

Christian Healing Versus African Traditional Healing: A Case of Kanyama Compound

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Abstract: Healing practices remain an important aspect of African society, particularly in communities where spiritual beliefs strongly influence people's understanding of sickness and health. In many African communities, including Kanyama Compound in Lusaka, Zambia, individuals often seek healing through both Christian and African traditional methods. This study examines the relationship, differences, and tensions between Christian healing and African traditional healing practices in Kanyama Compound. The study investigates how residents perceive these healing systems, factors influencing their choices, and the implications for faith, culture, and healthcare. A qualitative research design was employed using interviews and observations among church leaders, traditional healers, and community members. Findings indicate that while Christianity condemns certain traditional healing practices as unbiblical, many residents continue to combine both systems due to cultural beliefs, economic challenges, and accessibility. The study concludes that healing practices in Kanyama Compound reflect a complex interaction between religion, culture, and social realities. The study recommends increased dialogue between religious institutions and healthcare practitioners to address misconceptions and promote holistic wellbeing.

Keywords: Christian healing, African traditional healing, faith healing, spirituality, Kanyama Compound, Zambia.

1.0 Introduction

Healing has always occupied a central position in African societies because health is viewed as involving both physical and spiritual dimensions. African communities traditionally believe that illness may originate from natural causes, spiritual attacks, ancestral displeasure, or witchcraft (1). Consequently, traditional healing methods have historically been used to restore harmony between the physical and spiritual world. These practices involve herbal medicine, divination, rituals, and spiritual consultations.

With the spread of Christianity in Africa during the colonial and missionary periods, Christian healing practices became widespread. Christian healing generally involves prayer, fasting, anointing oil, laying on of hands, exorcism, and faith in divine intervention through Jesus Christ (2). Churches, especially Pentecostal and charismatic movements, emphasize miraculous healing through the power of God and the work of the Holy Spirit.

In Zambia, Christianity and African traditional beliefs continue to coexist despite theological tensions between them. Many Christians publicly reject traditional healing while secretly consulting traditional healers during times of severe illness or family crises. This situation is particularly common in densely populated urban compounds such as Kanyama, where poverty, unemployment, and limited access to healthcare influence people's choices regarding treatment and healing.

Kanyama Compound is one of the largest peri-urban settlements in Lusaka and is characterized by high population density, inadequate sanitation, and limited healthcare services. In such communities, both churches and traditional healers play significant roles in addressing social and spiritual needs. Understanding the

relationship between Christian healing and African traditional healing in Kanyama is therefore important for appreciating how religion and culture influence healthcare practices.

1.1 Background of the Study

African traditional healing existed long before the arrival of Christianity in Africa. Traditional healers served as custodians of indigenous knowledge and were respected for their ability to diagnose and treat illnesses using herbs, spiritual guidance, and rituals (3). Healing was not merely viewed as treatment of physical symptoms but as restoration of harmony within the individual, family, and community.

The introduction of Christianity transformed African religious and healing practices. Missionaries often condemned traditional healing as pagan, demonic, or incompatible with Christian teachings (4). As a result, many converts abandoned openly practicing traditional religion and embraced Christian forms of worship and healing. However, despite widespread Christianization, traditional healing practices remained deeply rooted in African cultural identity.

Pentecostal churches in Zambia have particularly emphasized divine healing as evidence of God's power. Pastors and prophets conduct healing crusades and prayer sessions where individuals seek deliverance from sickness, curses, and demonic oppression (5). These churches often interpret sickness spiritually and encourage believers to rely on prayer and faith rather than traditional medicine.

Nevertheless, African traditional healing continues to attract many people due to cultural familiarity, accessibility, and perceived effectiveness. Traditional healers are often consulted for illnesses

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believed to have spiritual causes, such as infertility, mental disturbances, or persistent misfortunes (6). Some individuals believe that hospitals and churches cannot fully address spiritually related problems.

The coexistence of Christian and traditional healing has created tensions within communities and churches. Some Christians consider consulting traditional healers as sinful and contrary to biblical teachings, while others view traditional medicine as part of African heritage. In urban compounds like Kanyama, syncretism has emerged where individuals combine Christian beliefs with traditional healing practices.

This study seeks to explore how residents of Kanyama Compound navigate these two healing systems and the factors influencing their choices.

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite the widespread influence of Christianity in Zambia, African traditional healing practices continue to be used by many Christians in Kanyama Compound. This has created theological conflicts, cultural tensions, and confusion regarding acceptable healing practices among believers. Churches often discourage traditional healing by associating it with witchcraft and demonic activities, yet many residents continue to consult traditional healers due to poverty, cultural beliefs, and dissatisfaction with modern healthcare services (7). The continued coexistence of these healing systems raises questions regarding faith, identity, and healthcare practices in urban communities such as Kanyama.

1.3 Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine Christian healing and African traditional healing practices in Kanyama Compound and assess how residents perceive and utilize these healing systems.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The study seeks:

1. To examine the beliefs associated with Christian healing and African traditional healing in Kanyama Compound.
2. To identify factors influencing residents' choice of healing methods and to assess the social and religious implications of combining Christian and traditional healing practices.

2.0 Literature Review

Literature on African healing practices demonstrates that religion and spirituality significantly shape African understandings of illness and treatment. Mbiti argues that Africans traditionally view sickness as connected to spiritual realities and social relationships rather than purely biological causes (8). Consequently, healing often involves spiritual intervention and restoration of harmony within the community.

African traditional healing has remained resilient despite modernization and the spread of Christianity. Traditional healers continue to play important roles in healthcare delivery, especially in areas where access to modern medical facilities is limited (9). Herbal medicine, spiritual divination, and ritual cleansing remain common therapeutic methods across many African societies.

Christian healing, particularly within Pentecostal movements, has also gained prominence in Africa. Anderson notes that Pentecostal

churches attract followers through promises of divine healing, miracles, and deliverance from spiritual oppression (10). Healing services often involve prayer, prophecy, fasting, and exorcism. Such practices resonate with African worldviews that acknowledge the spiritual causes of illness.

Research further indicates that many African Christians engage in syncretism by combining Christian beliefs with traditional healing practices (11). This occurs because cultural beliefs regarding ancestors, witchcraft, and spiritual attacks remain influential even after conversion to Christianity. Some believers seek traditional healers secretly while maintaining active participation in church activities.

Studies conducted in Zambia reveal that poverty and limited healthcare access contribute to the continued use of traditional healing practices (12). Traditional healers are often more accessible and affordable than formal medical services. Additionally, some illnesses are believed to require spiritual solutions that hospitals cannot provide.

Theological debates regarding healing continue within Christian circles. Some churches strongly oppose traditional healing, citing biblical passages against divination and sorcery, while others acknowledge the medicinal value of herbs but reject spiritual rituals associated with traditional religion (13). This debate reflects broader tensions between Christianity and African cultural identity.

Existing literature demonstrates that healing practices in African societies are shaped by cultural beliefs, religious teachings, economic conditions, and social realities. However, limited studies have specifically examined how these dynamics operate within urban compounds such as Kanyama, thereby justifying the present study.

3.0 Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to gain an in-depth understanding of healing practices within Kanyama Compound. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and discussions with church leaders, traditional healers, and community members. Purposive sampling was used to identify participants with relevant knowledge and experience regarding Christian and traditional healing practices.

The study focused on understanding participants' beliefs, experiences, and perceptions concerning healing methods. Data collected were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and themes. Ethical considerations such as confidentiality, voluntary participation, and informed consent were observed throughout the study.

4.0 Findings

The findings revealed that both Christian healing and African traditional healing remain widely practiced in Kanyama Compound. Many residents expressed strong belief in divine healing through prayer and church intervention. Pentecostal churches were particularly influential in promoting healing through fasting, deliverance, and prophetic ministry.

However, the study also found that traditional healers continue to be consulted for illnesses perceived as spiritual or mysterious. Some participants admitted combining church prayers with

traditional remedies because they believed both systems addressed different dimensions of illness.

Economic factors also influenced healing choices. Traditional healers were considered more affordable and accessible compared to hospitals. Additionally, cultural beliefs regarding witchcraft and ancestral spirits contributed to continued reliance on traditional healing practices.

The study further found that some churches strongly condemned traditional healing while others tolerated the use of herbal medicine provided it was not associated with rituals or spirit invocation.

5.0 Contribution of the Study

This study contributes to understanding the interaction between Christianity and African traditional beliefs in contemporary urban communities. It highlights the persistence of traditional healing practices despite Christian influence and demonstrates how socioeconomic and cultural factors shape healthcare choices.

6.0 Recommendations

Churches should promote balanced teachings that address cultural realities while encouraging appropriate healthcare practices.

Government and healthcare institutions should engage traditional healers in public health education and regulation.

Increased access to affordable healthcare services in Kanyama Compound is also necessary to reduce dependence on unsafe healing practices.

Further research should examine the role of traditional medicine within modern healthcare systems in Zambia.

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