rocked the country since the early 1980s, but also because they (the spiritualists) find it easy to manipulate the traders despite their awareness of the spiritualists' exploitation. This is partly because it is hard to separate their fears from reality. According to many of the traders, they give to spiritualists because "you do not know when your prayers will be answered".

Also, one of the observations made in two of the selected markets is that the markets are so filthy that the continual exposure of the children raised in such environments inevitably leads to series of infections. The unclean market environment as observed is as a result of poor waste and sewage disposal systems.

The import of this is that many children have died and may still die from contracting infections in such unclean market environments where there is an absence of prompt and appropriate health care. Oftentimes, such deaths are somewhat attributed to spiritual attacks from other rival traders. In addition to this, many mothers attend to their children health problems spiritually before seeking immediate medical attention. This is also reiterated in the comment below:

When my 3-year-old son started have fever, I quickly bathed him with prayer water from the Alfa (Muslim cleric) and the attack went away immediately, though he was admitted three days later at the hospital. He is now fine (Bodija market).

Another mother said:

I often buy anointing oil from this prophet who comes around, it is very potent, when any of my children complains of any illness, I apply it on them and watch them for at least 12 h, if it is spiritual, the oil will take care of it but if it is malaria, I take them to the pharmacy to get drugs (Aleshinloye market: 2016)

Hence, the spiritualisation of child morbidity and mortality has a negative effect on mothers' health seeking behaviours. As revealed from various responses, most traders attribute the ill-health of their children to spiritual attack and try to solve it with spiritual materials purchased from the spiritualists, instead of seeking proper treatment.

The market space as a public space allows for all sort of performances; it is a space where cash flows easily from one person to another, considering the nature of beliefs that abound in the market, the quest to make ends means has turned the space into an area of subtle contest. While traders contest for patronage and survival, the symbols of spirituality contest for the attention and patronage of the traders and buyers, and devise means of outsmarting other rival spiritualists. Some spiritualists go to the extent of penetrating the market power blocs. For instance, a spiritualist in one of the markets has his improvised church stand beside the *Iyaloja's* office (*Iyaloja* literally means Mother of the market, a prominent female market leader). He is popularly called "mama's spiritualist" (*Iyaloja's* spiritualist) as he wields influence over decisions taken in the market. He is also consulted by many people in the market, who seek favour from his powerful clients, indirectly. At this level, spiritualists have gone past making ends meet; rather, this has become a power tussle; as the spiritualist, having gained the trust of the market's "ruling class" utilises his position and tries to edge out other spiritualists from the market space. This would then result in tension and chaos. This evidently attests to the fact that the market space is a contested space for spiritualists.

For instance, in Bodija market, there are specific days of the year when the market is shut down and spiritualists are invited to the market to offer prayers for the cleansing, progress and protection of the market, its traders and their respective families. It is important to note that the welfare of traders' children often propels such spiritual activities. The market is a metaphor. In essence, it sums up "a set of activities on

public space, exploring its visibility value to create patron-clientele, platforms, politics of choices, acts of negotiating strategies, and appraisal techniques, with which to participate in the cultural struggles over images, values and material conditions that shape the perception of who we are, and what we think we are, in a constantly mediated reality” (Lawuyi 2015: vii). The market in Ibadan is a contested space in which different spiritualists seek livelihood and one in which the health seeking behaviours of parents as regards children’s ill-health are shaped.

Conclusion

The market is very strategic and essential in both the political and economic survival of Nigeria. Ibadan urban markets are melting pots of cultures. The market space is well known for the buying and selling of physical items, but there is also an exchange of spiritual ‘goods’ in the market. Spiritualists in market space are also traders, selling spiritual assurance of protection and prosperity to market traders and buyers, sometimes. Even though the economic crisis experienced in Nigeria over the years has led to an increase in child morbidity and mortality, spiritualists have also seized the opportunity to prey on their victims, by appropriating funds and gifts from traders and buyers alike. This in turn has a negative impact on traders’ child health seeking behaviours as it leads to delays in getting appropriate treatment for sick children and their presentation in the hospital. In addition, wrong diagnoses and therapies could be carried out on these children, which could then result in more cases of child morbidity or even mortality.

The implication of these on public health will be very grievous if not dealt with accordingly. As Nigeria struggles to reduce the rate of child morbidity and mortality to the barest minimum, issues of spirituality in urban markets and its relation to child health cannot be relegated to the background. Therefore, there is an urgent need to intensify awareness about appropriate health seeking behaviours for mothers and other caregivers as regards child well-being in Ibadan.

Funding The study was part of a larger doctoral research funded by American Council of Learned Societies–African Humanities Programme (ACLS-AHP)

Compliance with Ethical Standard

Conflict of interest No conflict of interest

Ethical Standard I complied with ethical standard, every informant participated freely, and their interests were protected. The study was non-invasive.

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