

Medical Context in the Tourists Patronage of Osun Osogbo Grove, Nigeria

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Abstract: Osun Osogbo cultural festival remains one of the most popular annual events in Nigeria. Lots have been said about the grove where this event takes place annually and its medical importance. However, dearth of information on medical context of tourists' patronage of the grove makes this study appropriate. The study took place in Osogbo the hub of the festival and data was collected through questionnaire and interview guide among 105 respondents. This was complemented with observation of events within the grove. The results showed that people were aware of the grove and the festival. Visitation to the grove by the respondents outside the festival period was once in a while (54%) while only 25% visited the place during Osun traditional weekly programme. Medical factor ranked highest (58%) among the reasons for the patronage of the grove; 32% of the respondents specifically went to the grove to find solution to their fertility problem. Healing process within the grove was rated excellent (45%), very reassuring (24%) and relatively cheaper (18%) compared to any other healing sources. Accessibility (22%), affordability (19%) and closeness to respondents' place of residence (32%) are some of the factors reported to have influenced patronage of the grove. Recommendations were offered in line with the common problems identified as confronting tourist's patronage of the Osun Osogbo annual festival celebration.

Key words: Medical context, tourists patronage, Osun Osogbo, grove, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

In Africa, particularly among the Yoruba speaking people of Nigeria, festivals are regarded as important and significant aspect of life. They are the most important activities for social and religious purposes in traditional societies. In contemporary times, the economic and social significance of festivals have also been underscored (Maughan and Bianchini, 2004; Clarke-Ekong, 1997). By its nature, festivals are days or times or occasions of feasting and celebration involving series of entertainment, dancing performance, merry-making, rituals, rites and ceremonies. Festivals are institutionalized aspects of people's culture. They are well established means of social relationship which continued to play important roles in the society till the present times.

It is in view of this that the month of August, every year has become very unique in the life of the people of Osogbo in Osun State, Nigeria. This special month is meant for celebration, traditional cleansing of the city and cultural reunion of the people with their ancestors and

founders of the Osogbo Kingdom. The celebration of Osun Osogbo festival is a period of stocktaking and assemblage of all sons and daughters of Osogboland as well as Yoruba people both in Nigeria and in the Diaspora. Like every other festival, it enhances what (Dopamu, 2004; Mbiti, 1992; Awolalu and Dopamu, 1979) referred as an avenue for appreciating the spirit of the land, entertainment and renewal of community life and forum for wining, dining and general rejoicing.

Of all the cultural activities that have attracted tourists from far and near in Nigeria, Osun Osogbo stands very clear in terms of popularity and improved annual patronage. The patronage has been noted as cutting across geographical divides (Omitogun and Oyinloye, 2004). Oral reports and media publications have testified to the growing importance of this famous traditional event. To some media it is an avenue for the people to relax, recreate and savour nature. Some people patronize Osun Osogbo festival in order to see the grove that was noted as one of the few surviving natural heritage that could be found in the South of Sahara. The purposes of

the patronage to Osun grove during or after Osun Osogbo festival, as it is common to all tourist attractions globally, cut across issues like leisure and relaxation, research (Enemuo and Oduntan, 2012; Adedeji *et al.*, 2011) and natural healing (Adedayo, 2005). That medical reason, among others, account for the volume of patronage attracted by Osun grove site may find its expression by Omitogun and Oyinloye (2004)'s description of the strong magical powers possessed by Oso-Igbo, the Osun goddess. This goddess, according to the duo is acclaimed to have possessed the powers of fertility, protection and blessings; most importantly, she possessed the ability to give children (through birth) to barren women and power to heal the sick and the afflicted by means of her medicinal water from the river (Omitogun and Oyinloye, 2004). Similarly, in his discussion of medical values of Osun grove, Adedayo (2005) noted that people yearn for celestial assistance from Osun river goddess and so many visitors bring different containers to collect the water which they believe has curative properties like the famous Dead Sea in Israel. It should, however, be pointed out that this phenomenon is not peculiar to Osun festival celebration alone, as festivals in other African cultures share this attribute. According to Clarke-Ekong (1997) participants in a cultural festival ask for long life, peace, prosperity, safety in risk undertakings, potency for men and fertility for women.

In its entirety and in components, tourism related festivals and events is an area that has been extensively reviewed in recent times and several state of the art type articles are available (Quinn, 2009; Maughan and Bianchini, 2004; Getz, 2008; Hede *et al.*, 2003; Clarke-Ekong, 1997). However, very little works are available on the purposes served by a notable tourist attraction like Osun-Osogbo grove, especially in relation to its natural healing component. Apart from this, information provided in many of the extant literature on Osun grove is very scanty and as a result failed to provide the required in-depth understanding of the issues involved in the medication processes taking place within the grove. Until the present attempt, almost nothing is known about the views of the key personalities involved in Osun grove healing activities. In contrast, spa (location where natural sources of mineralized water are used for drinking or bathing in order to cure disease or ensure good health) has received substantial attention from scholars and researchers alike. According to Wenzel (2010) taking the water at such spas was once a popular therapy and recreation in the United States. Such spas still remain popular in Europe.

From the foregoing, it is glaring that this work has become very apt for providing an in-depth understanding

of the medication processes involved in the Osun grove. More importantly, the study examined the rate of patronage of the grove for medical reason and as well investigates the process involved in health seeking behavior of the tourists to the grove. The perceived efficacy of this healing option in terms of its health outcome has come to be understood.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study population: The population on which this study was carried out comprises the residents of the indigenous areas of Osogbo Township. It involved both male and female adult residents of the study area. Data were also collected from seven purposively selected respondents which include the custodians (priest and priestess) and visitors to the grove site.

Research instruments: Data for this study therefore were collected through the use of questionnaire, interview guides and observation. Questionnaires were used to source for information from the indigenous community members while the interview guides were directed at the priest and priestess of the grove who also served as key informants. In-depth interview was also used to gather data from the visitors of the grove. Participant observation technique was adopted to capture the needed social facts in the course of celebrating Osun Osogbo festival while non-participant observation was used to examine the healing process during Osun weekly medical consultations.

Sample size: The sample size for this study was pegged at 100 respondents. This size involved both male and female residents of the indigenous part of Osogbo Township for a minimum of 5 years while 7 respondents were involved in in-depth interview.

Sampling techniques: This study was limited to the indigenous part of the city of Osogbo. The reason being that the preliminary studies carried out on the study area had shown an active involvement of the residents of the indigenous area in all activities relating to Osun Osogbo. As a result, the core indigenous area of Osogbo was clustered into major sections for the purpose of this study namely Isale Osun, Ita Olokan, Oja Oba/Oke Baale/Ibokun road, Orita Gbaemu/Oluode area.

These parts were further divided into traditional Quarters (Agboole) where (40%) of the traditional Quarters were randomly sampled from Isale Osun and Ita Olokan, the remaining (60%) of the Quarters were sampled from the Oja Oba/Oke Baale/Ibokun road and Orita Gbaemu/Oluode parts. One household was selected

from each of the sampled quarters for participation in questionnaire administration making a total of 100 respondents. Accidental sampling method was used to select one adult respondent from each of the sampled households. In addition to this, respondents like the Chief Priest of the grove (the Aworo of Osogbo land), two priestesses from the grove and four tourists that often patronize Osun grove for healing purpose were purposively selected for the in-depth interview.

Scope of the study: This research is limited to medical values of Osun Osogbo Grove in Osogbo town, Osun State. It was carried out strictly among the residents of the indigenous parts of Oshogbo as well as the tourists that patronize the grove for healing purpose. The main concern of this study is the processes involved in health seeking behaviour of the tourists.

Data analysis: Quantitative data collected through questionnaire was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The interpretation of data was done based on simple percentage. Content analysis was employed in the analysis and interpretation of qualitative data. At some points, direct quotations were extracted from the verbal statements recorded from the respondents who took part in the qualitative study. These were used to support data from the questionnaires. These also became very useful especially when specific issues under discussion needed to be further expatiated and/or illustrated.

RESULTS

Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents:

The results showed that female respondents constituted the majority (66%) of the population and sizeable proportion of the respondents in age categories of <30 years of age (28%), between 30-50 years (32%) as well as those who were 51 years and above (40%). Educational attainment included primary school education (28%), secondary school education (26%), National Diploma (22%), Nigeria Certificate of Education (15%) and University education (9%). Majority of them (68%) were married. The religious affiliation of the respondents included Islam (57%), Christianity (12%) while traditional religion has 31%. Occupations of the respondents include trading/artisan (35%), farming (26%), civil service/teaching (30%) and students/apprenticeship (9%).

Medical context of patronage to osun osogbo grove: The data on respondents' first visit to Osun grove in Osogbo,

Osun State showed that 56% of visitors made their first visit to the grove >10 years prior to the time of this study. To other respondents, the first visits to the grove was made precisely 10 years (18%), 5 years (16%), 3 years (9%) and 2 years (22%) to the time of this study. The frequency of visit to the grove by the respondents as at the time of collection of the data for this study was once in a while (25%), anytime there is need for such visit (23%) and every Osun week (which is 5 days interval (52%). Virtually all the respondents involved in this study went to Osun grove for medical purpose; 58% of them attested to this. Others either took their friends there for medication (24%) or simply went to the grove to redeem their pledges for one favor or the other they must have received earlier from the deity (18%).

Types of ailments being handled at the grove and respondents' particular medical problem:

The respondents revealed various forms of medication that could be handled at the grove. For instance, Fig. 1 showed that 36% of them were of the view that all ailments are being handled in the grove except death. Fertility was another ailment mentioned by 27% of the study population. Others include severe headache (ori tuulu) (15%) and bad luck or misfortune (22%).

The above statistics were supported by the responses from the key informants. Their responses revealed that virtually all ailments except death are being treated in the grove by the grove's health care providers. As specifically stated by the priests and priestess who also perform the role of healthcare providers in the grove, the curative power of the Osun goddess is highly extensive as it could cure all ailments except the divinely inflicted ones. In the words of a key health provider at the grove:

Osun deity can handle all sorts of ailments except those that come up as a result of destiny of the person suffering from this. Such include hunchback and so on. But cases like spiritual afflictions are being handled by Osun deity. Also, issues relating to fertility of the womb are also handled here. However, if somebody is barren through destiny, such case cannot be treated. Osun deity will reveal this so as not to waste the person's time (Male KII, Chief Priest of Osun deity/Osogbo)

Inquiry into the actual issue that took the respondents to the grove revealed as follows: fertility (32%); general health problem (23%); poor progress in business/occupation (19%) and spiritual guidance (26%) (Fig. 2). This information was equally corroborated by the data supplied by the qualitative instruments. It was

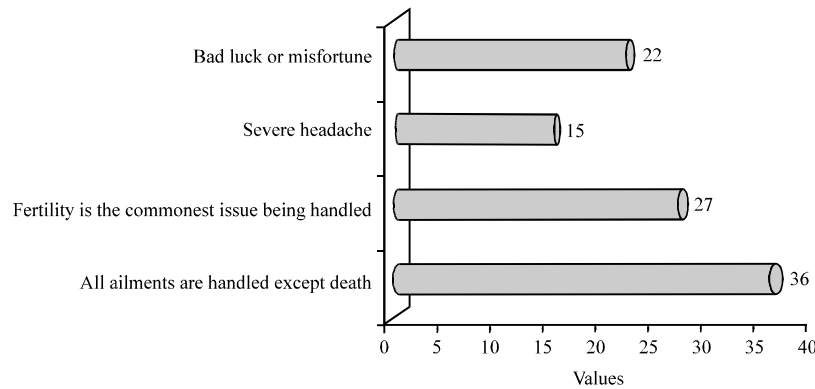


Fig. 1: Types of ailments being handled at the grove (Field Survey, 2012)

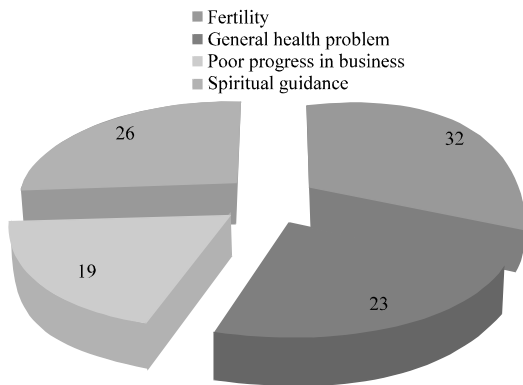


Fig. 2: Particular purpose for visitation to the grove (Field Survey, 2012)

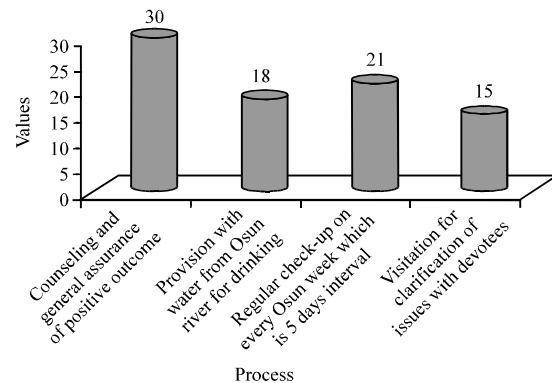


Fig. 3: Healing process within Osun grove (Fieldwork, 2012)

revealed that different kinds of health problems are being taken to the grove for treatment. However, fertility case tops the hierarchy of cases being handled, as it remains the most commonly and frequently treated cases. According to one of the patrons of the grove:

Majority of the people usually visit the grove for the fruit of the womb. Though there are others with various type of ill-health. I've seen people coming to the grove because of poor growth in their business. In my own case, I escorted a friend who took her sick child to the grove for healing. I have equally taken up to five people who have fertility problem to the grove for assistance. All of them are now blessed with children and they are thanking God today for this (Female IDI, a middle aged woman on patronage of Osun grove, Osogbo)

Healing in the grove: The data collected from the field shows that the healing process in the grove involved counseling and general assurance from Osun devotees of positive outcome of the healing strategy being sought after by the clients (Fig. 3). The 30% of the respondents

confirmed this. The data equally showed 18% of the respondents to have submitted that agbo Osun (Osun herbs) are usually prescribed for drinking to clients. The 21% of the respondents also reported regular check-up of health status at the grove by the clients on every Osun week which is 5 days interval as the most important process involved in the healing process. The clients may pay visit to Osun devotees at any time to clarify any issue bothering on their health problem (15%) while divination and prescription of Osun water (16%) formed the concluding aspects of the healing process as revealed by the respondents.

The key informants interviewed in this study also revealed that spiritual consultation to Osun goddess within the grove usually reveals the nature of individual's health problem. It is through this that each individual concerned will know which steps are involved towards solving his or her health problem. A female provider of healing services at the grove revealed that:

Upon spiritual consultation, Osun will tell each individual what should be done and the nature of the cases if different from the way the clients/patients perceived it. This usually enhances complete healing. Some cases have also been handled through counseling only, so it is not all the cases that involve ritual or special healing rite. Therefore, all cases are treated here in as much as they are not natural. It is only cases of natural occurrence like death, hunchback that cannot be handled here (Female KII, Senior Priestess of Osun deity/Osogbo)

The Chief Priest of Osun grove and other priestess narrated the healing process involved in infertility case as regularly treated within the grove. From their responses, issues of individual differences and peculiarities came to the fore. This explained why it is always necessary to consult with the Osun deity before taking any step whatsoever. In the words of another female health care provider at the grove:

The first step is spiritual consultation with Osun deity so as to know what is required by the spirit of the each client. It is the deity (Osun) that will prescribe the process that must be followed to get positive results (Female KII, Priestess of Osun deity/Osogbo)

The head of healthcare providers at the grove equally submitted that:

Some people ran into trouble due to their failure to follow certain family rites/tradition. Through such consultation, this will be noted for necessary action. Some people are what the Yoruba people call *elegbe* (meaning, they possess spiritual peers) such *egbe* (peers) may needed to be given spiritual appeasement before breakthrough could be achieved in their life. Once this is known, appropriate steps will be taken. In this grove, researchers have lots of shrines and upon consultation, Osun deity may direct us to any of these shrines as a step towards having positive outcome over the problem afflicting the clients. However, the step to be taken is always subject to individual's peculiarity (Male KII, Chief Priest of Osun deity/Osogbo)

Specifically on fertility issue, one of the female providers narrated thus:

When a client seeks for assistance of Osun deity for fruits of the womb, spiritual consultation is usually done to know the appropriate steps that best suit the person's case (Female KII, Senior Priestess of Osun deity/Osogbo)

Another female healthcare provider at the grove said:

Apart from following specific routine as spelt out by Osun deity, there are general rites which every client seeking fruits of the womb must follow. The rights are mandatory steps that guarantee the efficacy of fertility processes in this grove (Female KII, Priestess of Osun deity/Osogbo)

Further information on the rites was stressed as including:

...prescription of Osun water which is referred to as *agbo* (liquid herbs). Individual client is expected to come to the grove every Osun week which is 5 days interval. If the person resides outside Osogbo or Osun State such person could come to the grove fortnightly (every 15 days). Such individuals may be asked to add ordinary water to support or increase the herb collected from Osun grove pending the time the person will have the opportunity of coming to renew it (Female KII, Senior Priestess of Osun deity/Osogbo)

The head of healing services at the grove also underscored the gender peculiarity of those coming for fertility services in the grove. In other words, seeking solution to fertility problem is gender specific as there are more females than males the seek fertility treatment from the Osun Osogbo grove. This could partly be explained by the gender context of infertility in some cultures. Until recently in Yoruba land, women were commonly implicated for infertility problems. According to him:

Mostly female gender is the regular clients for fertility service. Once in a while there are situation when women are escorted to the grove by their husbands. In other health cases both male and female genders usually come to the grove for assistance (Male KII, Chief Priest of Osun deity, Osogbo)

In terms of efficacy of this healing process, 45% of the respondents rated it as very excellent while 24% saw the process as always reassuring. Apart from its efficacy, its cost-benefits and easy accessibility are other factors that influence patronage of Osun healing grove (18%). Corroborating the views expressed above, one of the patients responded that:

Every medical process needs a follow-up when you look at the fact that the cost of procuring health services in this grove is almost zero in monetary terms and the fact that nobody will harass you when circumstance is making you not to conform while there you feel free to go back as many times as you wish. On the basis of this, the providers will have every opportunity to assess you in relation to the health outcome for necessary action. This believe has been encouraging more patronage to this grove for medical reason (Male IDI, A patron of the healing services at Osun grove, Osogbo)

The next sets of responses bothered on the personal experience of the clients. Some of the respondents (13%) categorically stated that the usage of healing process in the grove has never failed to work for them. On the basis of the perceived efficacy of healing process in Osun grove, a sizable number (45%) of the respondents revealed that they have recommended the grove to more than ten people. For similar reasons, 36% of the respondents have recommended the healing process in the grove to between 5 and 10 people while 19% confirmed that they have recommended the utilisation of the grove to >5 other people.

In the course of utilizing this grove, all the respondents declared that they have never encountered any constraint, perhaps because the mutual interaction between the grove's health providers and clients have remained friendly and cordial. This of course, underscored the importance of social relations in health services production. The respondents, however, they recommended that health providers at the grove should be trained on how to incorporate some basic elements of modernity into their services so as to attract more patronage.

The above statistics also shows that majority of the respondents (32%) patronized Osun grove to seek medical assistance because of its proximity to their residence. A good number (22%) mentioned accessibility as a factor that motivated their patronage and choice of the grove as a healing option. Some others (15%) mentioned assurance and evidence of efficacy of the usage of healing process having been to the grove before for similar cases as factors that motivated them. Others (19%) considered the affordability (cost) of the healing strategy as the strongest factor that influenced their choice of the grove. The remaining category (12%) of the respondents met some of their people using the grove to solve their health problems and ever since they have been using it, they have recorded lots of successes.

Similar responses were noticed in the qualitative data collected for this study. More interestingly, however,

some of these responses bother on the care giver-patient relationship. Some of the respondents saw the Osun grove devotees who also doubled as healthcare providers, as readily and always available, passionate and dedicated to what they are doing. Above all, they attend to patients with humility and assurance that the outcome of their cases will be favorable. One of the client-respondents briefly pictured the social relations in the grove's health production system as follows.

You hardly see any of these grove workers talking to you contemptuously, compared to what obtains in the biomedical services where the Nurses will just talk to you in an unruly manner. Apart from that health providers here are always available and you need not wait endlessly for them, unlike the practices in the orthodox medicine where nurses or doctors only show up at will after long periods of waiting by their patients. Sometimes when they eventually show up, they may not even understand the problem that brought someone to that hospital. At Osun grove, there is free access and result oriented interactions between the clients and health providers (Female IDI, A patroness of the healing services at Osun grove, Osogbo).

Observation:

- It was observed that consultation by those seeking medical assistance from the grove always take place within the old (Osogbo) palace located within the grove
- The priests and priestesses were the coordinators of medical activities in the Osun grove
- This same palace is the final resting place of the Votary maid and the Sacrifice Votary prepared for Osun festival
- Inside the old palace, a large pot containing Osun herb (Osun water) is kept for the use of tourists
- Tourists are/could be given water from this pot as a mark of hospitality and entertainment that enrich Yoruba culture
- At the discretion of the priests and priestesses, individual client/tourist could be mandated to collect the herb from Osun River
- Tourists always gather at the bank of Osun River to collect the herb from the river
- Other tourists stand by the bank of the river to savour the scenery and activities of other tourists who are either collecting the herb or supplicating to the goddess by the river-side

DISCUSSION

The practice of utilizing the grove for medical purpose was sustained from the time Osogbo town

was established till contemporary era. The healing process here differs significantly from the cosmopolitan medical system. However, the absence of administrative bottlenecks, multitude of courtesy that midwife inter-relationships, couple with proximity factor appeared to have encouraged patronage to Osun grove among its visitors, especially in relation to health matters. Having strong faith in the grove's healing process has equally prompted the clients, especially the respondents captured in this study to recommend its services to many more people. Also, issue like poor business growth, back luck or misfortune were highlighted as some of health related issues being taken to Osun grove. This to a large extent, corroborates the position of World Health Organization that the concept of health goes beyond absence of disease. Even though not included as part of the main interests of this study, the connectivity between the above enumerated economic and spiritual components of health and the emotional well being of the grove's patients can be deductively understood. Invariably, this has strong implications for the patients' physical well being.

Efficacy in terms of positive health outcome formed one of the prime factors for the sustenance of the patronage. The significance of social relations in health care service production and delivery was also underscored in this study. Specifically, the study established that the natures of patient-health care service provider relationships are matters of great importance to many of the health seekers when seeking for medication. This reaffirms the need to give adequate consideration to social dimension of health care service delivery. Other prominent factors such as accessibility, proximity (nearness of medical centre) as well as cost of procuring medical assistance matter in healing process. Findings from this study further affirmed the position of Teuton *et al.* (2007), Salako *et al.* (2001) and Jaeger and Kanungo (1990) that fewer numbers (<30%) of the people make use of formal or biomedical health care facilities. The largest percentage, according to these researchers, constituted the people that consult and utilize alternative forms of health care system like traditional medical facilities, faith healing, divination and so on. They also acknowledged the existence of those that neither patronizes any of these medical sources as well as those that combine biomedical facilities with other medical systems.

Sustenance of patronage to Osun grove for healing process for decades equally corroborated the findings of Teuton *et al.* (2007), Ngongo *et al.* (2007) and Kleinman (2006) and Teshome-Bahiru (2004) that traditional medical

practice was expanding, contrary to earlier assumption that it will wither away most especially in the urban centres. The foregoing has therefore, revealed that patronage to Osun grove is indeed not limited to the period of annual Osun Osogbo festival, neither is it an issue restricted to leisure, recreation and academic development alone. While constraint challenges were not reported by the respondents who patronized the Osun healing grove to solve health related problems, they saw the need for training the health care providers of the grove, especially in the area of basic modern medical techniques.

CONCLUSION

This study underscores the need for the stakeholders in the health sector of society to take into cognizance the factors influencing preference for non-cosmopolitan medical facilities. The perceived shortcomings of the cosmopolitan medical system need be addressed so as to improve its efficiency and for this popular health system to attract adequate patronage. Otherwise, the nation's hope of meeting the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) and vision 20:20:20 may continue to be a dream in the pipeline. The sustained patronage of traditional facility like Osun grove for healing purpose re-emphasises the need for integration of traditional healing system into the cosmopolitan medical system. At worst, a collaboration could be forged between the two for the nation's health structure to be able to accommodate the interests of those that are not likely to change their opinion of the former even when changes are made.

While this study has revealed that the patronage of tourist attractions go beyond sight-seeing and relaxation, it is equally necessary that scholars, analysts and researchers should be more encouraged to direct their attention towards other less researched aspects of tourism for data updating. The reason being that finding from studies of this nature has capacity to expand frontier of knowledge about the health component of tourism. The present study, of course has provided insights into the health seeking behavior among tourists to Osun grove and has also shown the extent to which people could go when seeking solution to their socio-medical problems. While this study has pointed to some of the lapses inherent in the Nigeria's cosmopolitan medical services and the necessity for improvement, it has also identified flexibility of decisions as a property of health seekers amidst competing alternative strategies, especially when one is not satisfied with certain services as revealed in the case cosmopolitan medicine.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings in this study, the following recommendations are made to ensure sustainability of tourism industry as well as giving good considerations to its other components such as its medical value that is beneficial to the community. The recommendations are offered as follows:

- There is need to sensitize the people on the relevance of cultural identity and how to sustain it. The masses particularly need be informed that culture is never a threat to religious belief. Through this clarification and sensitisation, people will develop interest in their cultural site, events and materials. Such increased interest will lead to a discovery of interesting traditional medical activities like those within the thin Osun grove site that could be complement the extant medical system
- The media organisations should be joined in the crusade of projecting the image of all tourist attractions in Nigeria, particularly to identify and popularize their medical values
- Community associations should be encouraged to be more proactive in promoting the heritage sites located within their areas/communities. They can provide necessary facilities and ideas on how to uplift the status of the tourist sites in a manner that the natural identities and capacities for healing will not be lost
- Government should train and recruit experts in leisure, tourism and hospitality management to manage and render services that will make the nation's various leisure, tourism and recreational facilities attractive to all categories of people for effective and constant patronage. When more people are attracted to the tourist sites, they are more likely to discover and appreciate the medical and other values inherent in some of these sites
- Health providers at the grove should be empowered on how to cope with contemporary challenges in leisure and tourism industry. This will go a long way in changing public perceptions about tourist attractions in terms of its spiritual content. After all, healing spas in Europe started as a cultural affair but later improvement turned them to a sought-after healing system. This feat could be replicated in respect of the Osun grove healing strategy

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