



‘Dying for nothing’ or ‘dying for something’? understanding suicide in Igboland

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Abstract

In the modern world, suicide is frequently attributed to various factors such as depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, alcoholism, or drug abuse. However, this study identified other intrinsic factors that might induce suicidal feelings. These often-neglected factors, which are more spiritual than physical, relate to the idea of ‘dying for something’ and/or ‘dying for nothing’. The study aimed to explore the understanding of suicide among the Igbo people of Nigeria. Since Igboland is a large area, the study adopted the culture area method of interpretation. The reason for this method is to avoid the error of over-generalization, hence, what obtains in one subculture may not be the same in another subculture. The area of concentration of the study is the central sub-cultural area of Igboland, which is Ugbaiké Enugu-Ezike of Southeast Nigeria. Data for the study was generated from both event reviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Following a qualitative analysis, the findings show that, first, suicide is considered a taboo topic among Igbo people. It is very clear that, traditionally, the Igbo conceptualize suicide as an abomination against the gods, meaning that taking one’s life is not permitted by any human or spiritual agents. The study also identified the reasons for suicide, which intrinsically varied according to space and time. Generally, suicide stirs up discomfort in the supernatural world and to escape from the wrath of the supernatural powers, an expiatory sacrifice must be performed.

Keywords: Ancestors, risk factors, ritual sacrifice, suicide, taboos

Introduction

Death is a necessary end which everyone must face. But does one have the right to terminate one's own life? In Igbo worldview, to take one's own life (as well that of another) is to tamper with God's creation and is considered a taboo. There is no doubt that many people are currently faced with frustrations, disappointments, health challenges, or other challenges that may be traumatic in life. People in these conditions can, no doubt, be prone to suicidal thoughts. Peschke (1996) asserts that the reason for suicide is a person's inability to cope with problems, social isolation, the feeling of being useless or being a burden to others. In Exodus 20:13, the Bible states that violence to one's life is an abomination before God.

African (traditional) societies view life as sacred, something to be respected and revered (Nwaogaidu, 2016). That is why at any given time, if a family loses one to death, there are tears and anguish. Often, family members suspend whatever they are doing and spend days, weeks or even months mourning the deceased. This outlook indicates that in Igbo society, human life is cherished, preserved, and sustained. Igbo has a concept known as *nsoani* – a sacrilegious offense of a kind abhorred by everyone. *Nsoani* is a sin so grave that it is not only abhorrent to anyone but is considered a sin against the earth itself and against God. Chinua Achebe's (1958) exploration of this concept in *Things Fall Apart*, for example,

shows that a person who commits suicide has committed an evil act, has accepted a bad death, and bad deaths disrupt the normal cycle of life. It is considered a distortion of the cosmological order.

Given this attitude towards suicide, there are harsh consequences for committing suicide. Oduor (2018) presents the situation thus: the very land on which the suicide happens is considered polluted. Such a land can only be cleansed through elaborate rituals. If one hangs oneself on a tree, the tree would be cut down. If one hangs oneself inside a house, the house would be burned down, as it is believed that other people living in the house might be influenced to commit suicide. If the suicide happens in a yam barn, the barn would be burnt down together with the yams therein. The bodies of those who commit suicide are not interred normally. They are buried in the evil forest. In other instances, if one hangs oneself in a farmland, a grave would be dug directly under the hanging body so that when the rope is cut, the corpse will fall directly into the grave and be buried without anybody touching it. If one drowns oneself in a well, such a well would be condemned, declared unusable, and it would be closed.

Suicide is a significant societal problem. Going back to the example of suicide portrayed in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, critics who seek reasons for the suicide of

Okonkwo, the protagonist, were faced with two problems (Ogbaa, 1981). The first is the cultural enigma the suicide presented to critics who were foreign to the pre-colonial Igbo culture that Achebe presented. The second is literary: how to deal with the irony the event presented, for it was baffling and most unexpected that Okonkwo who, in the past, had demonstrated an incredible amount of courage and determination in facing his enemies (including himself), would consider suicide as a viable solution to the problems of the final moments of his life. The author went further to posit that some critics have sought an explanation in the works of social scientists as a way of dealing with both problems. To this end, Ogbaa (1981) contends that the text itself contains answers to these cultural and literary problems. In his thesis, he attempted to demonstrate how the Igbo cultural beliefs, deftly explained by Achebe in the novel, can help a careful reader to find motives for Okonkwo's shocking suicide. Throughout the novel, Achebe explains that every 'real man' in Umuofia aspires to personal achievements and piety. Piety, as it is used in Umuofia, does not just mean 'reverence for God or devout fulfilment of religious obligations'; it more broadly according to Dictionary.com refers to 'dutiful respect or regard for parents, homeland, and elders who represent the deceased ancestors'. Obviously, Okonkwo was an achiever who also showed a deep sense of piety. Therefore, he deserved anything but contemptible death

for something so personal to him, which led to his being buried like a dog.

In the light of the above background, the study seeks to understand why people die for 'nothing' or 'something' in Igboland. The specific objective of the study is to draw attention to the point that committing suicide does not make people less human arguing that victims should be accorded respect while measures for preventing suicide should be devised. However, much has been written in recent years about the increasing number of suicides among the young and the aged and how it can be addressed, but not much has been written about the kind of funeral rites performed for the victims of suicide in present-day Igboland. This is the gap this study wishes to fill using the Ugbaike community of Igbo-Eze North of Enugu State as the study area.

Contextualizing and Theorizing Suicide

Suicide can be contextualized as 'dying for nothing' or 'dying for something' depending on the causality. It is the act of intentionally causing one's own death, often committed out of despair on the one hand (dying for nothing), and out of heroism on the other hand (dying for something). In modern-day society, the cause is frequently attributed to factors such as depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, alcoholism, or drug abuse. Another reason for suicide is hardship. Some of the participants also indicated that the evil of the forefathers could propel suicide in

one's family. Nweze (2016) noted that many of their forefathers committed atrocities such as killing people or sacrificing people to the gods – mostly young girls, boys or pregnant women. Ijeoma (2015) states that at the point of death, many of the people who were killed by their forefathers placed curses on those who killed them. They believe that such curses most often come through in the families of those who were involved in such acts, which might manifest in suicides in such families.

Suicide is a global occurrence. About 800,000 to a million people die by suicide every year, making it the 10th leading cause of death worldwide (World Health Organization, 2014). Suicide does not have one universally accepted definition. From the Latin *Sui caedere*, suicide can mean to kill oneself or self-murder. This is the act of a person intentionally causing his or her own death. It is death from injury, poisoning, or suffocation where there is evidence (either explicit or implicit) that the injury was self-inflicted and that the deceased intended to kill themselves. Many researchers agree that a suicide attempt is a non-habitual act with a non-fatal outcome that is deliberately initiated and performed by the individual involved (Jans, 2018; Sadock et al., 2014; O'Sullivan et al., 2011; O'Carroll et al., 1996; Diekstra, 1989). It is also regarded as an intentional self-inflicted death (Kaplan & Sadock, 1998; Jacobs et al., 2003).

For the purposes of this study, the understanding of suicide aligns with the definitions above and specifically with that of Gonsalves (1986), who conceives it as "the direct killing of oneself on one's own authority" (p. 246). Halbwachs (1930) had earlier defined suicide as "all those cases of death resulting from action taken by the victim themselves, and with the intention and prospect of killing oneself" (p. 24).

From the views expressed above, one can conclude that there are two contending views on suicide, which will help us understand the concept. One is the 'Martyr – avoidance of Shame' perspective – by dying for something, while the other is 'Life is Scared' perspective – by dying for nothing. In Nigeria, these two views are prevalent. As such, killing is not suicide unless it is done on one's own authority. In the former, the oppressed populations across the globe, especially with the wave of Islamic fundamentalism in Nigeria expressed in the ideology of the sect popularly known as *Boko Haram* (literally meaning "Western civilization is forbidden"), the event of suicide has become recurrent and backed by religion. Although Obiezu (2013) and Strenski (2003) have tried to describe their actions in religious-laden words and symbols as martyrdom and sacrifice, thus raising it above profane calculation of individual cost-benefit analysis to a so-called level of higher good, it still does not change the suicidal dimension

of the acts. In Northern Nigeria, for religious purposes, there is an ardent desire in young men to enlist as suicide bombers (Kanu, 2014).

Hassan (2001) posited that these young folks practically go on their knees begging for an opportunity to be sent as suicide bombers. Apart from the religious determination, there is a cultural determination anchored on a simplistic concept of life expressed in Hausa sayings such as *me duniya?* (meaning "What is life?") and *duniya runfan kara* (meaning "Life is a roof made of the stem of maize"). This ideology, however, reduces the depth of the sacred value life possesses (Kanu, 2014).

Durkheim (1976) is of the opinion that all cases that are directly or indirectly from a positive or negative act of one capable of producing death are classified as suicide. This definition shows that suicide is different from risk or accident. According to Durkheim, the death here is intentional, and the intenders know full well that their action will directly or indirectly lead to their death. Hence, any death in which the victim is the cause, whether directly or indirectly, is considered suicide.

Related to the above, some Yoruba sayings throw some light on suicide. For example, the saying *iku ya j'esin* (which means "death is preferable to shame, dishonour and indignity") suggests that dignity plays a significant role in the choice of suicide (Asiata, 2010). Here, death (*iku*) is conceived

as a better option than shame (*esin*). Achebe (1958) captured this fact in his work. In terms of achievement, Okonkwo (that is before his exile) was clearly cut out for great things. He was still young but had won fame as the greatest wrestler in the nine villages. He was a wealthy farmer, with two barns full of yams, and had just married his third wife, which, in his society, was a mark of greatness. To crown it all, he had taken two titles and had shown incredible prowess in two inter-tribal wars. And so although Okonkwo was still young, he was already one of the greatest men of his time. Age was respected among his people, but achievement was revered.

Apart from explaining here what values constitute greatness in Umuofia, Achebe gives us another hint as to why Okonkwo eventually chose to die suddenly. That is, since achievement is revered and because his father died without it, Okonkwo's fear of failure motivates him to pursue achievement with a religious fervour. Having tasted the joys and glory of achievements up until the time he went into exile, he considered it a failure in life that when he returned to Umuofia, he had not achieved what he set out to achieve.

Thus, achievement is Okonkwo's life-spring; deny him achievement and you destroy the life in him. Achebe (1958) wrote:

His life had been ruled by a great passion - to become one of the

lords of the clan. That had been his life-spring. And he had all but achieved it. Then everything had been broken. He had been cast out of his clan like a fish onto a dry, sandy beach, panting (p. 119).

Mazrui (1965) further explains the Yoruba rationale for suicide when he wrote that "suicide becomes respectable when the life which it ends had at once aspired to great heights and is now descended to such depths" (p. 30). Asiata (2010) avers that such a life, in essence, lacks quality and value, and is devoid of the features of a good life and thus not worth living. The Yoruba describe a life worth living thus: *aye alaafia, irorun ati idera* (meaning "a healthy life devoid of pain and suffering"). For the Yoruba, when it comes to the issue of autonomy and competence as regards deciding on suicide, they would metaphorically claim that *bose wuni lase imole eni* (meaning "one determines one's faith the way one deems fit"). According to the author, this understanding of life creates room for suicide.

Helen-Hemingway (1984) sees suicide as an act of voluntarily or intentionally taking one's life. This definition intends to emphasize that for any case of self-killing to be termed suicide, the victim must not be forced to do it. In this case, a person who, for instance, poisoned himself voluntarily has committed suicide, while the fellow who poisoned himself without having the knowledge of the effect will not be said to have committed

suicide because their action is accidental. Helen-Hemingway (1984) stretches the definition further to include any person who attempts to take or has the tendency to take his own life, or with a notion that may bring about his own self-destruction.

Helen-Hemingway's definition is very close to reality, but the problem is: how can one know when suicide is intentional or voluntary? Here, the input of Douglas (1970) becomes necessary. He suggests that emphasis should be placed on the instrument and mode of self-destruction to determine whether it is voluntary and intentional or not. For instance, if someone leaves a suicide note on the table, bolts his door from inside, and hangs himself; the bolting of the door or the note and the mode of self-murder make it abundantly clear that the individual's action is voluntary and intentional, and therefore an indisputable case of suicide. If, peradventure, any evidence to prove the case is not found, Helen-Hemingway (1984) suggests that the resort to experts like medical practitioners or any judicial verdict might help establish the case of suicide.

In an attempt to explain the social theories and patterns of suicide, Emile Durkheim (1976) divided the social theories into three categories: the egoistic, the altruistic and the anomie. In the former, he said when an individual becomes socially isolated or feels that s/he has no place in society, s/he destroys 'himself' or 'herself'. This is the suicide of a self-centred person who lacks

altruistic feelings and is usually cut off from the mainstream of society. According to Omoregbe (1990), any suicide based on self-ego and pride is a crime against a person's obligations towards the community. He went further to say that a person's life is always a great investment in the community, which a man or a woman is obliged to let yield fruit.

Durkheim's second category describes suicide committed by people who are not strongly integrated into any social group. For instance, the lack of family integration explains why the unmarried are more vulnerable to suicide than the married. It also explains why couples with children are the best-protected group of all other groups that were studied. Durkheim also believes that rural communities have more social integration than urban areas, hence the low suicide rate. Another example is that of Protestants versus Catholics. He believes that Protestantism is a less cohesive religion than Catholicism; consequently, the Protestants have higher suicide rates among their members.

Durkheim believes that individuals who are philanthropic are prone to suicide because of their excessive integration into a group. Suicide is viewed as an outgrowth of that integration. This type of suicide occurs when individuals and groups are close and intimate. This kind of suicide results from the over-interrelation of the individual into social proofs. Omoregbe (1990) stated that Socrates was a victim of such suicide based on an

accusation levelled against him that he was corrupting the youth.

Durkheim's third category of anomie refers to social instability, with a breakdown in social standards and values. This is when the individual's integration into society is disturbed. Individuals in this group are thus deprived of customary norms of behaviour. This explains why those who experience negative changes in their economic fortunes are more vulnerable to suicide. This type of suicide is due to certain breakdowns of social equilibrium, such as bankruptcy or winning an unthinkable lottery. In other words, anomie suicide takes place in a situation that has cropped up suddenly. This type of suicide is known to be a person's inability to cope with a certain situation at a given time.

The Igbo conceptualization of suicide in ancient times as a religious concern was elevated to a legal concern in the Penal Code that Nigeria inherited from the British colonial system. In Nigeria today, the Penal Code Cap. 63 on 'Offences Connected with Murder and Suicide', particularly those sections that deal with aiding suicide (Section 225) and attempting suicide (Section 226), states that "any person who attempts to kill himself is guilty of a misdemeanour". Furthermore, in the Igbo philosophy, a person's life is circumscribed within *uwa* (the world), which is composed of the physical and spiritual – the abode of humans and spirits (Uchendu, 1965). The human is

composed of *ahu* (body), *mkpuruobi* (heart) and *mmuo* (spirit), and the basic unity of these is *mmadu* (person). This is different from Greek philosophy, in which Plato held that a person's spirit is assumed as a separate living entity inhabiting a body, or Aristotle, in which spirit is a form of the body. In Igbo, *ahu*, *mmuo*, and *mmadu* are inseparable, and are expressed as one entity.

This inseparability informs the ontological goodness of the human person, which is held as immensely significant among the Igbo as articulated by Nwala (1998). In pursuance of the ultimate good (*summum bonum*), the person is guided by the desire for *ndu* (life) and its preservation, and despite the *nsogbu* (difficulties and frustrations), this pursuit should not transgress the moral order. It is not uncommon, therefore, among the Igbo, for prominence to be given to concepts such as *Ndubisi* (meaning, "life is supreme" and should be preserved), *Ndukaku* ("life is greater than wealth", hence wealth must not be pursued at the expense of life), or *Nduamaka* ("life is good") (Kanu, 2014).

The prominence given to the ontological goodness of the person in Igbo philosophy informs the Igbo view of suicide. Suicide is *onwu ojoo* ("a bad death") and dreaded or regarded as "*nsoani*" (taboo or grave sin against natural order). A "good death" will cause the deceased to reincarnate, but "bad deaths" disrupt this cycle – those who die a bad death are unable to join their ancestors

or reincarnate. In Igbo ontology, a person who reached old ripe age and attained a life of accomplishment before dying is believed to have died a good death. Thus, old age is a *sine qua non* for good death. The accomplishments of the person should include marriage and children, which give the person in question the opportunity to participate in the life circle, accomplished through reincarnation. At death, such a person joins the ancestors following the full funeral rites that usher the person into the world of the ancestors. Death at an old age is regarded as a blessing and is celebrated with feasting. In Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, when Ogbuefi Ezeudu died, the people of Umuofia celebrated his death with lots of food, drink, and dancing. The nine representatives of the ancestral spirits, the *egwugwu*, and various types of masquerades came to pay their last respects. There were gun salutes, the beating of drums and the brandishing and clanging of machetes. He was given a befitting burial because he was one of the oldest men in Umuofia (Achebe, 1958).

From the Igbo perspective, it is a bad death when a person dies young. Thus, people who commit suicide are not given full funeral rites. There is no happiness accompanying the burial. There is no fitting funeral ceremony for someone who commits suicide, even if s/he is already old. No one is allowed to cry or weep publicly for the deceased. There is no cooking or drinking. Finally, cleansing ceremonies are performed by the deceased's

family so that such an evil (suicide) will not happen again. The elders would offer sacrifices for peace in the land and for the extinction of such thoughts and illness from the land. Thus, when one takes one's life, not only loved ones are offended, but the divine is involved, as *Ala*, the earth goddess, is offended because the land is desecrated.

The centrality of the concept of *ndu* among the Igbo, as expressed by Kanu (2014), is the idea that *ndu* is from God. This makes the human person a theomorphic being and thus human life a sacred thing. This explains why the Igbo say, *ndu si na Chi* (meaning "life is from God"). When a child is born, it is taken to be a gift from God. The life of children is not attributed to mere biological fact of conception, because every child has existed in an antecedent world of a divine master. It is thus not surprising that the Igbo would name their child, *Chi-nyere-ndu* (God gave life), *Nke-chi-nyere* (the one God has given), *Chi-n'eye-ndu* (God gives life), *Chi-di-ogo* (God is generous), *Chi-nwe-ndu* (God owns life), *Chi-ekwe* (God has agreed), *Chi-ji-ndu* (God owns life), among others (Kanu, 2014).

Methods

The study centred on the analysis of the Igbo concept of suicide. The historical, expository and critical methods of enquiry are employed to study the historical-cultural roots of the Igbo, their worldview, their concept of life and their approach to suicide. This perspective is further weighed against other

backgrounds. A systematic review of suicide rates among different peoples and assessed disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations were conducted. The study equally employed a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and obtained their responses on what the people understood by suicide, the means of committing suicide and a range of other factors surrounding suicide. It also analysed how people view the family that committed suicide, how they were buried and what happened to their property. Another important aspect of enquiry is how the church or traditional religions bury suicide victims.

Some of the dimensions of enquiry as captured in our focus group discussion (FGD) are:

- The initiation of an act that leads to the death of the initiator, that is, where the person takes an action that leads to his death.
- The will/act that leads to the death of the willer.
- The will to die for nothing.
- The loss of will, that is, the loss of the willpower to live.
- The motivation to be dead or to die, which leads to the initiation of an act that leads to the death of the motivator.

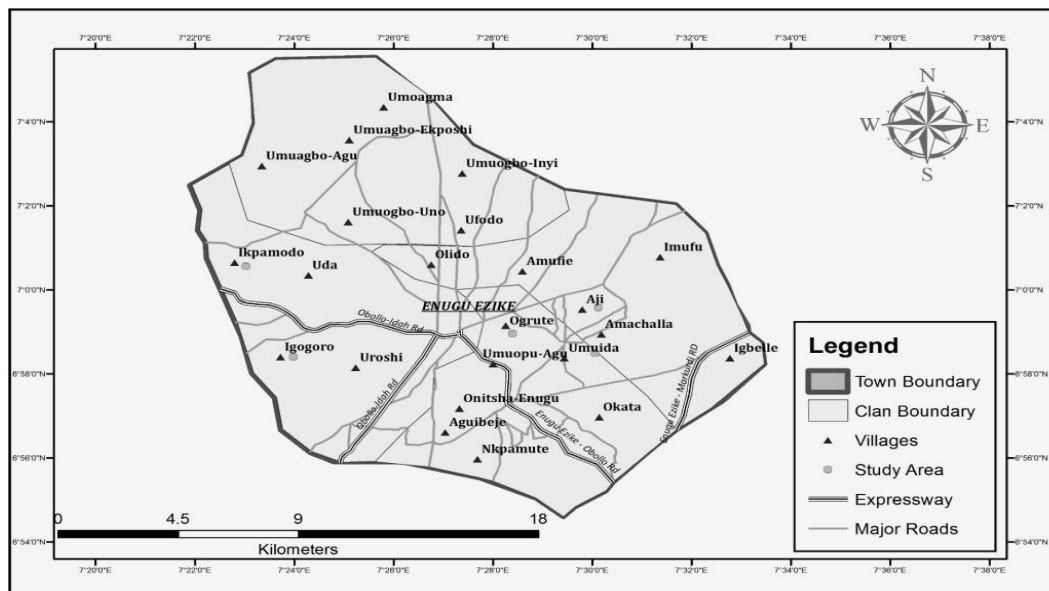
A close look at these dimensions reveals that most of them overlap and the inclusion of some words like initiation in the first dimension, willing and willer in the second

dimension, and motivation and motivator in the fifth dimension, makes any attempt to define suicide with the help of these dimensions difficult. But the basic fact is that suicide is intolerable in Igbo society, even in this modern time. It is considered *nsoani*, a sin against the Earth-goddess. The Igbo do not concede to life's difficulties or to everyday life's demands. They do not accept suicide in any form and at any age, as a solution to any problem regardless of the complexities. Thus, suicide is believed to be a terrible and evil way to die.

Background Information

Enugu-Ezike is located in the extreme Northern part of Enugu State, Nigeria. It is in Igbo-Eze North Local Government Area, with the headquarters in Ogrute. It shares borders with Alor-Agu of Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area and Amaka of Benue State on the West. In the East, it is bounded by Amalla and Obollo-Afor of Udenu Local Government Area. It also shares borders with Ette of Enugu State and Ofante of Kogi State in the North. In the South, Enugu-Ezike has borders with Iheakpu-Awka and Iheaka of Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area. The town is within the high forest vegetation zone.

Figure 1: Map of Enugu-Ezike



Source: Ministry of Lands and Survey, Enugu state, modified by Archaeology Department, UNN.

Increased human activities and global climatic changes have turned Enugu-Ezike into a Guinea Savannah eco-zone, with tropical dry land that supports the abundant growth of palm trees (Omeke, 2010). Like other Igbo societies, Enugu-Ezike people engage in numerous economic activities, including agriculture, wine tapping, blacksmithing, oil palm production and trading. Agriculture occupies the greatest

part of the Igbo economic activity of which Enugu-Ezike is a part. Its population is about 259,431, with 36 villages integrated into the newly created political autonomous communities (Apeh, 2007). Below is the list of the ancestral villages that make up Enugu-Ezike. It does not include new political creations in the form of autonomous communities.

Table 1: Ancestral Villages in Enugu-Ezike

Ezzodo (1st son)	Essodo (3rd son)	Itodo (2nd son)	Ozzi (4th son)
Uda	Aji	Amufie	Inyi
Uroshi	Umuagama	Amachalla	Ugbaike
	UmuogboUlo	Olido	Okpo
	UmuogboAgu	Imufu	Amaja
	Umuogbo Inyi	Igbele	Isugwu
	Umuogbo Ekposhi	Ikpuiga	Umuida
	Ufodo		Ogrute
			Ezillo
			Okata
			Onicha Enugu
			Igogoro
			Ikpamodo
			Umuopu
			UmuopuAgu
			Nkpamute
			OwerreEze
			Umachi
			Amube
			Ogbodu
			Aguibije

This study's main area of concentration is Ugbaike, because it shares borders with other communities outside Enugu-Ezike and has diverse settlements. The history of Ugbaike community is obscure. The historical account relived is mythological and legendary.

Therefore, all that is known is mostly from oral history. Ugbaike is an amalgam of settlers from different places. History has it that Akamangbo is known as the original inhabitants of Ugbaike who came from Ogboli, an Igala-speaking community. Legends have it that they migrated from Amala Orba in the present-day Udenu Local Government Area of Enugu State.

Ogboli is made up of Amegu and Ukwaji. They occupy the most fertile lands of the Ugbaike community. Their initial settlement was Amaeze, where the present Primary School Ameze is located. But with time, they moved northwards and finally settled within what could be adjudged the centre of the community. The reasons for their movement from their original location are attributed to the fear/threat from her neighbours as was used to be those days.

The pioneer migrants came from Akam-Agbo in Ekposhi Enugu-Ezike within the area called *Ugwu bee fada* (Reverend Father's Hill), the initial place where the early missionaries settled and where the present-day St. Mary's Catholic Church Enugu-Ezike is situated. Umama Agbo of Nkwuagbudu is made up of many other hamlets. Umesso, which is currently a part of Umu-Agbo, was believed

to have migrated from Ogrute Enugu-Ezike, the headquarters town of Igbo-Eze North Local Government Area. The last man of the Esso descendants as they were called, was reported to have died in 2015.

Akamangbo was the last settlement. They are believed to have migrated from Ogodo Ette, the Igala-speaking part of Igbo-Eze North. The word/name Akamngbo is Igala coinage. When they arrived, the earlier inhabitants would speak to them in Igbo and their reply was '*mgbon*', which means I do not understand. Akamangbo was, therefore, labelled as an area where its inhabitants would reply 'I do understand' when spoken to.

The name Ugbaike, according to stories, was derived from a hard tree with hardwood/timber as well as a seed that is used in preparing local food seasoning '*Ogbee*' that takes long to prepare. The community combines people from different villages/units and was not easily conquered in tribal wars as was the practice then. As a result of their exploits at war, her neighbours nicknamed them *Ugba di ike ana eshi mbochi* meaning, a seed of *Ugba* tree that would take over 24 hours before it is done/cooked.

The notable village deity is called *Iyi Akpal*. This female deity is believed to have arrived in disguise as a worker from Obollo. It first approached a farmer in Umura whom she begged for snuff. She continued and met someone from Ogboli who granted her

request for snuff. Because of the man's benevolence, the woman opened herself to the man, revealing her identity and secrets to the man and eventually settled at Ogboli, precisely at Amegu. The office of the chief priest of the deity and its succession have been localized among the Amegu and Ukwaji people. They have many herbalists of repute, but the most notable among them was Abugu Urama (Edoga). He was known to have many magical and spiritual powers that instil fear in the other neighbouring villages. Hence, Ugbaike was (and still is) envisaged as a strong and fearful village.

Results of the Ethnographic Findings

A study on the causes of suicide conducted by Meer (1976) reveals that in most cases, the victim feels frustrated and depressed before engaging in suicide. The findings of Meer's work are similar to the findings of the present study in terms of the causes of suicide in Ugbaike of Enugu-Ezike. The causes of suicide in this area, as the FGD audience outlined, include mental illness, depression, failure to achieve a target, not achieving one's expectations, fear of authority, fear of certain illnesses, fear of people, inferiority complex and shyness, unusual biological features, demotion or retrenchment, unemployment, infertility, broken heart or infidelity, loss of kith or kin, strained marital relationship, scandals, unwanted pregnancy, demonic control or possession, fear of old age burden, constant physical abuse by parents or spouse.

The mode which suicide cases take in this area is generally by hanging or drowning. But even drowning is not taken as seriously as hanging. Except if the fellow had earlier indicated his intention to take his life through that means, suicide by drowning could be explained away. Although there is no river around the area, there are water reserves dug by the villagers with the aim of gathering water during the rainy season. However, only hanging, which is self-betraying, is viewed with all seriousness. Within the limit of the peoples' civilization, some other modes of suicide could be noted, such as poisoning oneself, setting oneself ablaze, and drug overdose.

In the focus group discussion with the selected elders of the community between the ages of 65 years and 90 years and personal interviews with six religious leaders of both traditional and Christian religions, all believe that suicide is not normal. Some of the reasons adduced include frustration in life, which ranked high by the people who attended the discussion. From the Group, it was also gathered that the person responsible for killing himself or herself in Ugbaike community would be buried by people from Iheaka community because they have the antidote to deadly curses. This is done after performing traditional rituals inside the room where the deceased was kept. The funeral/cleansing rites take up to a year to be performed. From another perspective, one of the informants Sir

Theophilus Attama (2016) said that in the olden days, such a person was not buried but thrown into an evil forest. The blacksmiths, mostly those from Umundu and Nrobo, were invited to bring down the corpse in the case of hanging or to fish it out in the case of drowning. In fact, the corpse was left in the custody of the blacksmiths until it was finally disposed of in an evil forest. However, with the advent of Christianity and technological advancement, people's disposition towards suicide cases is gradually changing. It has become clear that several factors can contribute to killing oneself, especially in Nigeria where people constantly face poverty, lack of jobs, disappointment by loved ones or failed businesses. Due to this knowledge, the corpse of a suicide victim may now be buried by the Umunna (larger family) within his/her compound just like that of a normal death. This was also the view of a respondent Mr Onyeka Cosmos (2016) who said that the victim will be buried by hired families from Iheaka after performing some traditional rites inside the room where the deceased was kept. He added that the ritual would take up to one year before the final funeral rites could be performed.

Mrs Cecilia Omeh (2016) explained that before such a person is buried, some rituals must be performed by a group of blacksmiths, mostly from Nrobo in Uzo Uwani LGA. She equally noted that if the people of Nrobo and Iheaka were not available, another group of people from Umundu community would take

the responsibility of burying the suicide victim. However, if one hanged oneself in one's own land, one is usually laid to rest under the tree where the act was committed, but if it was done in another land, the remains would be taken away to one's father's land for interment. What has changed is that due to deforestation and hygienic concerns, suicide victims were no longer thrown into the evil forest.

Regarding the Church's position about burying suicide victims, one of the respondents said that in late 1998, a particular priest who worked in Ugbaike refused to bury a woman who committed suicide. This particular act left a lot of people in the community in doubt about the stand of the church, notwithstanding that the victim was an active member of the church. Later, in the same community, a young man who was an undergraduate student also committed suicide but was given a befitting burial by another priest in the community. The different positions of the priests made the people understand that these are the priests' perceptions on suicide matters and not the position of the church.

In order to clearly understand the position of the Church, Mmaju (2013) explains that the Church and, in fact, the Christian community believe that they have the responsibility to accord them befitting church funerals. This responsibility finds its legal expression and translation in c. 1176 §1 CIC, which reads: "Christ faithful who have died are to be given

a Church funeral according to the norms of law". Consequently, and in connection with c. 213, it is the right of the faithful to be buried by the Church and, at the same time, an obligation for the Church (pastors) to bury their dead members. C. 1176 further mentions the spiritual, pastoral and theological purposes of Church funerals, as stated in §2, among others. This is evident in the funeral rites where the Church prays for the spiritual support of the dead, honours their bodies, and at the same time brings to the living the comfort of hope. Funeral rites, so understood, are part of the public worship of the church, through which various occasions in the life of the faithful are sanctified through the intercession of the Church. They provide the opportunity for the Church to commit the departed faithful to the mercy of God by interceding for them and, at the same time, offering pastoral assistance to the living.

Church funeral is the whole rite meant to accord the departed faithful the dignity of burial regardless of the cause of death. It begins with the rite of blessing the corpse in the deceased's house by accompanying the same corpse to the church, the Mass for the dead (Requiem Mass) and concludes with the interment at the grave. But the 1917 Code of Canon Law tried to offer what may seem to qualify as a description of a church funeral rite. According to the c. 1204/1917 Code, Church burial "consists in the transfer of the body of the deceased to the church, the

celebration of funeral services held over the body in the church, its interment in the place legitimately destined for the burial of the faithful departed." This canonical provision, which could also serve as the definition of ecclesiastical burial, is not contained in the 1983 Code. This makes it imperative to rely on the 1917 Code to understand what church funeral entails.

The method of ritual cleansing varies depending on how the individual kills himself. An instance is the case of Okonkwo who killed himself by hanging; in that case, though only certain people are allowed to touch/remove the corpse, the tree itself is cut down so that no other person can hang himself there as the tree is considered evil. Mrs Rose Mama (2016) talked about a man and his wife from Ukwuagbdu in Ugbaike who killed themselves and how village women poured fuel into the room and set them ablaze. Whether the possessions within the house can be removed varies from village to village. If the act is committed within the yam barn, all the yams must be burned along with the barn. If hanging occurred in a farmland, a grave is dug beneath the body, so that when the rope is cut, the corpse falls directly into it. If a suicide is committed when a man drowns himself in a well, that well is filled in and becomes unusable from that point on.

Though people may commit suicide due to hardship, the wrath of gods is not out of place. Families of those who committed

suicide end up badly and people are warned against associating with them or even getting married from/to such families. Ugwueya Caroline and Ogbonna (2016) maintained that relating with such families is taking risks and inter-marrying with them is discouraged. Omeh (2016) said she would not allow herself to be mocked for allowing her daughter to contract marriage with such a family. Therefore, suicide creates problems and severe consequences for the community and the deceased's family. Since it is considered abominable to commit suicide, grown-up ladies from the victim's family may not have 'good' suitors. The male members will also have problems marrying from a 'good' family.

Finally, taking one's life for nothing implies that the victim has cut off his relationship with the living and the dead and certainly s/he cannot be admitted into the company of the ancestors. Such a person's spirit is believed to wander about; hence s/he is not at rest and at peace in the land of the dead. The remedy is a ritual of cleansing the evil to not pollute the community. In this ritual, everyone (whether passers-by or natives) is required to tie a chick brought for the sacrifice on their legs, then wave it on their heads, rub it on their two eyes, repeat whatever the priest says, and then hand the chick to the priest who leaves it to wander away with the evil. It is believed that everybody shares the affliction that might result from any failure to appease the gods,

and also shares the same as people from other towns would mock whoever comes from the victim's place. Because of this, the community gets aggrieved and demands from the family of the victim a guilt offering and internal cleansing of the land and appeasement of the offended.

Summary and Recommendations

This study has shown that among the Ugbaiké people, like in most other parts of Igboland, suicide is viewed as a taboo with far-reaching consequences. It is seen as a social crime against oneself, one's family, the land and community, and, above all, against divinity. The penalty for any type of suicide is always grave but grievous when it is by hanging. It is an abomination which goes with a corresponding punishment. Thus, by committing suicide, especially by hanging, the individual automatically loses all rights and privileges as a native, as a kinsman and even as a human being. Thus, he or she loses the honour and respect accorded to ordinary members of the community, especially with regard to funeral rites, because s/he has chosen to die for nothing.

However, the traditional and other religious leaders, community leadership and town unions in Igboland should use their powers and town hall meetings to educate the people on the stigmatization attached to suicide and the fact that no one has the right to take their life or the life of another. Life belongs to God, and to him alone. On the other hand, public lectures, seminars, and

workshops should constantly be employed both in public places, schools, and marketplaces, as well as jingles made in the media on the evil of suicide. This will make people contemplating the evil act not to engage in it.

There is also the need to restrict access to the means of committing suicide. An effective strategy for preventing suicides and suicide attempts is to restrict access to the most common means, including pesticides, firearms and certain medications. Healthcare services need to incorporate suicide prevention as a core component. Early identification and effective management of crises are keys to prevention. Communities also play a critical role in suicide prevention. They can provide social support to vulnerable individuals and engage in follow-up care,

fight stigma and support those bereaved by suicide. Efforts must be made to see that people are accommodated and accepted in their life conditions. Instead of insulting, cajoling or despising a person who finds himself in a critical condition, efforts should be made to help him or her out either by counselling or financial help.

Finally, booking or seeing a doctor or mental health professional is another step for the person contemplating suicide. The community members should, therefore, maintain their support if the person is getting help for such mental illness as depression. In the early stages of treatment, some people might start to feel physically well enough to carry out a set-out plan and monitoring by professionals before they start to feel better emotionally.

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