

# The Impact of Cultural Beliefs and Practices on the Diagnosis and Management of Headaches in Rural African Communities

Aderinto Nicholas

Department of Medicine and Surgery, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso, Nigeria

**Received:** 3-February-2023, Manuscript No. amdhs-23-88618; **Editor assigned:** 6-February-2023, PreQC No. amdhs-23-88618 (PQ); **Reviewed:** 8-February-2023, QC No. amdhs-22-88618 (Q); **Revised:** 18-February-2023, Manuscript No. amdhs-22-88618 (R); **Published:** 26-February-2023; DOI: 10.5530/amdhs.2023.1.3

**\*Correspondence to:**  
Aderinto Nicholas

Department of Medicine and Surgery, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso, Nigeria.

Email: Nicholasoluwayemi6@gmail.com

**Copyright:** © the author(s), publisher and licensee OZZIE Publishers. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License, which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 License

Published by : OZZIE PUBLISHERS



## Abstract

**Introduction:** Headaches are a common health issue worldwide, yet cultural beliefs and practices can influence their diagnosis and management. This is especially true in rural African communities where traditional healing practices coexist with modern medical care. Cultural beliefs regarding the causes of headaches, such as evil spirits or witchcraft, can affect how individuals seek and accept treatment. In addition, the use of traditional remedies, such as herbal medicines, can delay or interfere with appropriate medical management. Understanding the interplay between cultural beliefs and practices and headache management is crucial for improving health outcomes in these communities. Healthcare providers need to be culturally sensitive and aware of the potential impact of cultural beliefs on the diagnosis and management of headaches to ensure that patients receive the best care possible.

**Keywords:** Cultural beliefs, Practices, Diagnosis, Management, Headaches, Rural African communities

## Introduction

Headaches are a common and debilitating condition that affects individuals from all cultures and communities [1]. However, the experience of headaches, as well as the beliefs and practices surrounding their diagnosis and management, can vary significantly between different cultural groups. In rural African communities, cultural beliefs and practices significantly shape how individuals understand, diagnose, and manage their headaches [2]. In rural African communities, traditional beliefs and practices surrounding headaches significantly shape how individuals understand and manage this condition [3]. For example, headaches are attributed to supernatural causes, such as evil spirits or curses, and traditional healers may be consulted for treatment. In some communities, a stigma is associated with seeking medical care, particularly for conditions that are perceived to be less serious.

The limited access to healthcare services and the influence of cultural beliefs and practices seriously affect the health and well-being of individuals in rural African communities. Without appropriate and effective care, headaches can become chronic, leading to ongoing pain and discomfort and impacting an individual's overall quality of life. This review aims to gain a deeper understanding of the cultural context surrounding headaches in these communities and to identify ways in which cultural beliefs and practices may hinder or support the effective management of this condition. Ultimately, this article hopes to contribute to the development of culturally sensitive and effective approaches to the diagnosis and management of headaches in rural African communities.

## Cultural beliefs and practices related to headaches in rural African communities

Headaches are a common health issue in many rural African communities, and they are often approached from a cultural and spiritual perspective. In these communities, headaches are often seen as a manifestation of supernatural forces such as witchcraft, evil spirits, or curses [4]. In response to this belief, traditional healing practices frequently treat headaches. These practices often involve the use of herbal remedies, such as the application of medicinal plants to the forehead or the consumption of herbal teas. In addition to herbal remedies, prayer and spiritual cleansing rituals are commonly used to treat headaches. These rituals may involve reciting prayers or incense burning to drive out evil spirits or curses that are believed to be causing the headache.

Another common aspect of the treatment of headaches in rural African communities is the use of traditional healers. They often use a combination of spiritual and herbal remedies to treat headaches, such as the application of spiritual oils to the forehead or the administration of herbal teas that are believed to have healing properties. In addition to traditional healers, traditional African massages techniques, such as cranial or scalp massage, is also commonly used to alleviate headache pain. These techniques involve pressure and manipulation of specific head and neck areas and are believed to improve blood flow, release tension, and alleviate pain [5].

Several factors limit access to modern healthcare for headaches in Africa [6, 7]. Firstly, a lack of healthcare infrastructure, including hospitals, clinics and health workers, is a significant barrier to accessing modern healthcare

for headaches. Many African countries are characterized by inadequate healthcare infrastructure, which results in a limited number of medical facilities and personnel to provide adequate care. Additionally, poverty is another major barrier to accessing modern healthcare in Africa. Many people in the region live in poverty and cannot afford the cost of healthcare, preventing them from seeking medical treatment for headaches. This is especially true in rural areas, where access to healthcare services is limited, and the cost of medical care can be prohibitively high.

Another barrier to accessing modern healthcare for headaches in Africa is a lack of awareness about the causes and treatments of headaches. This result in people not understanding the importance of seeking medical attention and can prevent them from taking the necessary steps to obtain proper treatment. The limited availability of healthcare services is also a significant problem in many parts of Africa. In rural areas, there are few healthcare facilities, and those that exist may not have the resources to diagnose and treat headaches effectively. This result in a lack of access to essential medical services and can lead to the worsening of health conditions.

Cultural beliefs and practices can sometimes conflict with modern healthcare and prevent people from seeking treatment for headaches [8]. Traditional cultural beliefs and practices may not align with modern medical practices, which can result in people relying on traditional remedies rather than seeking medical attention.

### **Current state of knowledge on the impact of cultural beliefs and practices on the diagnosis and management of headaches in rural African communities**

The impact of cultural beliefs and practices on the diagnosis and management of headaches in rural African communities is an important and complex issue that has been the subject of ongoing research and investigation [9,10]. It is well known that cultural beliefs and practices significantly shape how people understand and approach health conditions, including headaches. One of the key ways in which cultural beliefs and practices impact the diagnosis and management of headaches are by influencing the way people understand the causes of headaches [11]. In many rural African communities, traditional beliefs about the causes of headaches may attribute headaches to supernatural or spiritual causes, such as curses, evil spirits, or ancestral spirits. These beliefs can result in people seeking traditional remedies, such as herbal medicines or rituals, instead of medical attention [12]. This can lead to delays in seeking proper medical treatment and worsen health conditions. Another way in which cultural beliefs and practices impact the diagnosis and management of headaches is by shaping the way people approach treatment. In some rural African communities, there are cultural taboos or stigmas associated with seeking medical treatment for headaches. For example, people may believe that seeking medical treatment for headaches is a sign of weakness or that it is unacceptable for certain community members, such as women or children, to seek medical attention. These cultural beliefs can prevent people from seeking medical treatment and can worsen health conditions [13].

Cultural practices, such as dietary habits, can also impact the diagnosis and management of headaches [14]. For example, cultural beliefs about the benefits of certain foods can result in people consuming foods that may trigger headaches or avoiding foods that could provide relief. This makes it more challenging for healthcare providers to diagnose and manage headaches effectively. In addition to how cultural beliefs and practices can impact the diagnosis and management of headaches, it is also important to consider the role that cultural beliefs and practices play in shaping the way healthcare providers understand and approach headaches. In some rural African communities, healthcare providers may not have access to information or training on the most effective ways to diagnose and treat headaches [15]. They may also be influenced by cultural beliefs and practices and prescribe traditional remedies instead of modern medical treatments.

### **Gaps in the literature and potential directions for future research**

The research on the cultural impact of headaches in Africa is still in its early stages, and there is a significant gap in the literature. While some studies have been conducted on traditional healing practices for headaches, there is a need for more in-depth research to understand the cultural beliefs and attitudes towards headaches and their treatment in various African cultures [13-15]. A better understanding of these cultural factors can help to provide culturally sensitive and effective interventions for headache management in African populations.

One area that requires further exploration is the prevalence and types of headaches in different African populations and how cultural factors such as diet, stress, and environmental exposure influence the incidence of headaches. It would also be useful to examine the effectiveness and safety of traditional healing practices for headaches in African populations and how they can be integrated with Western medical practices. Another important aspect of this research is to investigate the role of cultural factors in the utilisation of healthcare services for headaches in Africa and the impact of cultural barriers on access to care. This can help to ensure that culturally appropriate and effective interventions are developed and made available to those who need them.

Finally, it is important to understand the impact of cultural factors on the experience of headaches and the quality of life of those affected in Africa. This will allow for the development of interventions that not only address the physical symptoms of headaches but also provide emotional and psychological support to those affected by this condition.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, cultural beliefs and practices significantly impact the diagnosis and management of headaches in rural African communities. Further research is needed to understand the effectiveness of traditional practices and barriers to accessing Western medical care. Future studies should focus on exploring cultural beliefs and practices related to headaches and developing culturally sensitive interventions to improve diagnosis and management. This will inform the development of culturally appropriate and effective interventions for headache management in rural African communities.

### **References**

1. Ngere SH, Akelo V, Ondeng'e K, *et al.* Traditional Medicine Beliefs and Practices among Caregivers of Children under Five Years-The Child Health and Mortality Prevention Surveillance (CHAMPS), Western Kenya: A qualitative study. *PLoS ONE*. 17(11), e0276735 (2022).
2. Krah E, de Kruijff J, Ragno L. Integrating traditional healers into the health care system: challenges and opportunities in rural northern Ghana. *J community health*. 43, 157-63 (2018).
3. Onwuekwe I, Onyeka T, Aguwa E, *et al.* Headache prevalence and its characterization amongst hospital workers in Enugu, South East Nigeria. *Head face med*. 10(1), 1-8 (2014).
4. Robbins MS. Diagnosis and management of headache: A review. *Jama*. 325(18), 1874-1885 (2021).
5. Langland JT. A Review of the Diagnosis and Management of Headache. *JAMA*. 326(10), 976 (2021).
6. Osuntokun BO, Adeuja AO, Nottidge VA, *et al.* Prevalence of headache and migrainous headache in Nigerian Africans: A community-based study. *East Afr Med J*. 69(4), 196-199 (1992).
7. Winkler AS, Dent W, Stelzhammer B, *et al.* Prevalence of migraine headache in a rural area of northern Tanzania: a community-based door-to-door survey. *Cephalalgia*. 30(5), 582-592 (2010).
8. Dent W, Spiss HK, Helbok R, *et al.* Prevalence of migraine in a rural area in

## Nicholas.: The Impact of Cultural Beliefs and Practices on the Diagnosis and Management of Headaches in Rural African Communities

- South Tanzania: a door-to-door survey. *Cephalalgia: int j headache*. 24(11), 960-966 (2004).
9. Tepper SJ. A pivotal moment in 50 years of headache history: the first American Migraine Study. *Headache*. 48(5), 730-732 (2008).
10. Amiri P, Kazeminasab S, Nejadghaderi SA, *et al*. Migraine: A Review on Its History, Global Epidemiology, Risk Factors, and Comorbidities. *Front neurol*. 12, 800605 (2022).
11. Heckman BD, Britton AJ. Headache in African Americans: An Overlooked Disparity. *J Natl Med Assoc*. 107(2), 39-45 (2015).
12. Charleston IV L. Headache disparities in African-Americans in the United States: a narrative review. *J Natl Med Assoc*. 113(2), 223-229 (2021).
13. Kulkarni GB, Rao GN, Gururaj G, Stovner LJ, Steiner TJ. Headache disorders and public ill-health in India: prevalence estimates in Karnataka State. *J headache pain*. 16, 1-7 (2015).
14. Basdav J, Haffeejee F, Puckree T. Impact of headaches on university students in Durban, South Africa. *SpringerPlus*. 5(1), 1679 (2016).
15. Bigal ME, Ashina S, Burstein R, *et al*. Prevalence and characteristics of allodynia in headache sufferer : a population study. *Neurology*. 70(17), 1525-1533 (2008).

**Cite this article as:** Nicholas A. The Impact of Cultural Beliefs and Practices on the Diagnosis and Management of Headaches in Rural African Communities. *Adv. Med. Dental Health Sci*. 2023;6(1):22-24.