

## **TRADITIONAL BURIAL RITES AND LAND DISPUTE IN IKWERRE SOCIETY**

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### **Abstract**

*The study examined the relationship between traditional burial rites and land disputes in Ikwerre society using qualitative and quantitative methods. The population consisted of four thousand and seventy-three (473). A sample size of four hundred (400) was drawn from this population using the Taro Yamane formula. Stratified and multistage sampling techniques were used. A total of ten Focus Group Discussions were carried out in the target communities. The univariate data were analyzed using simple percentages. The qualitative data were transcribed and presented thematically based on research objectives. The qualitative and quantitative results revealed that traditional burial rites have a significant relationship with land disputes, hence, generating communal conflict in Ikwerre society. The study recommends that traditional burial rites should be controlled and supervised by government agencies such as the court where restrictions can be placed on excessive burial rites while awareness creation should be done in churches and in the communities on the implication of this obnoxious practice that encourages these practices.*

### **Background**

The Ikwerre people live in four out of the twenty-three local government areas of Rivers state, namely, Port Harcourt, Obio-Akpor, Ikwerre, and Emuoha (Okemini and Adekola, 2012, Ogoloma, 2013). The Ikwerres own more than 20% of arable land in Rivers state and are traditionally farmers, traders and fishermen, and women.

In Ikwerre society, like in other ethnic groups especially in Africa, it has been observed that some bereaved families sold their real estate, personal properties to meet up with the expectations of society as regards traditional burial rites. According to a Newspaper report, businesses had folded, children had been out of school and sudden deaths had been recorded because people could not wriggle out of the devastating effects of the huge expenses incurred during funerals of their loved ones (Daily Post News Paper 10 April 2019). This is done in their bid to meet the excessive conditions and demands to cover the cost of expensive burials which the society generally has imposed on families.

The increasing Nigerian population has triggered pressure on the use of available resources such as land, labour, capital, etc. These are essential resources in the production process especially in rural farming communities that depend on available natural resources for their livelihood. The struggle for access, ownership and control over land and other resources has generated serious conflict between individuals, families, and communities. According to Onyeche (2013), conflict is a fight, quarrel, bitter, argument, oppositions, differences, and a strong clash between contradictory impulses or wishes.

Historically, the Ikwerre people are known for peaceful co-existence as found in their ability to accommodate visitors in their communities. However, despite this positive scenario, some communities and families have been involved in a conflict. This calls for our research to investigate the relationship between traditional burial rites and conflict among the Ikwerre society.

In extant literature on traditional burial rites emphasized the socio-economic implication of elaborate burial rites (Akpan, 2016), socio-economic and religious implication of elaborate burial rites on families (Eze, 2010), Why Nigerian Bury their Wealth (Okaba, 1997), and motives for lavish funerals (Uche, 2013). There has not been any existing study on Ikwerre Ethnic nationality traditional burial rites and land disputes. This study aimed at examining the relationship between traditional burial rites and conflicts/land disputes in Ikwerre communities, Investigate the influence of traditional burial rites on children's education.

### **Methodology**

A qualitative and quantitative research method was utilized in conducting the study which was carried out in Ikwerre communities. The population of the study consisted of four hundred (400) participants drawn from a total population of four Local Government Areas using the Taro Yamane formula.

In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were the two major instruments used for data collection. In-depth interview (IDIs) respondents included community members as well as community stakeholders, while focus group discussion (FGD) consisted of homogeneous (male alone and female alone) and heterogeneous (both male and female) participants from each of the selected communities. These respondents were purposively selected with the assistance of the Research Assistant drawn from the selected communities who arranged initial meetings and liaised between the researchers and would-be respondents in each of the communities. Furthermore, the youth leaders in each of the communities arranged for all the ten (10) focus group discussions which were made up of heterogeneous (men and women) and homogeneous (with only men and women) participants.

Interviews and discussions were conducted in pidgin English and auto-recorded. The principal researcher and the research assistant were involved in data gathering, transcription, and translation of data into the English language as well as the examination and coding of key variables concerning the issues and themes covered by the research instruments. Thereafter, results were written from translated texts, coded master sheets, and researcher's memos to ensure that reported responses were contextual. Some of the findings with contextual connotations were reported verbatim, most were summarized and others that were not so relevant to the study objectives were left out. Reported findings were then compared with those of previous studies on similar issues and discussed.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The result of the study is discussed here under three sections. First, the socio-demographic data of respondents, the effect of traditional burial rites on the education of the bereaved children, and the relationship between traditional burial rites and land dispute among the Ikwerre communities.

#### **Socio-demographic Data of Respondents**

Four hundred (400) respondents participated in this research. Out of the four hundred (400) respondents, a higher proportion of the respondents are male (68.5%) while the frequency for the female participants is less in comparison (31.5%).

The marital status of respondent's shows that most of the participants were married (62%); followed by the frequency for single participants (23.75%) then the least frequency for respondents was the divorced (14.25%).

The distribution for the qualification of the respondents reveals that the majority of the respondents have attained OND/HND certificates (33.75%), followed by the frequency for respondents that have obtained BA degree (22.5%), followed by the category of respondents who have obtained BSc degree (20%), followed by the category of respondents who have obtained a secondary certificate (12%), followed by the category of respondents that have attained MSc degrees (9%), and then the category of respondents who have obtained MA degrees (2.5%) with the least frequency for the Ph.D. (0.25%).

The analysis on the religion of respondents reveals that most of the respondents affirm being Christians (67%) while the least affirm being traditional worshippers (33%).

#### **Traditional burial rites and land dispute in Ikwerre Society**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Agreed	105	26.25
Strongly Agreed	200	50
Disagreed	54	13.5
Strongly Disagreed	41	10.25
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2019*

The above table shows that 105 respondents representing 26.25% of the total study population agreed that Ikwerre traditional burial rites contribute to land dispute in Ikwerre communities, while 200 respondents representing 50% of the total study population have strongly agreed that Ikwerre traditional burial rites contribute to land dispute leading to communal conflict in the communities. About 305 respondents representing 76.25% of the total study population agreed that Ikwerre traditional burial rites contribute to conflict which in turn leads to communal conflict.

On the contrary, 54 respondents representing 13.5% of the total study population have disagreed that Ikwerre traditional burial rites do not contribute to the dispute in communities, and 41 respondents representing 10.25% of the total study population strongly disagreed that Ikwerre traditional burial rites do not contribute to the dispute which eventually results to communal conflict. About 95 respondents representing 23.75% of the total study population disagreed that Ikwerre traditional burial rites contribute to disputes leading to communal conflict.

#### **Influence of traditional burial rites on children education of the bereaved**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Agreed	122	30.5
Strongly Agreed	95	23.75
Disagreed	82	20.5
Strongly Disagreed	101	25.25
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2019*

The above table illustrates that 122 respondents representing 30.5% of the total study population agreed that traditional funeral rites affect children of education age of the bereaved household, whereas 95 respondents representing 23.75% of the total study population strongly agreed that children of education age of bereaved households are affected by traditional burial rites. About 217 respondents representing 54.25% of the total study population agreed that children/wards of education age are affected by traditional burial rites. On the other hand, 82 respondents representing 20.5% of the total study population have disagreed that traditional

funeral rites do not affect children of education age in bereaved families, and 101 respondents representing 25.25% of the total study population strongly disagreed that traditional funeral rites do not affect children of education age. About 183 respondents representing 45.75% of the total study population have disagreed that children of education age in bereaved families are not affected by traditional funeral rites.

### **Qualitative Data Analysis**

The report for the result of the qualitative data analysis is presented in this section. The qualitative data were reported thematically based on the research objectives

Interviews comprised of Focus Groups Discussions (FGDs) which dealt with experiences of bereaved families and stakeholders within Ikwerre society. The interviewing process was carried out by two individuals, the lead researcher who served as the moderator of the interview process and an assistant who handled note-taking and the recording of information.

All generated data were transcribed and displayed thematically. Two main questions dominated the interview sessions:

#### ***What is the relationship between the land dispute and conflict arising from expensive burial rites?***

This question allowed for contributions and opinions outside the identified factors and served to generate feedback that can be utilized for recommendations with regards to land dispute and conflict during burial rites and how to prevent land dispute.

#### **To what extent have traditional burial rites in Ikwerre community affect the bereaved children's education?**

This question allowed respondents to express their views on how the expensive burial rites that result in borrowing and selling of landed properties have affected the continuation of the

### **Discussions and findings**

This study investigated the relationship between traditional funeral rites and land disputes in Ikwerre ethnic society and the impact of traditional burial rites on the education of bereaved children. The study design was a survey research method and examined using both quantitative and qualitative methods, looking at the relative impact of households that experienced bereavement and traditional ceremonies in the recent past. The major premise for the study was therefore based on the observed literature gap which addressed issues of traditional funeral rites and land dispute in the context of Ikwerre society. Furthermore, this study sought to provide a more all-embracing methodological framework that could effectively address the observed limitations of previous empirical work that emphasized only the quantitative methods thereby having a narrow view of the effect of traditional funeral rites on the bereaved families (especially of Ikwerre ethnic society) which is experienced almost on daily basis. This study, therefore, offered a summarized opinion of the ongoing relationship between the variables examined and provided insight as to how they affect the target elements.

The result of the qualitative data further validates the findings of the quantitative data, which indicates that traditional burial rites influence the education of bereaved children. This is as findings from the qualitative data indicate support for a substantive relationship between traditional funeral rites and land disputes in Ikwerre ethnic society. The study, therefore, finds that there is a harmony of results between the quantitative and the qualitative analysis concerning the relationship between the variables of the study.

The study, therefore, affords further reiteration of the argument put forward by various studies (Nyemadi et al, 2015, Onyeche, 2013, Ukeh, 2013, Genyi et al 2010 and Anozie, 2014. Abanyim, 2012, Phay, 2013, Ossai, (2016), that traditional funeral rites contribute significantly to land disputes in Ikwerre ethnic society and also affect the education of the bereaved children

### **Conclusion**

The assertions put forward by this study with regards to the relationship between traditional funeral rites and land disputes in Ikwerre ethnic society are based on the empirical evidence provided by the quantitative and qualitative results of the study. The conclusions are therefore drawn concerning the research questions which are as follows:

The results of the study offer substantial support for the argument that traditional funeral rites contributed to land disputes in Ikwerre. Therefore, this study asserts that elaborate traditional burial rite is a significant antecedent to land disputes which leads to communal conflict in Ikwerre society.

### **Recommendations**

The recommendations put forward herein are geared towards addressing the observed societal inadequacies which have over time become accepted and which continue to tolerate and make excuses for the practice of traditional burial rites.

Traditional burial rites should be controlled and supervised by government agencies such as courts where restrictions can be placed on excessive burial rites.

There should be awareness creation in churches, communities on the implication of some of the obnoxious cultural practices that reduce the family to a scenario of poverty.

Social sensitization activities should be encouraged through programs and training on the ills and dangers of traditional burial rites. Community members should also be encouraged to participate in such programs and training which should aim at a reorientation of the mindset and perception of the family and relationships. It should entail actual demonstrations either through drama or actual testimonies of victims of the negative effects of traditional burial rites on the building of a harmonious society

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