

ETHICO-MEDICAL IMPLICATIONS OF OPEN DEFECATION IN A MULTI-RELIGIOUS SOCIETY: A STUDY OF THREE COMMUNITIES IN IBADAN, OYO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The practice of open defecation is a hazardous environmental and public health challenge that is currently attracting a global concern, also being investigated from a multidisciplinary backdrop. Through a cross sectional descriptive approach involving 50% Christians, 36% Muslims and 15% traditionalists of the selected sample size, the study explored the practice of open defecation in Ibadan city of Oyo state, since previous studies showed that this largest city in Africa takes the third position in the practice of open defecation after Ekiti and Plateau states of Nigeria. The study was carried out in Bodija, Gege and Akinleye communities of Ibadan. It aimed at investigating the religious and cultural factors influencing the practice of open defecation as well as the people's perception about its health implications. The work adopted thematic content analytical procedure in analyzing the qualitative data that was gathered. The results of the findings showed the majority of the respondents have relative knowledge of the adverse effects of open defecation on people's health, and that the religious hygienic ethics of the extant faith traditions in the area disapprove such practice. While fewer number of the respondents blamed the government for not providing toilet facilities, more than half agreed that constant sanitary inspection, intentional health promotion, serious legislation with penalty by offenders, as well as intensive religious teachings will curb the menace of open defecation practice in Ibadan. Therefore, the work recommends the unified effort of the government health ministry, religious leaders, community leaders and landlords in ensuring the availability of toilet facilities in homes.

Keywords: Ethico-Medical, Implications, Open Defecation, Multi-religious Society.

The Practice of Open Defecation in Nigeria

The practice of open defecation remains widespread phenomenon in Nigeria. Findings in Gbadegesin, and Akintola (2020) attest that about 25% of households (33% of rural households and 15% of urban households) still engage in this practice. Similarly, report from the United

Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2017) shows that Nigeria is among the highest ranked nations in the world whose significant proportion of the population engages in the practice of open defecation. In Nigeria, it is estimated that over 46 million people, both in rural and urban areas engaging in this practice. Apart from bringing a negative social stigma to Nigeria, open defecation is a shameful practice which the Nigerian state as the giant of Africa and the most populous black nation in the world is taunted for (Dele, 2020). Okpasuo et al (2018) observed that discoveries made in 2018 proved that many parts of the Nigeria struggled with high levels of water borne diseases resulting from poor sanitation practices especially open defecation. In the rural communities in Nigeria, where open defecation is practiced, people deem it a delight to defecate openly in rivers and lakes which also serve as water sources from which they drink. As they do this, they deny themselves access to clean and safe water, exposing their health to environmental and water related dangerous diseases (Ngwu, 2017).

Open Defecation in Ibadan, Oyo State

Previous findings show that Oyo state has the third highest prevalent rate of open defecation in Nigeria with about 54.0 percent after Plateau state with 56.2 percent and Ekiti state having 60.8 percent of open defecation practice respectively. According to WHO/ UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) for water supply and sanitation, the ancient city of Ibadan, which is also the capital of Oyo state with a population of over 3.8 million is the hub of open defecation in the state. In Ibadan, this practice is almost perceived as a norm with more than half of the population indulging in it. Adebayo (2018) argues that the situation and act of open defecation in Ibadan is compounded by the absence of a proper master-plan of the city. This has led to buildings being erected indiscriminately without accurate considerations for toilet facilities and sanitary lanes, coupled with lack of water, poverty, and government's inability to provide public toilets in schools and markets, and to monitor the duty of sanitary inspectors.

Sanitation and Hygiene threats as posed by Open Defecation in Nigeria

Reports on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) as presented by the Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) and reported by the World Health Organization in July, 2021 shows that out of about 494 million people that practice open defecation globally, about 196 million are found in the sub-Saharan African region (Shivangi, 2021). This figure reaffirms the fact that open defecation intensifies the height of health related environmental challenges this part of African struggles with.

In Nigeria, open defecation is a primary factor that leads to poor access to improved water and hygienic environment, leading to increased vulnerability to water-borne diseases, especially diarrhoea outbreak. This low level of sanitation constitutes a major contributing factor to high morbidity and mortality rates among infants and children before the age of five. The annual mortality rate arising from the use and drinking of contaminated water combined with the resultant poor sanitary conditions is placed at about 70, 000 infant deaths.

Diseases Associated with Open Defecation

Various studies have shown that the practice of open defecation causes the transmission of fecal pathogens which leads to adverse health impacts such as diarrhea and worm infections (Al-Zoubi et al, 2020). Other diseases associated with unsafe disposal of human excreta include typhoid, cholera, hepatitis, polio, trachoma among others (Arul, 2017). Over half a

million people around the world die annually as a result of such diseases. Open defecation poses serious health and environmental challenges, and has continued to be a global public health concern (Gbadegesin, and Akintola, 2020). It is estimated that the practice of open defecation affects nearly 1 billion people worldwide, leading to sanitation related diseases and resulting to about 842,000 deaths annually. Open defecation leads to water pollution and affects the ground surface of water, hence the faecal pathogens which are being transmitted to water results to water borne diseases (Arul, 2017). Open defecation is one of the important causes of diarrheal death. Nearly 2,000 children under the age of five die every day, one every 40 seconds, from diarrhea. The practice of open defecation has serious connection with various infectious diseases, with its fatal consequences of health, particularly in children as they are more prone to diarrheal morbidity (Freeman, et al 2012). Various studies in the review demonstrate plausible evidence that open defecation has significant impact on health and well-being of women. Three studies in Padhi, et al (2015), Majumdar, et al (2010), Janmohamed, et al (2016) affirm that there is a high vulnerability of child-bearing women who involve in open defecation, as this is found to be detrimental to both mother and the developing foetus. Open defecation also poses obvious environmental risk, joining health and economic problems at the detriment of Nigeria and its nationals. From its environmental pollution, the practice exposes children even adults to critical health problems like diarrhea leading to mortality (Dele, 2020). Dittmer (2009), observed that open defecation, discharging of waste water in public spaces, dumping of garbage close to households, and in areas around the village affects the environment, contaminates groundwater and result to diverse health problems.

Religious Perception on Environmental Sanitation with Reference to Open Defecation

Open defecation has been termed “unhealthy and unhygienic cultural practices” (Gbadegesin, and Akintola, 2020). In religious discourse, it is a taboo discussion that is usually masked in mystery, which is associated with far too many diseases, sufferings, indignity, social and psychological impacts. It is a mitigating practice that is detrimental to the moral and ethical protection womanhood. Many women and girls in developing countries are disproportionately affected by the lack of sanitation facilities, which is the primary cause of open defecation. This in turn deposits a serious threat to women’s health and mental well-being, as they struggle with managing their bodily function of defecation on daily basis. Several inquiries into the philosophical and ethical tenets of various faith traditions show that virtually every religious tradition has does not promote this unhealthy practice. A proper look into the three major religions practiced in Nigeria, which include African Traditional Religion, Christianity and Islam prove that religious beliefs never approved the practice of open defecation. A study in Ajibolosoo (2021) established that high occurrence of open defecation could be carrying cultural undertone manifesting in the form of taboo, superstition and traditional norms.

Open Defecation in African Culture

Africa as a continent has diversified cultural practices with reference to environmental hygiene. In some communities among the Igbo tribe of Nigeria, one caught in open defecation is penalized in accordance with the traditional penal codes. Paying of fine of certain amount of money or livestock such as goat or fowl is mandatory by the apprehended and convicted offender. Dittmer (2009), observed that total sanitation techniques such as Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) have been generally successful in most West African communities.

Christianity's Perception of Open Defecation

Christians' perception of environmental cleanliness with reference to the avoidance of open defecation is rooted to the Old Testament injunction during the wilderness journey of the Israelites.

You shall also have a place outside the camp and go out there, and you shall have a spade among your tools, and it shall be when you sit down outside, you shall dig with it and shall turn to cover up your excrement. "Since the LORD your God walks in the midst of your camp to deliver you and to defeat your enemies before you, therefore your camp must be holy; and He must not see anything indecent among you lest He turn away from you (Deut. 23:12-14).

The divine explicit directive here is the linking of environmental cleanliness to godliness. Sanitation in Deuteronomy 23:12-14 is in relation to appropriate disposal of excrement far from the camp as a means of ensuring adequate camp cleanliness. In the light of sanitation, as seen in the passage, Stott (1999), Richter (2010), DeWitt (2000), observe a great connection between sanitation mandates in the Torah to public health in as much as the effective maintenance of fecal waste and other pollutants reduces potential threats of sicknesses and diseases within the community. According to Crüsemann (2001) and Borowski (2003), the hygiene stipulations as contained in the text of Deuteronomy 23:12-14 provided for the world's first public sanitation-latrine law which aimed at the prevention of diseases and the responsible way of the handling the health of the community, it elucidates issues that are concerned with the foundation for medical practices. The instruction must have come as a measure to solve the acute problem of disposal of human excrement in Israel. Stressing obedience to the Law as a prerequisite to health, Hart (1995) argues that keeping the hygienic commandments in Deuteronomy 23 is considered a preventive care, and that, the duty rested on the people and not on God in the pursuance of health and holiness. The Jews had survived and developed as a nation over thousands of years because they had adhered to the laws of hygiene set down for them in the Torah. Therefore, there positive observable nexus between good health and a life lived acceptably to the Yahweh. The soldiers as well as the community of God's people, through the practice of burying fecal waste would preserve the health of soldiers by removing infection is understood. The digging of a hole for excrement and covering it up as directed by Yahweh eliminates several potential health problems. Even so covering the feces in this context would keep humans from coming in contact with it, by so doing preventing the spread of diseases associated with open defecation (Hall, 2000).

Islamic Environmental Hygiene and Rejection of Open Defecation

Islamic hygienic jurisprudence the *Qaḍī' al-Ḥājah* promotes certain hygienic measures that are suitable for practice by all believers. In such stipulations, strength is associated to health, and health is associated to hygiene, while weakness is associated to illness and hygiene is a measure to prevent diseases. A tripartite cleanliness approach is highly advocated for among the Muslims. This includes the cleanliness of the body, the cleanliness of cloth and environmental cleanliness. The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him), admonished the believers to bathe seven in a week with all parts of their body including their heads (Book of Purity, No. 849). A counsel by the Prophet (peace be upon him), to those who failed to bathe becoming coming to worship as witnessed by Aisha is a pointer to how he cherished the bodily hygiene of the believers.

The people came for Friday prayer from their houses in the neighboring villages dressed in woolen garments on which dust was settled and this emitted a foul smell. A person among them (those who were dressed so) came to the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, while he was in my house. The Messenger of Allah, may peace be upon him, said to him: O, would you only have cleansed yourselves on this day (Sahih Muslim, Kitab al-Jumu'ah, No. 847).

The explicit injunction by the Messenger, peace be upon him, is stated directly, **“If one of you comes on Friday, let him bathe”** (Sahih Al-Bukhari, The Book of Friday, No. 877). **Waste such as the urine, feces, vomit, pre-ejaculate and blood constitute impurities that must be properly handled. Of the cleanliness of the cloths and proper dressing, Allah gives an express command saying,**

O Children of Adam! We have bestowed upon you clothing to cover yourselves with and as adornment. But the clothing of righteousness – that is best. Such are among the signs of Allah, that they may remember (Surah Al-Araf, Verse 26).

And of the dressing cleanliness, He said, “your clothes purify” (Surah Al Mudather, Verse 4).

Removing harmful substances from the public reach is a part of the seventy or sixty branches of faith (Sahih Muslim, Explanation by al-Nawawi, Book of Faith, No. 35). Thus, environmental sanitation is highly promoted among the Muslims. On warning the believers of the wrongness of exposing harmful waste matters that make people inconvenient, the Prophet, peace be upon him said,

Be on your guard against two things which provoke cursing. They said: Messenger of Allah, what are those things which provoke cursing? He said: Urinating on the thoroughfares or in the shade (Sahih Muslim, Book of Purity, No. 269).

The pollution of roads by defecating or urinating on them is highly forbidden. Public places where people go to rest, such as parks, shades, even under trees. Defecating and urinating in standing water and streams of water constitute prohibited environmental activities.

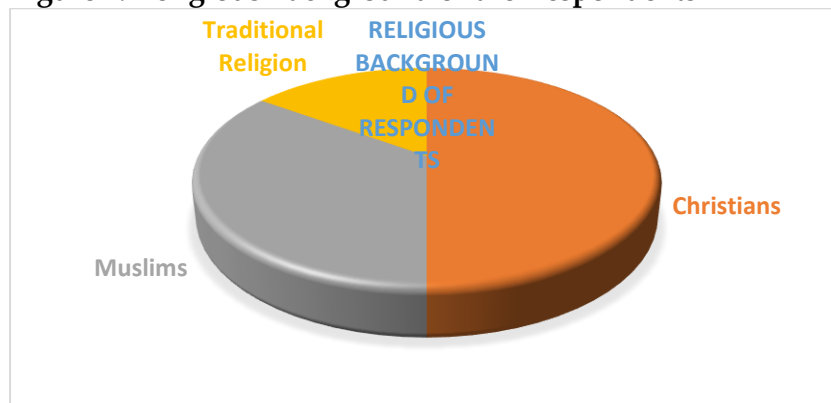
Area of Study

This study investigated the practice of open defecation in Gege, Bodija and Eleyele communities in Ibadan, Oyo state, Nigeria. According to record of the Demographia World Urban Areas (2015), the city of Ibadan has urban density of 464.71 kilometres which is about 1,203.6 square miles. It is located in south-western Nigeria, with about 128 kilometres inland northeast of Lagos and about 530 kilometres southwest of the federal capital, Abuja. The region serves as a prominent point of transit between the coastal region of the southwest and the hinterland areas of the country. From the early days of British colonial rule, Ibadan the administrative centre of the old Western Region, even as parts of the city's ancient protective walls still extant. The primary inhabitants of the city are the native Yoruba people with other notable various communities of Nigerian people such as the Igbo and Hausa. Initially, Ibadan was known to be the largest city in West Africa and the second largest in the entire African continent after Cairo in Egypt. However, recent demographic records show that it is the third

most populated city in Nigeria after Lagos and kano, having over 6 million people within its metropolitan area. Geographically, it remains Nigeria's largest city. Within the historical and etymological spheres, the term "Ibadan" denotes the Yoruba phrase *Eba Odan* which could literarily translated as "within the edge of the meadow". This term was developed during the hectic period of wars among the kingdoms in Yoruba land around 1826 (Falola et al, 2018). Regarding the practice of open defecation in the city, results in previous survey by Adebayo (2018) attest that Gege area is the worst in such practice, owing to the fact that Gege market and the adjoining markets in the Agbeni, Orita Merin, Oranyan and Beere neighbourhood have no toilet facilities and generate a lot of human waste into the Kudeti River. According to Towoju in Adebayo (2018), Gege is one of the places known for open defecation in Ibadan, a practice that made a part of Gege community to be known as "Gege Olorun" a Yoruba phrase that could be translated as "Stinking Gege". As a community that is located in the Ibadan metropolis and plays host to food markets, abattoirs and residential areas, edible products are displayed openly by the road side and under shades with assorted smells saturating the vicinity due to odour coming from several sources of disposed human faeces and animal carcasses mixing together to constitute a nauseating environmental and atmospheric pollution (Adebayo, 2018).

Analysis and Discussion

Figure 1: Religious Background of the Respondents



The above figure shows that all the interviewees had their different religious affiliation, with Christians having 50%, Muslims 35% while traditional religionists occupy 15%.

Figure 2: Sex of Respondents

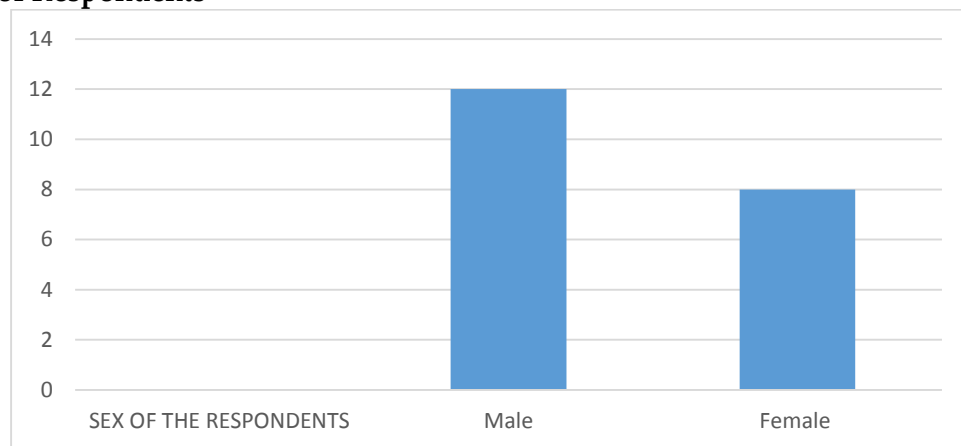
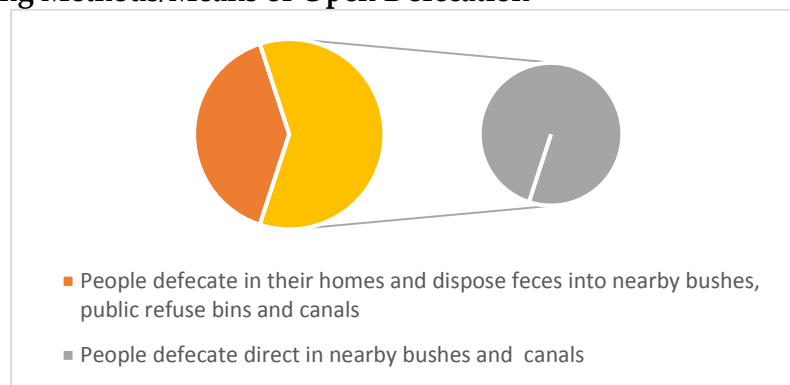


Figure 3: Awareness of the Practice of Open Defecation



All the respondents agreed that open defecation is an ongoing practice in the communities. From their responses, it is evident that family members, neighbours and individuals are involved in this unhealthy act, making it a serious phenomenon that should be addressed with utmost intentionality. This finding is in harmony with the observation in Connell (2014), that most of the people practicing the act of open defecation have grown up seeing family members, peers, and others in the community defecate in the open and as such see this practice as habitual, natural and part of a daily routine. Such norms and practices which people seem to have held from cradle overtake the needed hygienic manners, sticking and becoming a way of life such that even where the facilities are available, they are neglected. Hence, the practice of open defecation remains the preferred behaviour to the use of hygienic toilet facilities.

Figure Showing Methods/Mean of Open Defecation



The practice of open defecation takes two major dimensions. Those who cannot make their ways to bushes, canals, gutters and elsewhere, especially children and the aged use papers and light polythene bags and mediums for toileting by defecating inside it and discard the feces to either nearby bush, into drainages or public refuse dumping areas. The above chart shows that while approximately 60% of respondents agree that people defecate directly and in person at the places of their choice, such as inside drainages, nearby bushes, canals and other places, 40% agree that people use materials like polythene bags or papers and dispose thereafter.

Figure showing Reasons why People Engage in Open Defecation



People practice open defecation for various reasons ranging from no toilet facilities available in the living area.

Lack of proper knowledge of hygiene: Good knowledge of hygiene is the culture of living careless lifestyle. Good hygiene practice is an important aspect of environmental public health as the absence of the knowledge and practice of such brings difficulty in disease prevention and control, especially as it concerns waterborne diseases as well as sanitation related diseases (Gbadegeshi & Akintola, 2020).. Others attribute the practice of open defecation to the spike in population which make available toilet facilities insufficient to those living in such communities. This finding is in harmony with the observation made by Gbadegeshi and Akintola (2020), that this practice is predominant in areas where sanitation and toilet

infrastructures are not readily available. However, the least percentage of the respondents blames the government for not providing toilet facilities to the communities.

Figure showing the Respondents' Awareness of the Implications of Open Defecation



The respondents showed reasonable awareness of the various implications and challenges associated with practice of open defecation. Whereas about 71% of the respondents agreed that when men defecate in canals, drainages, bushes and forests it exposes them to certain level of unnecessary danger, 75% of the respondents believed that the privacy of the women who practice open defecation is usually at risk.

Conclusion

The study shows that open defecation is one the fatal public health problems that works insidiously to the harm of the society where it is practiced. It is a militating factor against the quest for intensified environmental hygiene in the contemporary society. Apart from the hazardous health challenges, and high level of morbidity it poses on the community, open defecation is an abhorrent social phenomenon. In the philosophical and ethical view of virtually every religious tradition, human excreta is usually perceive unpleasant when it is exposed to public view. Open defecation is extremely an intricate issue that needs a holistic, intentional and aggressive approach to be controlled in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this paper, the following recommendations are made:

1. Constant public health promotion is hereby encouraged through religious leaders, community leaders and both government and private healthcare providers.
2. Hygiene messages in local language in form of jingles on radio, televisions and modern social media apparatuses.
3. The use of the harmful effect of open defecation as popular ringing tones for mobile telephones is one way of solving this challenge.
4. Periodical sanitary inspection in the areas that are popular and notoriously known for open defecation.
5. Tasking house owners (landlords and landladies) mandatorily to provide functional toilet facilities for their tenant and instituting monitoring team in every compound.

6. Community leaders should in collaboration with local government sanitary inspectors and security establish a community sanitary team and anti-open defecation taskforce that will be operative within neighbourhood.

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