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Indigenous Knowledge, Beliefs, and Cultural Practices for Children and Families in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the indigenous cultural practices that impact the well-being of children and families at five sites in Nigeria. Fifteen community leaders participated in semi-structured interviews, and 78 community members participated in focus group discussions in their communities. Responses were analyzed using a grounded theory and thematic analysis approach. Three cultural practices are discussed: the naming ceremony of the child, the use of *Oríkì*, and the care of children and family by relatives. Overall, the cultural practices largely reflected the indigenous knowledge and beliefs of the local context. Implications for social work are discussed.

KEYWORDS

African populations; children and youth; community practice; family services; international social work

Introduction

As African social work educators and practitioners are gathering in regional and international conferences to promote the visibility of social workers as change agents in the fight against poverty and social development, the importance of culture and the context of practice remain critically relevant in social work education. Globalization and modernization continues to present challenges for social work in Africa, and innovative approaches in social work theory, education, practice, ethics, and research are needed (International Social Work Conference Kampala, 2014). The history of social work as a profession, and social work education and training, are both Western and colonial (Hochfeld, Selipsky, Mupedziswa, & Chitereka, 2009). “Indigenous social work” is a growing theme in the literature, which attempts to move away from the use of inappropriate Western models in the teaching and application of social work (Hochfeld et al., 2009). The goal of this study is to better understand what indigenous knowledge, beliefs, and cultural practices strengthen and promote the well-being of children and families in Nigeria. The study explores family structures, family practices, and decision-making practices, and their implications for social work education, policy, and practice. The overarching research question is “What indigenous knowledge, beliefs, and cultural practices are valued with respect to care of children
and the family in Nigeria?" The study has three objectives: (a) to document and analyze Nigerian indigenous cultural practices for children and families; (b) to integrate indigenous cultural practices for children and families into social work education, policy, and practice; and (c) to raise awareness of the value of Nigerian indigenous cultural practices for children and families, locally and internationally. The potential benefits of the research include advancing understanding of indigenous knowledge in social work education, practice, and policy contexts in Nigeria. This article is based on original field research undertaken in five culturally diverse community sites in Nigeria: Aiyepé (West), Akure (Southwest), Enugu (East), Ibibio (Southeast), and Sokoto (Northwest).

Building upon recent initiatives, the Social Work in Nigeria Project sponsored the first national conference on social work education in November 2011. The Social Work in Nigeria Project (SWIN-P 2006–2012) is an international collaboration between the University of Benin, Nigeria, and three Canadian universities—York University, the University of Windsor, and the University of British Columbia.

The project aims to strengthen the social work education sector by training a new generation of professional social workers with the necessary skills and knowledge to develop and implement community-based interventions that address the social problems faced by Nigerian women, their families, and their communities. SWIN-P sponsored the development of research clusters, and Nigerian researchers were awarded seed grant funding to undertake six exploratory research projects. The research applicants participated in the inaugural conference and research meeting to identify the goal and objectives of the study. This study on indigenous cultural practices for children and families is one of the emergent initiatives and funded-seed-grant-research projects that aims to rediscover the value of indigenous knowledge for social work education. Cultural practices are understood to support the child’s physical and mental development, and to facilitate the child’s interaction with others in the community. During the teaching roundtable held at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria in June 2012, Nigerian social work educators and scholars discussed the application of indigenous knowledge to contemporary problems. By centering on indigenous cultural practices relevant to children and families, the study aims to contribute to a re-visioning process for social work education and training in Nigeria, Africa’s most populous country.

Previous research on social work education in Nigeria has focused predominantly on the development of critiques of Western social work, with far less attention paid to indigenous knowledge and practices. Yet indigenous knowledge is crucial to the well-being and survival of many communities. The project is significant because it provides a range of community perspectives on indigenous cultural practices of importance to children and families,
and of interest to stakeholders, such as social workers, educators, community practitioners, academics, and the social sciences, particularly in the relationship between indigenous knowledge and social work practice and policy. The potential benefits of the research include advancing knowledge in Indigenous practices of relevance to social work education, practice, and policy contexts in Nigeria, in Africa, and throughout the globe.

Literature review

As indigenous people from around the world remind us, spirituality, storytelling, and connectedness to the land are critical parts of our essential humanity and are necessary for our truly “knowing” the world, one another, and ourselves (Ife, 2001). Within a global context, concerns over “professional imperialism” continue, as social work has become part of the ongoing colonial project (Midgley, 2008, p. 32). Many scholars have noted that social work has to be concerned with this ongoing colonization through the globalization of social work education, practices, and policies, and specifically the potential devaluing of localized and indigenous knowledge and systems of helping and healing (Gray, Coates, & Yellow Bird, 2008). Gray (2005) refers to indigenization as the extent to which social work practice fits local context, how social work practice is shaped by local social, political, economic, historical, and cultural factors, and how local voices mold and shape social work responses. The Africentric (or Afrocentric) perspective in social work acknowledges that African culture and expressions of African values, beliefs, institutions, and behaviors are important in social work practice (Daniels, 2001; Leashore, 1995). Social work scholars are calling for indigenous forms of social work, with their own forms of social work practice, and for social work education to rediscover the value of indigenous knowledge within local communities (Anucha, 2008; Dominelli, 2010). Indigenous social work refers to a form of social work that seeks effective, culturally appropriate research, education, and practice (Gray & Coates, 2010). Numerous debates have taken place on the role of universal, global, and indigenous frameworks in social work (Gray & Fook, 2006; Heinonen & Drolet, 2012; Midgley, 2001; Mohan, 2005; Sijuwade, 2006; Taylor, 1999; Yunong & Xiong, 2008). Indigenous social work seeks to highlight the unique culture and consequent plight of particular minority cultures and, in so doing, insists upon culturally sensitive and culturally specific knowledge and practices (Gray & Coates, 2010). Social reality is constructed differently by various societies, giving rise to unique cultures, social relationships, and institutional structures, which social work practice must capture (Rankopo & Osei-Hwedie, 2011).

Social work education in Africa has been particularly critiqued for retaining its colonial heritage, as Western social work knowledge does not fit the local realities of Africa countries and is unable to address the unique issues
and characteristics of the majority of Africans (Anucha, 2008). Social work on the African continent emphasizes community development approaches because the concept of individuality is inappropriate in the African culture (Silavwe, 1995). Nigeria is one of the largest countries in Africa, with a population of 170 million in 2012 (Population Council, 2014). Three major ethnic groups are the Hausa-Fulani, the Yorubas, and the Igbo, who represent about 70% of the population, and there are more than 300 smaller ethnic groups that account for the remainder of the population (Moscardino, Nwobu, & Axia, 2006). Specifically, in Nigeria there is a need to re-vision social work education and training to better meet the social realities facing children and families. Nigeria faces numerous challenges in the 21st century, including poverty, unemployment, environmental degradation, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, lack of access to basic health care, and structural constraints to the equality of women (Anucha, 2008). In the Nigerian context, a colonial government introduced welfare services with child and adult welfare services, and colonial rule led to an increased individualism that impacted traditional systems and migration within the country. Historically, the role of the extended family as a social welfare system has been acknowledged for supporting well-being and the harmonious functioning of society. In traditional Africa, for instance, social needs and social problems were dealt with by the family—both immediate and extended, family lineage, or the clan—and assistance was provided through the extended family, intervention of neighbors, and contributions by religious organizations (Rwomire & Raditlhokwa, 1996). In Nigeria, the traditional extended family support and welfare systems exist side by side, with important differences between rural and urban regions. Presently, there is increasing interest in learning how traditional and indigenous practices, such as the extended family, clan obligations, and mutual aid societies, can build capacities. Cultural practices include the provision of social support, social work, personal care, and protection to children in need or at risk and to strengthen their families and caregivers.

**Methodology**

This study utilized qualitative research methods to better understand which indigenous cultural practices strengthen and promote the well-being of children and family in Nigeria. Focus groups in five localities were conducted with community members, market women, and women’s groups. The focus group discussions were organized at an appointed time and place to respond to the focus group discussion questions collectively. These practices are congruent with the local community context in Nigeria. Individual key informant interviews were conducted with community leaders, chiefs, traditional rulers, and practitioners with experience working with children and families in the local
community. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for data analysis. During the recruitment, persons were identified based on purposive sampling. A letter of invitation was sent to each of the sample groups for the interviews and focus groups. Subjects were invited to participate in 45- to 60-minute interviews and 60- to 90-minute focus groups. Research ethics approval was obtained at University of British Columbia, Canada, prior to recruitment and data collection. The sample includes 12 to 18 participants in each focus group discussion in each of the five localities (78 participants), and 15 structured interviews across the sites. The context of the inquiry reflected a diversity of worldviews, cultures, and meaning systems, from among both community members and leaders. The narratives were recorded, transcribed, and systematically analyzed by identifying emergent themes, patterns, interconnections, and consistency, for a full understanding of the meanings of the data. The oral traditions and storytelling narratives were considered in their cultural context. For each interview, the recurrent themes or concepts relating cultural practices were identified. A grounded theory approach is used to guide data analyses and interpretations using open coding and axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) for developing categories and themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Verbatim quotations are used to illustrate the community responses on relevant themes. All data were coded by the authors and a graduate-level research assistant. In case of disagreement, original transcripts were re-examined and discussed until coding agreement was reached. Student research assistants were involved in data collection in Nigeria, as well as in the process of transcribing interviews and focus groups, and data analysis, to provide new insights and training into indigenous research methodologies. Indigenization has focused on celebrating local forms of social work practice and developing locality-specific forms of practice (Dominelli, 2010), and the methodology acknowledges the importance of indigenous research methodologies and the importance of relationships in developing new forms of knowledge.

Research findings

The findings revealed three indigenous cultural practices for children that are used across community sites and reveal the central role of the family in Nigerian society. This section presents the research findings on the three child cultural practices: the first centered on the naming ceremony of the child, the second concerned the use of Oríkì, and the third examined the care of children by relatives and neighbors.

Child-naming ceremony

The naming ceremony is an important ceremony that was found across all sites. This traditional practice is undertaken by family members and neighbors
who come together to name the child after birth. Often parents will choose one or two names for the child, and it is an honorable cultural practice for the parents to request that the grandparents and older members of the family give names to the child. A formal naming ceremony is organized, and at the naming ceremony, a child may have as many names as contributed by family members and the officiator, who could be a traditional priest, pastor, or imam, and the names will be called out. The parents will later choose the ones that will become the official names for the child. Some members of the family may choose to call the child the name they gave as a “pet” name. There are variations in the naming ceremony, as discussed in the following select interviews:

When a child is born in a community on the eighth day after the child is born we have what they call “naming ceremony.” On this day the child is given names and they have little rituals or rites they perform that day. They use kola nut, bitter kola, salt, alligator pepper, fish, and water as symbols to pray for the child. The officiant will touch the lips of the child with all these things and also give the mother the remaining to eat. Monetary gifts are also collected, given to the mother to keep for the child until the child is old enough. The money could be used to buy bible for the child if they are Christians or to buy Koran if they are Muslims. (Yoruba community leader)

Similarly, in another community, gifts of food are featured in the naming ceremony:

At the birth of a child, certain substances like fish, pepper, and honey are used to pray for the child during the naming ceremony. (Male focus group participant, Aiyepo)

In the early days of an infant’s life, members of the community may be called upon to play specific roles:

A couple brings forth a baby but the responsibility of care and nurture is for everybody around. When the baby is born, the hair has to be cut in eight days. The person who is honored is asked to do it. If one is sick it is the concern of everybody. Concoctions are brought by members of the community. (Community leader, Aiyepo)

Religious traditions of the family and community often influence the naming ceremony of the child:

Traditionally you call your people around [ceremony in naming the child], especially the most senior, the husband and parent, and you tell the person the name of the child. According to our tradition we do some certain prayer; depending on the family some things will be said like prayers, and that is another problem too because it’s just like initiation to the lineage except the church is involved. It is the father that gives name and prayers are made like incantation, and you can give your child name at any time. Some of us give our children names in the church. (Ibibio community)
Diverse religious influences across Nigeria influence traditional and indigenous social practices:

On the seventh day, whatever name you give the child is according to Islam doctrine—it could be Abubakar, Abdullah, or Ibrahim that is an Islamic name; after that the mother is the most important to take care of the child and if the child is having problems then the father will come in. (Sokoto community)

According to his religion in respect of his culture, as a Christian, when a child is born, he goes to his pastor to pray for the child, and when it’s time to dedicate the child, the child is taken to the church and sanctified. It is also good to name children with good biblical names as this affects the child positively in future. It is also good to name a child as he/she comes to life. (Male chief, Aiyeye)

While traditional practices are influenced by religion and practiced in local contexts, these practices are not static. The findings demonstrate the evolving and changing nature of traditional practices to meet the needs of children and families.

Things that should be changed… idol worshiping, putting of tribal marks on the child as a form of protection… this shouldn’t be done as it does not have any meaning. (Focus group in Aiyeye)

According to an interview with a community leader in Aiyeye, “none of the practices should be changed; traditions should be changed. They work for us. The practices are protective.” Traditional ceremonial practices bring together members of the community and strengthen social ties. From birth through the developmental stages of the child and transitions to adulthood, the community plays a role in social caring practices.

When a child is born, it is believed that he is for everybody; every member of the community is urging to help in training the child; there is naming ceremony after child birth for every child, but for the male child, at 16 to 18 years there is an initiation ceremony into adulthood and it’s called “dodo” ceremony. The purpose of this ceremony is to bring the male child into manhood. It is accompanied by flogging and beating of the drum and dancing. (Northern Nigeria Bajjuu tribesman resident in Aiyeye cluster)

Despite the influence of modernization, there are a number of traditional indigenous practices that have been maintained in local communities and that offer supportive cultural practices that strengthen and support children and families in Nigeria.

If there is a stubborn or disobedient child and they scold the child and the child refuses to listen and change from his/her bad ways, they consult native doctors (babalawo) about what is wrong with the child and why the child is behaving that way. If the child is a Christian the child is taken to the pastor for prayers in church. If the child is a Muslim he/she will be taken to Alfa for prayers in mosque. Child stubbornness is caused by cutting the child hair too early; it could affect the child’s behavior in future. A well-behaved child is taken good care of by his/her parents to late stage. And the child is given praises known as “Oríkì” of their lineage. (Female community leader, Aiyeye)
Indigenous knowledge and beliefs influence cultural practices for children, as demonstrated in the use of *Oríkì*.

**The use of Oríkì**

Among the Yorubas in the western part of the country, the *Oríkì* is an indigenous way of celebrating ancestral achievements through the giving of names and titles to a family. An individual child is given names that are not necessarily everyday names but are used to celebrate the individual child. This practice is an indigenous self-esteem booster. Mothers will call upon the *Oríkì* of the child when the child is being celebrated or is feeling depressed. Persons called “praise singers” specialize in the act of *Oríkì*. The *Oríkì* builds a positive self-concept that is rooted in the achievements of the family. Community leaders spoke of *Oríkì* as a traditional practice that should be maintained and promoted in local communities.

*Oríkì* should be promoted because it helps to correct the child to behave very well, knowing that the parents will praise him or her. It should be kept in a positive way not in a negative way. It is also an ongoing process. (Aiyepé community leader)

The *Oríkì* is meaningful to families and community members by serving as a reminder of the historical roles and accomplishments of the family, throughout one’s life.

Families have *Oríkís*, special names and titles that reflect the historical roles and accomplishments unique to that family, and mothers recite to their babies to calm them down. It instills a sense of value. (Akure community leader)

The *Oríkì* among the Yorubas is celebrated among other tribes as lineage and ancestry, as stated by a member of the Ibibio focus group.

The lineage is what we hold in concrete places. For example, my son said he wants to travel abroad, and I told him, “Remember you are from Ukoruko,” which is my lineage, and whatever I tell him he will do because he respects the lineage; a shame for him is a shame for my lineage. (Focus group Ibibio)

Indigenous knowledge, beliefs, and practices affect the nature of family systems and structure and influence cultural practices of children.

**Extended family structures and care of children**

The extended family system offers a means to care for children.

Family is not just the father, the mother, and children. It includes extended family from the father’s side and extended family from the mother’s side. (Focus group, Aiyepé)

The typical Nigerian family is extended family, which includes all relatives, uncles, aunties, grandparents, and even close neighbors. (Community health worker, Aiyepé)
Life events, such as naming ceremonies, weddings, and funerals, bring members of the extended family together. They are essentially involved in decision making concerning the care of children.

Our family is extended. We cannot say family is man, wife, and children; but the family entails your wife’s generational relationship and your generational relationship so they relate to your family and even your mother’s generational relationship, so it’s interwoven—it is not related to the immediate family alone. When something happens to the family people come from the husband’s mother’s side, from the husband’s father’s side, and from wife’s mother’s side and from wife’s father’s side and everyone is coming up because somehow there is a relationship. (Focus group, Enugu)

Decisions affecting the cultural of children and families take into consideration the extended family. A typical family is extended. Although there is a nucleus family. Important decisions are made with due considerations of how it affects the extended family. In planning special programs and ceremonies, people plan from outside in. The extended family members are given priority. (Focus group, Aiyep)

I, as a father, cannot make a decision about my child’s wedding ceremony without the input and permission of the elders in my family. (Community leader, Aiyep)

Dates, times, and venue for events are set collectively by the extended family. The roles of ceremony and social gathering continue to serve as important traditional beliefs and cultural practices affecting the child and families’ well-being.

It is not only social gathering, everything that relate to the family, every day is involved, the whole family and extended family come together to wish people well; in the ceremony, nobody is left out, they share their joy together and they share their burden together. (Focus group, Enugu)

The sense of togetherness is riveted into indigenous care by the use of Aso-\(\text{Ebi}\) (family uniform) during ceremonies. The practice of Aso-\(\text{Ebi}\) establishes the extensiveness of Nigerian families. Persons who are not biologically related are considered as family, \(\text{Ebi}\). They are therefore part of the resources available to individuals, children, and families. The Aso-\(\text{Ebi}\) concept also provides insight into diverse (and sometimes stressful) relationships in the family. Some people may choose to exclude persons with whom they have grievances from wearing the Aso-\(\text{Ebi}\), which explains why sometimes biological relatives are excluded while nonbiological acquaintances are included.

According to a community health worker in Aiyep, indigenous knowledge must be valued regarding the role of the extended family with respect to social work practice with children and families.

The extended family is responsible for the care of every child and the family in general. Child care is not just the parent’s responsibility, it is the responsibility of the community. (Community health worker, Aiyep)
Focus group participants spoke of the importance of the family structure in their lives.

In Ibo land and culture we value our families so tenaciously, we don’t want it to break… in a nutshell, we value our family system so much and we want to maintain it. (Focus group, Enugu)

Extended family members are recognized for providing support and assistance, and they influence the caregiving practices affecting children.

Families are valuable. The extended family is entrenched. The act of helping cousins, aunts, and other relatives binds people together. Aunts who are fathers’ sisters are esteemed as fathers even when the father is dead. The extended family members have a say in the conduct of children. Children learn from them. (Community leader, Aiyepe)

Traditional cultural practices exist for childless couples who raise their relatives’ children. Childless couples take their relatives’ children and raise them. Some children never know their biological parents. I was raised that way. Couples agree to give their children to their childless relatives. (Community leader, Aiyepe)

Also, when a child loses a parent, relatives are expected to take over the care of the child(ren) of the deceased.

[The] community committee sees to the child’s welfare. We link with the relatives of the deceased on how the orphan(s) shall be catered for. The community will then know how to come in, for example, by sponsoring the orphans’ primary/secondary school education, informing the community counselor/chairman for government’s support. (Community leader, Akure)

In some communities, the traditional practice of wife inheritance was linked to the need for care of the children of the deceased, as discussed in the context of indigenous cultural practices.

If parents die, family members take up the care of children as foster parents. Also, the brother of the deceased can inherit the wife. However, if the widow decides not to marry within her husband’s family, she will be left to care for her children alone…. The extended family members will come together in a formal meeting and decide what to do with the deceased properties and children. They also decide who will inherit the wife. (Focus group, Aiyepe)

The results of the study further demonstrate the role of relatives and extended family in finding alternate maternal health practices for infant and child health in the event of a mother’s death.

At least I witness the case of my grandmother when my uncle’s wife died. The baby was not up to two months and then the mother died and so at that time my grandmother’s breasts were dry and then she picked up the baby and started breastfeeding the baby until the breast came up again. She did that until the baby grew; that is the way our people do. If the mother of a child dies and there
is a close relation, the person that is nursing a baby at that time will breastfeed both children. (Focus group, Ibibio)

My mother’s immediate sister died when having a baby. I was still young. My mother was also nursing a baby. They transferred the baby to the living sister when the junior sister died. The older sister breastfed the baby of her late sister. (Yoruba community leader, Ilishan/Aiyepe)

Community members explained the cultural practice of breastfeeding another’s child and providing for the care needs of orphans in another community.

In the past if a woman dies breastfeeding a child another woman within the community breastfeeding a baby takes up the responsibility of caring for the orphan. (Focus group, Enugu)

Relatives and other members of the community are also involved in cultural practice with respect to child discipline.

In my village, we have youth community, we have men community, so any child that behaves will be taken to the youth meeting and the father will take him there and they will flog him no matter how big the person is and after that ants will be poured on the person until the person plead to his father and mother that he will never do such again. (Focus group, Ibibio)

In a focus group session, it was discussed that the parents play an important role in child discipline, and the community is less involved.

Formally, if a mother finds a child misbehaving no matter whose child it is, the child is cautioned and then reported back to the parents who accept it in good faith, but it is not so today. The community and family has concern over the behavior of a child and is cautioned unanimously but today every parent takes the responsibility of caring for their children due to Western culture and everybody minds his/her business. (Focus group, Enugu)

As the community may be less involved in child discipline, a community leader explained that this may explain why some children are difficult to manage.

Sometimes the child may go to the head of the community the parents will respect when the parent is upset with the child because of an offense. The head of the community usually will plead and appeal to the parents. “Enikan nibimo, gbogbo eniyan niwo” (“One gives birth, many help to care”). No longer being practiced, that is why children are getting difficult to manage. (Yoruba community leader, Ilishan/Aiyepe)

The findings also revealed a cultural practice in which neighbors help to occupy a bored or whining child. The practice of Arodan (Yoruba) is one example. In the Arodan concept, the village helps to give a stressed mother a break by occupying the child. The mother will send the child to a neighbor to
collect *Arodan*. When the child gets to the neighbor and asks for the *Arodan*, the neighbor says that another neighbor just came to get it, and the child will go to that other person. At the end of the day, the child will have gone around the village asking for *Arodan* and finally goes home. This practice thrives on a communal understanding by everyone that when a child says that she or he has been sent to collect *Arodan* (Yoruba) or *Ituida* (Ibibio), it means that they are either to keep the child occupied or refer the child to someone else. When a child is born, it is believed that he or she is for everybody, and every member of the community is encouraged to help in training the child. While the community is involved in raising a child, the parents are expected to play their own roles, as demonstrated in this statement: “The person who births a rebellious child is also responsible for backing him [as in the act of carrying the child on the mother’s back]” (Yoruba community leader, Aiyepe).

**Discussion**

The prevailing socioeconomic situation in Africa presents a number of challenges for social work education and practice, and social workers are faced with socioeconomic and cultural challenges that require a great deal of innovation (Mwansa, 2011). It is necessary, therefore, to establish curricula and practice methods that embrace the local context; social work educators and practitioners in African countries need to find paradigms that address social issues built on the sociocultural, economic, political, and environmental conditions pertaining to their communities (Mwansa, 2011). The research findings contribute to advancing knowledge on indigenous cultural practices that will have an impact within social work education and practice. In Nigeria, social work practice includes building partnerships among professionals, caregivers, and families; collaborating with the community to create supportive environments for clients; advocating for adequate services and resources; challenging and changing social policy to address issues of poverty, employment, housing, and social justice; and supporting the development of preventive programs (Institute of Social Work of Nigeria, 2014). Social work practice in community development involves working with leaders to identify common goals among community members and learning from people in their communities to enhance collaboration and partnerships that lead to achieving real social change (Institute of Social Work of Nigeria, 2014). A major goal of this study was to better understand which indigenous knowledge, beliefs, and cultural practices are valued with respect to children and families in five community sites in Nigeria. In addition, we sought to explore whether these beliefs and practices were influenced by the attitudes and values of the family system. Based on participants’ experiences, three practices were revealed: the naming ceremony of the child, the use of *Oríkì*, and
the community care of children and families. Respondents agreed that these practices should be retained.

Appreciating and incorporating these practices into social work education, practice, policy, and research makes indigenization of social work authentic within the African context. The indigenous practices and beliefs are moorings for social work values such as dignity and worth of a person and respect for relationship. The naming ceremony and Oríkì instill dignity and pride in a person and her or his lineage. Social work practitioners and therapists may utilize a recall of given names and Oríkì when working with individuals struggling with low self-esteem or sense of belonging. While this practice method may have minimal appreciation from a Western world orientation, it is an existential approach that draws on intrinsic values embedded in the Nigerian psyche. An exhilarating and powerful experience usually happens when a person’s lineage, as celebrated in the Oríkì, is spoken or chanted.

Exploring the meaning of names is a valuable tool in unraveling or tracing past events that may have contributed to present challenges. As one of the participants stated, repeating a Yoruba adage, “Ile lanwokiatọ so omoloruku” (“We look at the home situation before a child is named”). Yoruba names tell the story of a family’s religion, social status, wealth, artisanal ability, among others. For example, prefixes with Ade indicate royalty, Ogun refers to the worship of the god of Iron, and Ayan suggests a family of drummers. Therefore, exploring the meaning of a Nigerian client’s name could enhance rapport and foster insight.

The principles of strength-based approaches to social work practice as identified by Saleeby (2006) are also illustrated by the indigenous practices. For example, for the principle “every environment is full of resources,” the neighbors and relatives who come together for a naming ceremony are resources both for the parents and newborn child. The giving of multiple names by different people is a way of holding a stake in the child’s life in the future. One of the authors remembers that her maternal aunt named her and continues to address her by that name, regardless of her official names. The maternal aunt was very dear, and felt personally committed to the author’s well-being each time she called the author by the special name. Also, persons who buy and wear an Aso-Ebi on an occasion or ceremony are persons who identify themselves as members of the nonbiological family. Both Nigerian social work students and practitioners can therefore be taught to engage in the Aso-Ebi practice. Social workers in other parts of the world may also use it in biopsychosocial assessments. For example, they may ask, “If you were going to have a festivity, who are the people you would invite to wear the Aso-Ebi with you?” This is a culturally relevant way of asking, “Who do you consider as family?” The members may be possible resources for child placement, respite care, caregiver support, hospice support, and other forms of support.
Social work practitioners and educators outside Nigeria may borrow a “leaf” from these indigenous practices by adapting them to the practice context. This is the internationalization of indigenous practices. Policies and regulations on confidentiality and decision-making processes may need to be adapted to accommodate the extensiveness of the Nigerian family. For example, while a client may have a right to self-determination, the client may be reluctant to make decisions in the social worker’s office because of the pressing cultural need to consult either with the community audience that the social worker does not see or even with the Oracles to determine what social work practice interventions should be pursued.

The findings confirmed the existence, endurance, and importance of indigenous knowledge, beliefs, and practices among different ethnic groups in Nigeria. Family members exist in relationship with extended family and multiple caretakers, including neighbors and other relatives who are willing to provide care to young children. Children are often monitored by a number of different caregivers, such as family members, neighbors, and relatives. Nigerian society is collectivistic and interdependent, and there is a strong connectedness among members of the same community. Beliefs about cultural practices are influenced by indigenous knowledge, traditional Nigerian culture, and the context in which people live.

Obikeze (1997) submitted that there are indigenous cultural practices that enhance the well-being of children and families in Nigeria. The study identified Omugwo, a postpartum cultural practice among the Igbo tribe of South Eastern Nigeria that comprises several activities of care and education for the mother and newborn. There is thorough bathing, muscle exercises, and surrogate breastfeeding of the child, and several activities targeted at relieving the mother of regular household chores and emotional stressors, and ensuring her proper nutrition so she can care for the baby adequately.

This observation supports the Oríkì and the naming ceremony as a cultural practice that impacts both the adult and children among the Yoruba tribe of South West Nigeria. The naming ceremony confers the names of the child in community, which is often a reflection of events surrounding the birth of the child or good wishes for the child. For example, a child born when the parents are building a house is named Bankole (“help me build”).

A child called by these names grows up with a sense of location in the context of the events of the family and is historically grounded. This is a major contribution to a sense of belonging and self-esteem, the lack of which may contribute to emotional and behavioral disturbances in the latter years of the child. This is also the concept of the Oríkì. There is often an affective and emotional response in a Yoruba person when the Oríkì of a family is recounted. It does pacify children and emotes a sense of belonging and worth in older children and adults.
Furthermore, the coming together of friends and relatives for the naming ceremony is a reflection of the family’s ecosystem and can assist a social worker in the construction of assessment tools such as ecomaps and socio-grams for a child, adult, or family clientele. People who come for naming ceremonies and submit names for the child become stakeholders in the child’s life for support and care.

**Conclusion**

This study highlights the usefulness of a qualitative approach in studying the cultural meaning systems shared by particular ethnic groups to better understand the subjective experiences of these families and community members. From a social work perspective, this study provides insight to the professionals working in social service agencies, government ministries, nongovernmental organizations, and civil society groups for a better understanding of how to support the needs of children and families at the community level.

There is renewed interest in indigenous knowledge and how integrating indigenous knowledge into practice will result in more successful program interventions. Social work education must consider local knowledge, cultural contexts, identities, and histories in order to prepare social workers to contribute to better interventions and programs. Practices and beliefs influence the ways in which children are socialized and share their cultural identity. Environments and practices change as a result of economic, social, and political changes, and in the process, some practices, which continue to have value, are adapted and/or adopted. Traditional practices are also being applied in new settings, or new practices are being adopted that may not be appropriate to the changing local settings. This study aims to highlight good practice guidance by involving service users, carers, practitioners, providers, and community leaders in advancing and promoting good practices in cultural settings. Knowledge about social work practice must be based on a society’s needs and aspirations, and this knowledge must form the basis for social work practice and education in a meaningful way (Rankopo & Osei-Hwedie, 2011). In Nigeria social work education and practice must take into account multiple perspectives and cultural explanations that are relevant in local community contexts, including indigenous knowledge, beliefs, and practices. Social work, at its best, reflects the society in which it is operating and should be a dynamic profession, changing and evolving with the needs of the people of the country (Kreitzer, 2012).

An understanding of the indigenous beliefs and practices of clients regarding cultural practices is imperative in ensuring the quality of social work education, practice, and policy for children, families, and service providers. It is recommended that indigenous beliefs and practices for children and families be incorporated into the social work curriculum to better meet social development and the needs of all members of the community.
References


