

The Basic Determinants of Commercial Embalment in Ogoni Ethnic Group, Nigeria

Emue EwonuBari Bernard¹, Danladi Sambo Amaza², Joseph Vandi Zirahei²,
Martha Attah², Amaike Innocent A. O². & Onwih Etim Efiog¹

¹Department of Anatomical Sciences, College of Health Sciences, University of Abuja, Nigeria.

²Department of Human Anatomy, College of Medical Sciences, University of Maiduguri, Borno State, Nigeria

Abstract: A cohort study was conducted from January, 2008- December, 2010 in Ogoni, Nigeria. Adopting interviewer-administered structured questionnaires, a total number of 422 of the respondents were interviewed to find the determinant of commercial embalment. A total of 422 respondents were administered structured-interviewed questionnaires. The questionnaires were distributed to embalmers either in the hospitals or at their residence while those that patronize the practice were consulted house to house and even in their business places. The questionnaires were distributed in the 5 LGAs as follows: Khana (90), Gokana (85), Tai (83), Eleme (90) and Oyigbo (74). The data were collated and simple proportional analysis carried out. The result revealed that Christian religion was the most 80(19.0%) determinant, followed by befitting burial rite/ceremony 69(16.4%) and income 56(13.3%). We conclude that even though these factors influence embalment, the final decision lies in the hands of the deceased love ones; hence all deaths should be treated with respect and dignity before and at funeral ceremony.

I. Introduction

Embalming is the process of chemically treating the dead human body to reduce the presence and growth of micro-organisms, to retard decomposition and to restore an acceptable physical appearance [1]. [2] Opined that embalming originated in Egypt around 3200 B.C. [3] reported that the ancient Greeks and Romans also embalmed to prevent premature burial. The first person to formally undergo Summum's process of modern mummification was the founder of Summum, Summum Bonum Amen Ra aka Corky Ra [4]. In many parts of the world, commercial embalming is a profession that is growing [2]. Following several legislative procedures (1986 and 1993), the liberalization of the undertakers' profession led to their structuring of their field and the conditions for accessing the profession (funeral director) [5, 6]. Studies from [3] reported that embalming has a very long and cross-cultural history, with many cultures giving the embalming processes a greater religious meaning. Embalming is an important source of income for the embalmer. The Ijaw and Ibo ethnic group in Nigeria perform intricate burials and funeral ceremonies [7]. In Nigeria, the ancient people of Ogoni reasons for traditional embalment were to have enough time for burial right, giving the dead last respect and to transport the dead to their ancestral home [8]. According to [3], in Northern Nigeria predominantly of Muslims, the embalming process is not necessarily a commercially and economically viable venture. In Southern Nigeria predominantly Christians, the reverse is the case. [2] Revealed that the main reason for embalming was religious. Hinduism does not accept embalming but in practice, it is known to occur. Neopagans generally discourage embalming [7]. [1] Opined that embalming should always be carried out by a fully qualified embalmer. Literature on this subject was relatively scarce in our country and hence the need for this study.

II. Materials and methods

Study Area: Ogoni kingdom is a minority ethnic group that is located on the Southern part of Rivers State, South-South, Nigeria. Ogoni consist of 5 Local Government Areas (LGAs) which includes Khana, Gokana, Tai, Eleme and Oyigbo. The inhabitants who speak Khana, Gokana and Oyigbo languages are endowed with a lot of natural resources especially crude oil and commercial activities especially due to emerging manufacturing and oil exploration industries in the region. **Scope of the Study:** The study was carried out in 5 LGAs from January, 2008- December, 2010 on the embalmers and those who patronizes embalment. The opinions of the respondents (with diverse culture, social status and religion) were sought concerning the factors responsible for the practice in Ogoni land. **Methods:** The design employed simple random technique and descriptive survey. A total of 422 respondents were administered structured-interviewed questionnaires. The questionnaires were distributed to embalmers either in the hospitals or at their residence while those that patronize the practice were consulted house to house and even in their business places. The questionnaires were distributed in the 5 LGAs as follows: Khana (90), Gokana (85), Tai (83), Eleme (90) and Oyigbo (74).

Statistical Analysis: Administered questionnaires were pretested and some anticipated problems in the field corrected. The data were collated and simple proportional analysis carried out; results were represented in table.

III. Results

422 structured-interviewed questionnaires were administered to the respondents and the results are shown below.

Table 1: Socioeconomic factors influencing commercial embalmmnt in Ogoni

Responses	Yes [No. (%)]	No [No. (%)]	Total (%)
Income	56(13.3)	10(2.4)	66(15.6)
Cost of embalmmnt	40(9.5)	15(3.6)	55(13.0)
Education/Enlightment	34(8.1)	19(4.5)	53(12.6)
Position in the society/community	32(7.6)	15(3.6)	47(11.2)
Love after dead	31(7.4)	10(2.4)	41(9.8)
Sacrosanct	29(6.9)	11(2.6)	40(9.5)
Hospital/mortuary	25(5.9)	9(2.1)	34(8.0)
Embalmmers/funeral directors	20(4.7)	12(2.8)	32(7.5)
Embalmmnt modern materials	18(4.3)	11(2.6)	29(6.9)
Funeral materials	17(4.0)	8(1.9)	25(5.9)
Total (%)	302(71.7)	120(28.3)	422(100)

N0. (/ %) = Number/percentage.

The study reveals that the commonest 56(13.3%) socioeconomic factor for embalmmnt in Ogoni was income while the least 17(4.0%) was funeral materials (table 1).

Table 2: Cultural/traditional factors influencing commercial embalmmnt in Ogoni

Responses	Yes [No. (%)]	No [No. (%)]	Total (%)
Befitting burial rite/ceremony	69(16.4)	3(0.7)	72(17.1)
Settlement of affairs of the death	58(13.7)	2(0.4)	60(14.1)
Contact with deceased relations/love ones	55(13.0)	4(1.0)	59(14.0)
Transportation/geographical location	50(11.9)	6(1.4)	56(13.3)
Investigating cause of death	49(11.6)	3(0.7)	52(12.3)
Time/day of death	40(9.5)	8(1.9)	48(11.4)
Age at death	34(8.1)	3(0.7)	37(8.8)
Type/cause of death	17(4.0)	4(1.0)	21(5.0)
Will documented before death	15(3.6)	2(0.4)	17.0(4.0)
Total (%)	387(91.8)	35(8.2)	422(100)

N0. (/ %) = Number/percentage.

As many as 69(16.4%) interviewers considered befitting burial rite/ceremony as the reason for patronizing commercial embalmmnt in Ogoni. The lowest 15(3.6%) suggestion was *will* documented before death (Table 2).

Table 3: Religious/Neopaganism's opinion on commercial embalmmnt in Ogoni

Types of Religion/Neopagan	Yes [No. (%)]	No [No. (%)]	Total (%)
Christianity	80(19.0)	28(6.6)	108(25.6)
*Traditionalist	68(16.1)	20(4.7)	88(20.8)
Rosicrucian (Amorc)	19(4.5)	47(11.1)	66(15.6)
Moslem	14(3.3)	35(8.3)	49(11.6)
Reformed Ogoni Fraternity	10(2.4)	34(8.1)	44(10.5)
Eckankar	30(7.1)	12(2.9)	42(10.0)
Grail message	8(1.9)	17(4.0)	25(5.9)
Total (%)	229(54.3)	193(45.7)	422(100)

*Traditionalist (juju/idol priest, herbalist, magicians), N0. (/ %) = Number/percentage.

The predominant 80 (19.0%) religious/neopaganism's factors that accept commercial embalmmnt was Christianity while the highest 47(11.1%) that reject the procedure was the Rosicrucianism (table 3).

IV. Discussion

Deductions from these findings show that religious/neopaganism, cultural/traditional and socioeconomic factors influence positively or negatively commercial embalmmnt among the ancient people of Ogoni [9, 8, 3].

In table 1, this study has revealed that the commonest socioeconomic factor for embalmmnt in Ogoni were income and cost of embalmmnt among the study cohort. The business of embalmmnt is fast taking a fair ground as many licensed or not licensed persons find it as a lucrative business (because annual profit is high) [8]. Among many embalmers, the cost per embalmed body per day was between ^200- ^500 with an initial deposit of ^5,000-^10,000 in most public and private hospitals. However, bodies embalmed within the deceased residence cost between ^300- ^500 per body per day with an initial deposit of ^10,000- ^20,000. Both the poor and rich family/relation/business associate of the deceased was involved in the practice [7]. The increasing trend of education/enlightment associated with industrialization and socialization among the people was another factor that influences the practice positively. Position [traditional title like village/town chief (*Menebue*), district chief (*Gbenemene*) and public service like LGA's chairmen, governors etc] the deceased was occupying in the society/community was a determinant. It is a custom in Ogoni that *Menebue* or *Gbenemene* be allowed after dead to undergo series of traditional rituals to appease the ancestral father (gods) to accept his soul. Violation in most cases puts the living in serous afflictions and sometime dead of the family members. The people believe in love after dead and sacrosanct [10], that organizing burial/cremation ceremony in the presence of relatives and friends for their love ones will show respect and gratitude for the soul of the dead which is thought is with them in spirit [2]. The increase in hospitals gives a corresponding increase in awareness and attraction even though the procedure is part of their mortuary services [3]. Modern embalmmnt facilities have reduced the fear of body's infection [1, 11] by the traditional methods for long period of time. Modernized coffins (casket) and other funeral materials have attracted the people's attention to embrace the practice [12]. Choice of coffin and pattern of burial by the deceased before death has been speculated. Of recent the licensing of funeral directors who decorate embalmed body for burial was another attractive avenue [13, 11].

The results from table 2 about Cultural/traditional factors influencing commercial embalmmnt opined that befitting burial rite or cremation was highest amongst others [3]. It is a common believe in many families that the highest respect accorded to the decease is to provide a ceremonious burial. Family meetings are held to fix a possible date for burial with each member of family made compulsory to contribute money for embalmmnt and funeral activities. Sometimes responsibilities are shared according to one's capability. People go as far as selling properties or even borrow money to give their dead love ones what is called a "state burial". Traditionally in Ogoni, embalmmnt (often described as the "savior" of family crises) was commonly the first option to create time for dispute settlement of deceased properties/responsibilities. The properties distributions are completed before the final burial. Among many, embalmmnt was commenced before contact with deceased relations/love ones if they were not present at the time of death. This was specified for the first son, daughter (if no son), or any other person (s) believed or authorized would take up the deceased responsibilities. The location/place of death distance from his/her home that require transportation and which may delay immediate burial was accepted for preservation. The main reason here is that most Ogonis do not bury dead bodies outside their ancestral (father's) or husband's home. Embalmmnt is instituted for investigating the cause of dead either by autopsy or consultation of idol worshippers/priest (*Yor-kana*, *Yor-maa* or *Dam-pie*) especially in death of a young or highly person in the community/government. The time/day of the dead determine whether burial should be postponed or not. Preservation of bodies is commonly done for death that occurs late in the evening or night. Burial may not be allowed in adult persons except in accidental death in days like Sundays, Christmas and Easters (if it falls traditionally on a day called *Deebom*). It is a cultural believes that these days are "Holy" and should be respected with no burial. However, [8] reported also that most of the Igbo communities sampled (37%) gave timing of burial as a reason for the traditional embalming. They have certain festivals during which their great dead must not be buried and the ancestral home of a married woman determines the day she will be buried. Most deaths at old age (especially centenarians) are embalmed but the reverse is the case of some younger age death. The type or causes of death traditionally determine whether a body was to be embalmed or not. Deaths from accidents, suicide, drowning or manslaughter are regarded as a "taboo or shameful" for embalmmnt [14] in Ogoni culture. The *will* of the deceased indicating that the body should be embalmed after death was highly respected and implemented but were associated with property/responsibility sharing among family members and providing a befitting burial [8].

As revealed in table 3, Christianity dominating the area accepted embalmmnt among other groups. The embracement of the procedure must have been borrowed from the burial of Jacob and Joseph indicated in the Bible [15]. Many traditionalists which include Juju/Idol priest, herbalist and magicians as part of the laid down principles are required to be embalmed to create enough time for series of sacrifices to appease to gods of the land before burial. Most of the Rosicrucian (Amorc), Moslem, Reformed Ogboni Fraternity, Eckankar and Grail message reject body embalmmnt. Muslims are required to be buried within 24 hours of death if possible;

embalming is forbidden and believes that the spirit remains with the body from death until after burial [1, 16, and 17]. Many rejects the procedure because they believe in "earth to earth burial," as an alternative to either cremation or the slow putrefaction of encased corpses [12, 18]. However, embalmmment was part of the services in the mortuary sections of most hospitals [3], but it looks as if most of the decisions to embalm these deceased occult are taken by their family/relation/business associate disregarding whatever interests/principles they had when alive.

V. Conclusion

From this study, we conclude that even though embalmmment was influenced by religious/neopaganism, cultural/tradition and socioeconomic factors, final decision lies in the hands of the deceased love ones; hence all deaths should be treated with respect and dignity before and at funeral ceremony.

Acknowledgement

We wish to thank all those who completed these questionnaires especially mortuary attendants of General Hospital, Bori for spearing time and energy for the success of this work.

References

- [1] Frederick LG, Strub CU: The principles and practice of embalming. 5th Ed. USA; 1989.
- [2] Mayer RU: Embalming; History theory and practice 1st Ed. Appleton and Lange USA; 1990.
- [3] Ezugworie J, Anibeze C, Akpuaka F: Critical appraisal of reasons for traditional embalming among Igbos in the South-East, Nigeria. *The Internet Journal of Alternative Medicine*; 2009. Volume 7 Number 2.
- [4] Dane, Joseph A: "The Curse of the Mummy Paper". *Printing History*; 1995; 17: 18–25. Retrieved from "<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mummy> last modified on 6 July, 2011 at 09:27.
- [5] Trompette P: 'Institutional Change and competition dynamics on local markets. The history of the funeral market in France (XIX-XX century)', (Barcelona: Egos Conference); 2009.
- [6] Clark P, Sziming I: 'The structural captivity of the funeral consumer. An Anglo-American comparison' in 3rd critical management studies conference (Lancaster University); 2003.
- [7] Embalming-Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia (online) 2011. Cited 2011 May 14. Retrieved from: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/embalming>
- [8] Udoaka AI, Oghenamavwe L, Ebenezer T: Ancient techniques amongst the Ogoni tribe in Southern Nigeria: *journal of experimental and clinical anatomy*; 2009; Vol. 8, No. 2.
- [9] Chisholm H: *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Cambridge University Press; 1911; 11th Ed.
- [10] Jones D G: On Ethics, The Human Cadaver: Assessment of the Value we place on the Dead Body. *From a Perspective on Science and Christian Faith. American Scientific Affiliation*; 1995; 47. P 43-51.
- [11] Habenstein R W, Lamers WM: *The history of American funeral directing* (Wisconsin: National Funeral Directors Association); 2011.
- [12] Natural burial From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. Last modified on 6 July, 2011 at 23:48.
- [13] Australian Funeral Directors Association: *Infection Control Guidelines for the Funeral Industry, Part A, B & C*. Australia; 1992.
- [14] Karen H: *Funeral ceremonies of the Ibo. Africa postcolonial literature in English in the postcolonial web*; 1990.
- [15] Genesis 50:26, 50:2: Holy Bible.
- [16] Huda: *Islamic Funeral Rites. Care for the dying, funeral prayers, burial, and mourning*. About.com Guide; 2011.
- [17] Ben B: *Egyptian Rosicrucianism and the Quest for immortality*; cited 18 July 2011; Retrieved from: <http://www.rosicrucian.org>.
- [18] Keith W. Stump "What is Man?" Retrieved from www.british-israel.ca last modified 6 July, 2011.