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Research Article

The Prospects and Challenges in the Practice of Islamic Medicine in Ibadan, Nigeria

Oniye

Department of Religions University of Ilorin, Ilorin; Oniye.oi@unilorin.edu.ng 



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Abstract. The practice of Islamic medicine is becoming a household activity in the city of Ibadan today. Every nook and cranny of the city has at least an Islamic medical clinic where patients are admitted and treated according to Islamic prescriptions. Its inception has brought about some changes both among Muslims and in the medical practice in the land. This study intends to examine the practice vis-à-vis the inherent prospects and challenges of venturing into the practice. A historical method of research is adopted to achieve the objectives of this paper. This is imperative considering the nature of the topic of this paper which is deeply rooted in history. It is discovered that their profession can be made from the practice and the future is bright for the practitioners. It provides job opportunities, strengthens the Muslim faith and is relatively affordable. On the other hand, the practice is faced with many problems and challenges which the practitioners have not been able to put behind them, such includes misconceptions between Jalabi and Islamic medical practice, financial inadequacies, lack of knowledge and unfavorable government policies among others. The paper therefore concluded that the future of Islamic medicine in Ibadan is brighter but the practitioners need to surmount those challenges to strengthen the practice in the city.

Keywords: Ibadan, Islamic Medicine, Yorubaland, Challenges, Practice

INTRODUCTION

Ibadan, a city in South West Nigeria, is one of the indigenous Yoruba Communities in Nigeria. The city is said to be the largest single city in Africa. It is the capital of Oyo state in Nigeria. The city pioneers so many developmental strides in the country, hence it is known as the pace-setter state. The history of Islam in the city is not different from other communities in southwestern Nigeria. Islam got to Ibadan around the 14th and fifteen centuries through Hausa, Fulani and Nupe who came into the city for different purposes including trading, farming, and Islamic evangelism. Islam at that time was practised by those foreigners, until around 1800 when the indigenous people of Ibadan started to accept Islam as a religion.¹ Between 1830 and 1850, precisely during the reign of Bashorun Oluyole, Islam has become well pronounced in the city with central mosques and *Madrasah* established. The fast growth of Islam became a serious threat to people of other religions, hence there was a resistance movement in 1830 which led to the demolition of a central mosque under the instruction of the then Ibadan ruler, Oluyole. No doubt today, Islam is the leading religion in the city, with different Islamic institutions like *Madrasahs*, mosques, Asalatu and Islamic medical practices in the city. As Ibadan pioneers the acceptance and the practice of Islam among other Yoruba communities, the city also takes the lead in the practice of Islamic medicine, especially in the adoption of modern approaches that are in tandem with 21st-century needs. This study, therefore, is to examine the challenges and the prospects of Islamic medical practice in the city to make it an abiding practice that is adaptable to various dimensions and advancements, not only in the city but across the Yorubaland and the Muslim world in general.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Development of Medical Practice in Islam

Medical practice is one the oldest professions in human history in general and Islam in particular. Allah makes various references to healing functions of the Qur'an as mentioned in four different places, namely, Q.10:57, 16:69, 17:82 and 41:44, the Prophetic rendition also enables the realization of health as wealth. The Prophet, who was the torch-bearer of Islam was reported to have acted on different occasions as a medical doctor who did not only treats diseases but also make prescriptions. Out of the six sound collections of Hadith by different scholars, it is only An-Nasa'i and Imam Muslim who do have a chapter of Medicine in their compilations, others do with various reports indicating how medical matters were handled by the Prophet, ditto for the people of *Salaf*. Also, it is the compilation of his various medical instructions, prescriptions and methods that make up the *Tibb 'n-Nabawi* (Prophetic

¹ A.A. Oladiti, "Islam and Colonial Rule in Ibadan, 1893-1960" (*Historical Research Letter*, Vol. 9, 2014) 1

Medicine) by Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah who compiled a comprehensive report on the subject matter.² Muslims, therefore, put these hints into practice, though gradually.

The days of rightly guided Caliphs (*Khulafa' r-Rashidun*) and the Umayyad dynasty were preoccupied with various moves to consolidate Islam, hence there was no major interest in medical practice. The Umayyad period, however, laid the foundation for what later developed into an intellectual awakening among the Muslims when Abdulmalik Ibn Marwan directed and supervised the translation of various documents, including medical ones, into the Arabic language.³ It was in the days of Abbasid that Muslims ventured into medical and other branches of knowledge on a large scale. With the establishment of *Bayul-Hikmah*, the medical practice became one of the properly structured sciences therefrom.⁴ It was not long before different medical personnel started springing up and medical centres and hospitals got established. Some of those medical experts include Al-Biruni (973-1051 CE), Ibn Rushd, Abubakr Ar-Razi, and Ibn Zina (979-1037CE) among others. These individuals practised medicine in full-fledged, established hospitals and trained students.

Muslim scholars were said to have taken inspiration from some foreign medical schools which they had contact with. Nagamia identifies some of those schools including Jundishapur and Harran schools. These were Greek, Syriac and Hellenistic medical and philosophical schools but Muslims took inspiration from their works when they had contact with them. It was during the reign of Harun Rashid (170-193AH/786-809AD) that the first hospital was built in Baghdad which was modelled after that of Jundishapur. Another large hospital was in Cairo around 1248 by the Mamluk ruler, Mansur Qalaun. This was how different provinces, territories and empires started to establish hospitals in Muslim communities to cater for the health needs of Muslims.⁵ Thus, Muslims over time, across nations and communities, have been building on this foundation till the present time.

Islamic Medical Practice in Ibadan

In Yorubaland, Muslims started to take note of the practice of Islamic medicine through the practice of *Jalabi*, a Yoruba name for Islamic clerical consultancy services, which was previously misunderstood as an Islamic method of treating a variety of physical and spiritual health issues.⁶ This has been in practice for years, until recent times when, as a result of advancement in the study of Islam through the availability and accessibility of advanced Islamic literature and materials, people started to spot

² R.D. Abubakre, "Islam and Health", *African Culture, Modern Science and Religious Thought*, University of Ilorin, African Centre for Religion and Science, 2003, p. 499

³ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Umayyad-dynasty-Islamic-history> retrieved on 23/06/2023

⁴ H.F. Nagamia, *Islamic Medicine: History and Current Practice*, [http://IslamicMedicineHistoryAndCurrentPractice\(alhassanain.org\)](http://IslamicMedicineHistoryAndCurrentPractice(alhassanain.org)) Accessed on 25/06/2022

⁵ Ibid

⁶ O.M. Afiz and A.I. Hassan (2015), "Jalabi Practice: a Critical Appraisal of a Socio-Religious Phenomenon in Yorubaland, Nigeria" *European Journal of Social Sciences Education and Research*, Vol.2, No.4, p.121-123

the difference between what are Islamic medicine and *Jalabi* practice. This later metamorphosed into the development of therapeutic modalities that are solely based on Qur'anic and prophetic prescriptions

Ibadan took the lead in this regard, courtesy of the likes of Shaykh Isa Salaudeen Akindele. He is said to have pioneered the vanguard to differentiate between *Jalabi* and Prophetic medicine and direct the attention of the people to the latter.⁷ He was himself said to have acquired the knowledge partly from his teacher, Shaykh Murtala Abdus-Salam, the founder of Mahdul-Arabi an-Najiri, who later introduced him to some Arab scholars. After the initial interactions, he embarked on a hajj operation where he got familiar with many Arab scholars, bought various books on Islamic medicine and came home with a lot of medical materials that he used to teach people and treat the sick at times.⁸

Almost all the practitioners that were interviewed for this thesis linked themselves to him. Some are direct students of his and those who were trained by his students. Some even acquired the knowledge before further research from his audio and video clips. This is because Alhaji Akindele used to dish out medical prescriptions in his lectures for the benefit of all and sundry.⁹ It started with people making efforts to make available Islamic medical prescriptions, and shops were opened for that purpose. It later led to practicalizing those prescriptions as a result of different factors. Such includes the absence of adequate knowledge of the individuals who wanted to buy and make use of them. The seller will therefore need to step up his commitment to avoid fouls that may arise from combination, application and usage. The practice has now advanced beyond the simple opening of shops to sell to the building of clinics by various practitioners, where patients are admitted and modern medical equipment is involved in the treatment of patients. Today, the Ibadan city is filled up with Islamic medical hospitals that operate like modern medical centres.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research adopts both historical and analytical research methods. These are considered appropriate because it essentially reviewed the historical development of medical practice in Islam and how it evolved in Ibadan. It also conducted interviews with the Islamic medical practitioners in the city to gather a firsthand information from the concerned people. These assisted in formulating a theoretical basis for the research's objective, which is to identify and discuss the challenges and prospects of Islamic medical practice in Ibadan, as one of the major cities in Yorubaland, Southwestern Nigeria. The study therefore collected data from different sources and relevant literary materials. The research also explored other means of data gathering including observations and personal experience of the writers.

⁷ This was gathered from various interviews conducted with our informants. Every one of them referred to him as their teacher, trainer and mentor.

⁸ Ustadh Faldur-Rahman disclosed this during an interview with him at his mosque on 23/09/2022

⁹ Alhaji Isa Akindele has different social media platforms including Facebook, WhatsApp, and telegram youtube channels where his lectures are uploaded for all to have access to them.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Prospects of Islamic Medical Practice in Ibadanland

In recent times, there is a growing demand for Islamic medicine, as an alternative to the existing orthodox medicine which has been proven to be inefficient in treating or curing some ailments like HIV/AIDS, and Hepatitis among others. Patients in these categories search for alternatives having been informed that their situations cannot be remedied. They, therefore, find Islamic medicine as one of the potential alternatives to alleviate their condition. There are also issues of high billing in the orthodox hospitals which scared people away due to financial incapacitation to foot the exuberant bills. It is thought that Islamic medicine is affordable compared to the orthodox ones. Those with hopeless cases, as could be informed by orthodox hospitals and or those who cannot afford the bill from modern hospitals, get solace from Islamic medical centres,¹⁰ thus scaling up the demand for Islamic medicine which will bring about more Islamic medical centres in the city.

In Nigeria, one of the major contemporary challenges in the country is unemployment, which got increased in the last three years as one of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the current inflation rate which stood at twenty-two (22%) at the time of filling this report (March 2023). Both have listed many people out of their places of work because the former has reduced the rate of income while the latter has increased the expenditure. Maintaining a balance between the two has become a problem for different nations of the world, including the first world countries. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in its 2021 release put the rate of unemployment in the country at 37.7% per cent. The release, as reported by the Punch Newspaper shows Nigeria at the 42nd position in the world when it comes to the rate of unemployment across the globe.¹¹ Governments at various levels have been making efforts to create more jobs to stem the evil tide of a growing population without jobs, especially the youth.

Advancing the course of Islamic medicine is one of the avenues to reduce the rate of unemployment and increase jobs for the teaming youths and graduates. It will bring about economic prosperity and increase wealth creation. This study will therefore give credit to the existing practitioners and thereby draw the attention of government at various levels to them, as a better alternative to reduce the rate of unemployment in the country. It should be mentioned here that many of the practitioners that were interacted with during interviews were promising youths with skills, some with education but see a future in the practice of Islamic medicines and building careers in it.

Undoubtedly, man lives not without falling sick and needs to be treated to regain his health. This makes medicaments an integral part of human existence that every perfect religion must discuss, thus Islam. The search for wellness and the zeal to live above ailments have been responsible for many derailments and deviations

¹⁰ Some of the patients on admission and those who came for treatment were interacted with during the investigation.

¹¹ [Nigeria's rising unemployment, poverty - Punch Newspapers \(punchng.com\)](https://punchng.com/nigeria-rising-unemployment-poverty/) retrieved on 23/06/2023

from Islamic principles due to little or no knowledge of medical practice among Muslims. Many Muslims out of curiosity to get themselves out of spiritual or physical health challenges have been involved in different kinds of acts that contradict the principles of the Islamic concept of *Tawhid* (monotheism). Worst still is that many of the *Jalabi* practitioners who present *kufr* methods to their clients are Muslim scholars. So, the clients do not suspect any violation of Islamic fundamentals, whereas all they do largely fall outside Islamic principles. Mustapha identifies some of those un-Islamic methods and approaches including *hantu*, *turare*, *aseje*, *gbere*, *tira*, black soap, and divination¹² among others.

With the evolvement of Islamic medicine, therefore, Muslims who need medicine are being salvaged from the shackles of *Shirk* and syncretic practices that they might have drifted into due to health and medical challenges. It should not be forgotten that Yoruba have medical and herbal heritages that lack *Shirk* (polytheism) and *Takhlit* (syncretism) tendencies if viewed through the lens of Islam. These, therefore, formed part of what they used as Islamic medicine. This study also serves as an eye opener to some Muslims as it will identify some items that can be used for Islamic medicine like leaves, roots, grasses and other items found around in the neighbourhood, many of which people have been living with but could not discover their usefulness vis-à-vis medical importance. It, therefore, better the understanding of people about them and how they can be used without violating Islamic rules.

Another prospect from Islamic medical practice in Ibadan is the enhancement of the religious consciousness of Muslims. This is because part of what accounts for the efficacy and effectiveness of Islamic medicine is piety and religious consciousness. An individual who seeks or is going through Islamic medication will undoubtedly increase his religious commitment and tend to live a religious life at all times. This will distance him from sin and forbidden acts while engaging in virtuous acts that can endear him to Allah and get closer to Him at all times. It, therefore, enhances the affirmation of the power of Allah, trust in Him and messengers of the Prophet.

The integration and interaction between Islamic medical practitioners and their counterparts in orthodox medicine will give a new outlook to Islamic medical practice, which hitherto is seen as a traditional medicine that does not accommodate any innovation that can enhance its practice. With an emphasis on areas of friendship and cooperation between the two, it will give birth to another form of treatment, which is neither purely orthodox nor Islamic but a combination of the two. The interplay between Islamic medical practice, orthodox and traditional methods will improve patronage due to effectiveness, thereby making it all-time demanding for healing purposes. Of importance too is that the interplay will bring out the feasibility of the adoption and application of modern medical equipment and laboratory facilities in the area of Islamic medicine. This will go a long way in bringing out the hidden areas of collaborations which have not been adequately explored by the practitioners of traditional, orthodox and Islamic medicines. It will therefore go a long way in fostering cooperation and collaboration among them.

¹² A.B. Mustapha, "The Spiritual Consultancy (Jalbu/Jalabi) in the Religious Culture of Yoruba, Nigeria" *Al-Adabiya: Jurnal Kebudayaan dan Kaegamaan*, Vol.17, No.1, 2022, 56-58

1. Challenges

Despite the prospects and brighter future that the practice of Islamic medicine in Ibadan portends, which ordinarily would have spurred many to engage in its practice, there is an array of attendant problems that the practitioners faced daily. Interactions with many of them during research revealed various problems and challenges they encounter which have not been addressed. Those challenges are listed below:

a. Jalabi Practitioners

Before the advent of Islamic medical practice, *Jalabi* practitioners pioneered and dominated the aspect of spirituality, especially the areas of challenges where people need healing or to unravel spiritual matters that posed challenges to them. The *Jalabi* scholars are known and consulted as the custodians of Islamic solutions to both physical and spiritual problems. They are referred to as *Alfa* (a local name for Islamic scholar among the Yoruba), while their job is referred to as *Ise-Alfa*. Quadri rightly observes:

Jalabi is one area which many Alfes depend upon as a means of making money. They practise *Jalabi* as spiritualists, prayer workers, or prayer warriors serving as intermediaries between their clients and Allah. Many of those who practise *Jalabi* is involved in fraud, telling lies, duping their clients, and engaging in occultism and syncretism. They are not different from *Babalawo* or *Adahunse*, while some of them are members of Secret Societies. Such Alfes distance their clients from Allah. They never empower them spiritually, nor do they teach them core Islamic values and practices such as *Tahajjud* (Q17:79); *Tawakkul* (Q3:160 & 65:3), *Sabr* (Q2:45), etc. They make their clients slaves who depend on their masters. They feed fat on their clients.¹³ This reflects how deeply rooted the practice is among the Yoruba Muslims generally, Ibadan inclusive. Quadri explains further that the practice evolved with Islam and has become a household one.

With the coming of Islamic medical methods that emphasize the *Sunnah* of the Prophet and the ethics of Islam, people start to realize the deficiencies and delicate nature of *Jalabi* with was hitherto in vogue. It, therefore, exposed the Practitioners and brought about a drastic reduction in their patronage by the People. The *Jalabi* scholars reacted through two different methods. Campaign of calumny and attacks of different sorts. The director of the Islamic Heritage Herbal Clinic¹⁴ explained how he was alleged to have engaged in the use of jinn, alcohol and other profanes in the production of his medicines. He was equally attacked as a result of an allegation that he kidnapped a child for a ritual purpose. It was later discovered that some group of *Jalabi* scholars in the town were responsible for those travails. The director of the Islamic Solution Herbal Clinic¹⁵ also narrated different cases of police and arrest which were orchestrated by *Jalabi* practitioners who saw them as their open enemies.

¹³ Y.A. Quadri, On the Method of Making Money by Alfa, *Jumu'atun Mubaratun*, A Whatsapp Friday message released on 28th Muharram 1444 / 26th August 2022

¹⁴ Ustadh Isma'il Jami'I was interviewed on 22/06/2022 at his office in Ibadan

¹⁵ Tabib Minkail Olaide AbdulKareem was interviewed on 22/06/2022 at his office in Ibadan

b. Absence of Professionalism

Another major hiccup in the practice of Islamic medicine in Ibadan, as revealed during the investigation is the lack of professionals among the practitioners. Many of them (practitioners) are not certified either by the government or reputable medical firms, either within or outside the country. The level of education of many of them did not beyond the school certificate (SSCE), while some do not even go to *Madrasah* at all. Out of ten (10) practitioners that were selected for this study, only Fadlur-Rahman¹⁶ graduated from Azhar University, Cairo and he is currently running his master's programme at the University of Ibadan with an interest in Islamic healing and medical practice. The director of Al-Haleem Islamic Clinic is an undergraduate student in the Guidance and Counselling department, at the University of Ibadan,¹⁷ while the director of Islamic Heritage Herbal Clinic holds a *Thanawiyyah* certificate from *Mahdul-Arabi An-Najiri*. Others claimed to have attended *Madrasah* at one time or the other but without certification. Many of them only trained as an apprentice for a short period and start to practice. Some transformed their parentage heritage to what is known as Islamic medicine, as they practice today. The likes of the director of Islamic Heritage Herbal Clinic and Olohun Mofimisileo Islamic Herbal Clinic are in this category.¹⁸ Both transformed their fathers' traditional medicine knowledge into Islamic ones. This is one of the reasons why the practice is more Islamic medicine than Prophetic medicine. In other words, they do not emphasize prophetic medicine as they do local medicines that are Islamically admissible. As-Shiffau Islamic Centre's¹⁹ director however confirms periodic training, and seminars both at local and national levels for members. He also confirmed that the University of Ibadan has also held seminars for members in the bid to integrate Islamic medicine into orthodox practice.

c. Lack of Awareness

Another major bane to Islamic medical practice in Ibadan is the lack of adequate awareness among the populace, especially the Muslims. This has affected the level of acceptability of the growing Islamic medical practice in the land. Many Muslims still live with the confusion of Islamic medicine different from *Jalabi*, while some have bad notions about the practice due to the practitioners who were seen as religious extremists, that everything about him is in excess and extreme. This is further strengthened by the government registration and recognition of the Islamic medical practice as herbals, which makes it an alternative medicine. So, people see them as herbalists. There is no proper medical engagement, be it print, electronic or social to advertise, educate and inform people about Islamic medicine and its importance. It makes the acceptability and reliability of Islamic medicine to be low. There is

¹⁶ Ustadh Fadlur-Rahman was interviewed on 08/09/2022 at his mosque in Ibadan. He does not have a clinic but specializes in ruqyah and jinn cases.

¹⁷ Naturopath Muhammad Abdullah was interviewed on 23/06/2023 at his office in Ibadan

¹⁸ Alfa Abdul-Ganiyy Olohunmafimisile was interviewed on 06/06/2022 at his office in Ibadan

¹⁹ Ustadh Abdul-Hakim Abdur-Rauf Abu Ruqoyyah, Was interviewed on 23/06/2022 at his office in Ibadan

therefore the need to scale up the awareness campaign across the nook and cranny of the city to make people see Islamic medicine as the best solution to their medical problems.

d. Inadequate Finance

Finance is the backbone of every business. It determines the functionality and effectiveness of an establishment. From the interactions and interrogations conducted with different owners of the selected clinics for this study, it was obvious that they are faced with a lack of finance to properly translate their vision into reality. This has affected their operations and drawn back their intentions. Apart from the Islamic Heritage Herbal Clinic which constructed a building for the clinic, others used rented apartments that were situated in unhygienic environments. There is a lack of staff to handle the patients. It used to be a one-man show in most of the clinics, though some directors used to join hands when the need arises.

Another dimension to finance is on the side of the patients who often find it difficult to foot their bills. This is because Islamic medical items are expensive. So, the services are at a relatively costly price, and then the question of affordability becomes unanswered. It should be pointed out here as gathered from the various directors that oftentimes, recourse to Islamic medicine is made after every hopeful means had been exhausted. It, therefore, becomes the last resort when every financial muscle must have been over-stressed elsewhere. Begging and pleading used to be the order of the day.²⁰

e. Non-Availability of Medical Materials

Another major issue in the practice of Islamic medicine is non and or inadequacy in the availability of materials used for curative purposes, especially Prophetic medical items. Since the Prophet did not live in Africa as a whole or Nigeria as a country or Ibadan as a community, many of the items mentioned by the Prophet are available in his immediate environment. This is one of the reasons why the practitioners emphasized Islamic medicine than Prophetic medicine. Often, they used to make purchases of some items from Kano, Kano State and some from outside the country like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran and Oman among others. There are so many bottlenecks before these items arrive home.

There is also the issue of fake materials, especially those prophetic medical items which abinitio many of the practitioners do not have access to them. Identifying the originals, therefore, posed serious challenges to them. However, almost all the clinics selected for this study have botanical gardens where some medical items are planted, but they are not enough. Some of the materials are processed, especially by Ashifau and Heritage clinics to make them readily available for use.²¹ Heritage even secured NAFDAC registration for some of its products.

²⁰ This is gathered from various interviews conducted with the directors of the selected centres for this study.

²¹ The director disclosed that what the centre does majorly is the production of medicines for the use of others.

f. Government policies

The practice of Islamic Medicine in Nigeria as a whole, as gathered from the interviews conducted with the various practitioners during the investigation for this study, is licensed by the government as an alternative medicine and it is categorized as herbal medicine. The implications of these are that Islamic medicine is made to be subservient to orthodox medicine despite the proofs of its efficacy and effectiveness, even in the areas where orthodox dashed people's hope. With this, therefore, Islamic medicine only functions better, but cannot stand shoulder equal or above the orthodox one. This is one of the reasons why people's recourse to it comes only when there is no hope. Another implication is that registering Islamic medicine as a herbal product or the practitioners with herbalists is discouraging patronage because people see them as one, especially in a country like Nigeria where herbalists have acquired meanings that are strange from the Islamic religious belief system. They are described among the Yoruba as *Oloogun* or *Alawo* (cultist) among other occultism qualifications. It deters people from wanting to be identified with them or have religious confidence in what they do. They are also seen by many as *Jalabi* practitioners. This has made the police raid them on many occasions suspecting that their practice is not permitted by law and their activities are suspicious of the law. Almost all of the selected centres for this study have cases of police raids, invasions and arrests. This has however strengthened their unity as a body to defend their colleagues against the police or law officers' activities.

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the prospects and the challenges in the practice in Ibadan with a view to highlighting the variables at each section. It is clear from every indication that Ibadan pioneers the practice of Islamic medicine in Yorubaland, hence the city has many experts who established hospitals and are making meaningful impacts in the society. The future of the practice in the city is bright because Islamic medical practice is fast becoming a household practice in the land. Also, the economic reality in the country is another major factor that favours the practice because an average Nigerian cannot afford orthodox medicine as it is today. There are several challenges which bedevilled the smooth running and the success of the Islamic medical practice in Ibadan, but they are surmountable if those who are practising do not relent in their efforts.

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