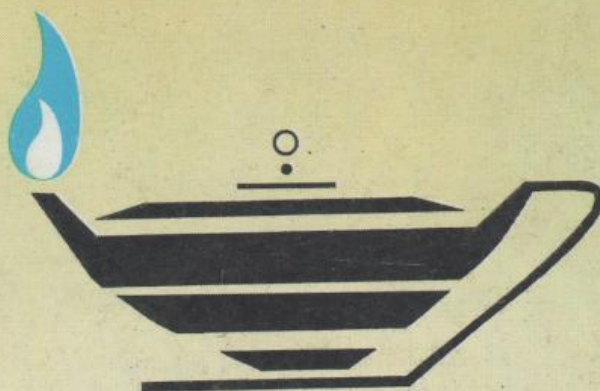


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SPIRITUALIST MOVEMENTS AND FEMALES' HEALTH: AN EXPERIENCE OF A NIGERIAN COMMUNITY.

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INTRODUCTION

In the Christian religious tradition, there are countless records of the experiences of the supernatural intervention in female health issues¹. Healing has been obtained by a great many through prayers and under miraculous circumstances right from the time of Christ². There is therefore no doubt that, at least, within this religious experience, spiritual powers can and have been utilized in the area of health. In the history of Christianity, there have existed authentic Spiritualists who have worked in the forefront to save humanity from mysterious situations and diseases³. However, despite these genuine cases, it must be admitted that both in history and in our contemporary situation there are some self-acclaimed and unauthentic Spiritualists who make themselves healers in matters of females' health. Their subjective methodology and often-disastrous consequences have made many question the rationale for their continued presence in our society. The objective of this paper therefore, is to explicate the effects of the feigned Spiritualist Movements on females' health in a Nigerian society- the Annang⁴ Community, and proffer solutions to the females' health hazards posed by these Spiritualist Movements in rural Annangland. As a result of intensive fieldwork and personal contacts with many women, we discovered that though this research is focused on Annang society, similar experiences of sham spiritualists interfering in females' health do occur in many rural settings in Nigeria.

Before proceeding, it is appurtenant to describe the Annang traditional religious climate that favours the continued existence and operations of the Spiritualist Movements particularly those linked to females' health issues. The Annang indigenous religion favours the belief in the existence of myriad of spirits and divinities that assist *Abasi Ibom*⁵ to deal with human problems. S.C. Messenger (Jr.) gives an estimated number of the divinities as being over thirty.⁶ Kenneth Enang leaves their number at twenty-three⁷ but added that information gathered from the field trip indicated that their exact number cannot be known as individuals or villages or clans can easily welcome and accept any *new* god from anywhere if judged powerful. These divinities or gods are believed to be very near to humans and if not properly placated can cause untold sufferings and diseases. It is important to note that one of the multifarious gods or divinities in the Annang Traditional Religion is deeply associated with female reproductive health. This *divinity* is known as *Ekpo Nka Owo*⁸. The traditional Annang person believes that the task of this divinity is checking and punishing women who engage in extramarital affairs thereby being unfaithful to their husbands. It is one of the most dreaded divinities in Annangland. Within this belief-system, any woman who suffers from prolonged and difficult labour is suspected to have committed adultery. Maternal mortality is most often than not believed to be the punishment from *Ekpo Nka Owo* on a woman who refused to confess her male sexual partner at

childbirth. It is of course medically clear that there are many causes of difficult labour and maternal mortality. The belief in *Ekpo Nka Owo* in my opinion is one of the Annang traditional tools for female subjugation and psychological disempowerment that has affected the female reproductive health very adversely. *Ekpo Nka Owo* is not known to punish men who equally commit adultery. My recent interviews in the course of this fieldwork revealed that the belief in *Ekpo Nka Owo* is still very strong among the Annang people of this 21st century⁹.

Within the complex structure of this indigenous religion there is a prominent belief in the mysterious power of witchcraft. Witches are believed to have very negative influences on the people's life especially on pregnant women. The witches and wizards are believed to possess some supernatural elements and powers, which they use to harm their fellow human beings, especially their close kinsmen. Witchcraft is considered a serious phenomenon. They are said to have major negative influences in the social life of the people. In the traditional belief, a pregnant woman is vulnerable to the attacks of witches and therefore need special protection until the time she delivers the baby. In this situation, the Sacred Specialists play real roles in the protection of the women.

Again, in the Annang traditional religious setting, the Diviners¹⁰ are considered very important religious figures as they act as links between the gods and the humans. As C.A. Dime rightly observes, divination is at the heart of African Traditional Religions or indigenous religious systems¹¹. As in most African Traditional Religious situation, divination is a sacred religious institution within the Annang traditional belief-system. Divination is the method and process of probing into the secrets of life or into the hidden knowledge about the will of the gods or deities on any given issue. Divination is a very popular religious practice among the Annang people. The diviners are believed to have the powers to communicate with spirits and the gods to ascertain the course of action to take in any given circumstance. Divination is associated with supernatural powers because, in the process, the expert "reveals" the unknown and "discloses" the wish of the gods and ancestral spirits by magical incantation. According to E. G. Parrinder, the diviners are among the most popular and busy figures in the religious life of the people¹². The diviners are consulted on many occasions in life in the Annang set-up.

Within this Annang traditional religious context, Christianity was introduced in the 19th Century. The Annang adherents of the Christian religion understood that their newcomer Christian religion discouraged them from seeking the help of or resorting to the traditional divination practices. The demands of the Christian religion did not change their inner yearning of the people who always want to know and interpret what they considered *mysteries*. The traditional Annang person who embraced Christianity was soon to discover that the basic and important difference in these two religious traditions is that while Christianity discourages the practice of divination and other forms of spiritism, their traditional religion welcomes it with open

hands. As the Annang adherents of Christianity struggle between the demands of Christianity and the attraction of their indigenous and *serviceable* traditional religion, a new development occurred: the evolution of Spiritualist Movements which they hoped would be *meaningful* to them in their new religious situation. These Spiritualist Movements have the Christian coloration but their spirituality, beliefs and practices are very much like that of diviners of the traditional religion of the Annang people. The birth of the Spiritualist Movements in Annangland can best be described in the words of Harold Turner:

A new development arising in the course of the interaction of a tribal or primal society and its religion with one of the more powerful and sophisticated cultures and its major religion, involving some substantial departure from the classical religious traditions of both the cultures concerned, in order to find renewal by reworking the contributing traditions into a different religious system¹³.

The Spiritualist Movements have remained an important religious nuance that cannot be safely ignored because of its' effects on females' health.

SPIRITUALIST MOVEMENTS IN ANNANGLAND

The term Spiritualist Movement may have various interpretations according to the religious traditions in question. Within the context of the Annang traditional society experiencing the impact of Christianity, the term is to be understood as an independent religious initiative by self-acclaimed sacred specialist[s] whose duties to clients ranges from attempts at uncovering the past, understanding the future, protecting clients from the attacks of witches, solving problems, detecting the causes and remedies of diseases through the facilitation of the Holy Spirit. Their *diagnoses* and cure of diseases are done through the rigorous performance of specific *assignments*¹⁴.

It is difficult to determine when the Spiritualist Movements began in the Annangland. However, the earliest indications of their activities are documented in the writings of Messenger and Lanternari in the first and second half of the 20th century respectively. Their historical origins can be traced back to the arrival of Christianity in the area in the late 19th century. In his survey of the Nativistic-Religious Movements of Africa in the second half of the 20th Century, Lanternari¹⁵ referring to the research of Messenger¹⁶ noted that the Spiritualist Movements that appeared from Guinea around the 1930 had a large following from the Annang people of the Calabar province¹⁷ in Southeast Nigeria. According to Messenger, at the inception of the Spiritualist Movements in Annangland, many of those attracted to the group often made their home there, sleeping in pews and in the church grounds so that they could be near to the benevolent power of the Holy Spirit¹⁸. Lanternari further explained that in the Spiritualist Movements:

The Holy Spirit is cast in a magical role as coadjutor of God to heal wounds and cure sickness, to give wealth and longevity, to destroy the forces of evil in all forms...The entire congregation usually fall prey to convulsive seizures during the service: many rise to make prophecies, others roll on the floor...shouting incomprehensible words through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit¹⁹.

Furthermore, the Spiritualists like the Diviners in the traditional Annang religion were said to be fond of foretelling the miracles to be wrought for those who become converts. These Spiritualists were operating by prognostication as the Holy Spirit afforded them the power²⁰. According to Lanternari, a test case for these early Spiritualists came in 1936-37 when a plague by an invasion of locusts occurred in Annangland, the Spiritualists tried in vain to stop the invasion and to improve the lives of the followers, but many still died of various causes. The Spiritualists looked upon and *explained-away* the disaster as the revenge of the ancient gods the people had forsaken. The important point to note is that they were unable to reverse the invasion of the locusts. Nearly half a century after the research of Lanternari, sham Spiritual Movements still remains a dreadful force to be reckoned with in rural Annangland. The weights of their impact are on women's health.

In a dialogue with a female Spiritualist²¹, she claimed that she was specially called and prepared by God to minister to women's spiritual needs. According to her, this call was confirmed in prophecies in the various churches group she visited where she was always spotted out as a *Shepherd* of God's flock. She eventually began her Spiritual Movement in 1997 particularly to cure women. From her *spiritual* experiences, she noted that the causes of infertility and barrenness in women could be the refusal of spouses to perform traditional marriage rites. Secondly, she claimed that the *disappearances* of wombs in women and the subsequent *transfer* of the wombs to the coven of witches are very common occurrences and the causes of infertility in women. Witches, according to her analysis often cause these *disappearances* and *transfers* of female wombs to their covens. Thirdly, she identified abortion as a common cause of infertility in women. But for her, any form of infertility can be treated spiritually. She said that God has a store house of spare *human parts* especially *female reproductive parts* in heaven and can and does give it to any one who has lost hers at her- the Spiritualist-intervention provided the woman in need is willing and is faithful in performing prescribed *assignments*.

Her methodologies in diagnosing/curing of diseases are: prayer, prophecy, revelation and dreams. According to her, through dreams, God has performed blood transfusion on some of her clients. She also claimed that cases that ordinarily would have entailed surgery have been so performed spiritually by God. She also asserted that any case to be refereed to the hospital (which is often rare though) must be revealed to her in a dream or through prophecy. It is important to note that her methodology are very subjective and leaves much to be desired. It is difficult for instance, to understand why the refusal or inability to perform the rather expensive

traditional marriage rites can cause infertility in women. While not doubting the efficacy of spiritual healing, scientific methodologies need to be resorted to greatly in the many cases of female infertility.

At the Christ Redeemed Church²², the female Spiritualist who acts as a midwife has no form of formal or western education at all. She has not accepted to be trained as a Traditional Birth Attendant by the Team that conducts the Safe Motherhood Education in her locality. She claims that her powers are from God and therefore she cannot subject herself to human training. What is to be expected in this situation is clear. In this Religious Movement, I found no few than ten pregnant women. In an interview with them, they express strong belief in the *expertise* of the woman and that they have been staying under her surveillance since the sixth month of their pregnancy. One of the Leaders of the Church²³ also claimed that their untrained *Spiritual* Midwife has been blessed greatly by God and consequently, she does handles difficult deliveries of babies. But contrary to their claims, and in-depth investigation during the field trips revealed that at times, all is not well with pregnant women in this Spiritualist home. Although, the pregnant women here undergo series of Spiritual exercises like fasting and deliverance²⁴ with the prayer-band of the church, they often encounter difficult cases that calls for thorough medical assistance and attention. A trained Traditional Birth Attendant²⁵ in the locality informed me that she is often sent for to assist in difficult deliveries in this Spiritualist home. According to her, when the cases are beyond her competence she usually refers such women to the hospital. She also said that sometimes women suffer greatly due to lack of technical-know-how of the Spiritualist. There are many of these kinds of Spiritualist Movements scattered over Annangland and their impacts on females' health are enormous. These movements are also a symbol of the need for relief for women. Very often, these religious specialists discourage orthodox medications. The unhealthy effects of these on women's health are only to be expected.

EFFECTS OF SPIRITUALIST MOVEMENTS ON WOMEN'S HEALTH

"Science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind"²⁶.

Albert Einstein

From the data collected from the fieldwork for this research²⁷, women and girls form the greatest clients who seek the services of the Spiritualists. In the bid to understand the effects of the Spiritualists Movements on females' health, I have drawn examples from three principal and authentic sources in Annangland:

1. From an experienced Gynaecologist born in Annangland and practiced medicine for years in Annangland.
 2. From an Assistant Nursing Officer who has been in the Safe Motherhood Programme in Annang Villages since 1983.
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3. From the Data of the field research I have conducted in the area of females reproductive health in villages of Annangland.
4. Information from Trained Traditional Birth Attendants.

1. FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF AN ANNNANG GYNAECOLOGIST

On September 29, 2001, I organized a reproductive health rally at a village²⁸ in Annangland and invited a cross section of women, men and children to share views on the effects of religion on female reproductive health. A seasoned Consultant Obstetrician & Gynaecologist whom I invited to share his experiences on the cases of the interference of the Spiritualists Movement with women's health reported the following:

This case history presented here is not fairy tales; this is indeed only one out of many such pathetic cases, which I saw, in my professional practice²⁹:

The Case of a 25 year old post-NYSC Graduate Staff of a Government Ministry³⁰

Mrs. "C", married to a Civil Engineer, was expecting her "first baby in two weeks" time when she was referred to me from a Government Antenatal Clinic for possible external cephalic version (ECV) because the baby was presenting by the buttocks (breech) instead of the usual head-down presentation (vertex). (ECV is the procedure usually performed between 32nd and 37th weeks of pregnancy, whereby the doctor, by manipulating with his both hands on the expectant mother's abdomen – one over the baby's head and the other over the buttocks, - gently turns a breech to the normal vertex presentation). Clinical examination showed her case to be one of a large breech at 38 weeks gestation, in a primigravida, (woman having her first pregnancy) with borderline pelvis. Based on these findings and the confirmatory X-ray film she had brought along from the Antenatal Clinic, I carefully explained the position to her and the husband with whom she had come along, pointing out the impossibility of a successful ECV and emphasizing that the only way for her to have a safe delivery of the child was by caesarian section. The young woman almost leapt from her chair with the cry "Oh, No!" while the husband calmly asked, "No other way, Doctor?" "No other safe way", I replied, adding "any attempt to deliver your wife vaginally of this baby as a breech will be disastrous both to her and the baby". They were obviously disappointed because they had come to me with great hope (having been "assured" by the referral clinic staff, of my "expertise" in ECV) that a successful version would save her from caesarian operation. Fear was now written on her face – fear of the operating theatre, fear of the likelihood of her subsequent deliveries being by caesarian operation (having heard about the out-dated dictum: "once a caesarean, always a caesarean"). I deeply appreciated their plight but re-emphasized that there was "no other safe way" of delivering the baby. They appeared to have accepted my professional advice and so I booked the young lady for elective caesarean operation in a week's time. The X-ray film was retained in the Clinic Office.

Two days to her admission date, she returned this time with her mother, to request for the return of her X-ray film as her family had decided

against her delivery by caesarean operation! I was stunned and asked "why?" the answer was simply "our Church Pastor wants to pray over the X-ray film so that the baby can turn to the head-down position and allow for easy vaginal delivery". "Christ!" I exclaimed and then asked, "my dear, do you really believe that nonsense?" adding, "let me speak to your husband first". Her mother, fuming interrupted: "Comfort (not her real name) is my daughter and it's not the husband right to decide on this matter. Give us back the X-ray for God will work wonders on my daughter through our pastor's prayer over the X-ray and the baby will be delivered vaginally". To prevent a scene in my consulting room, I returned the X-ray film to them and wished them good luck. But deep in my heart I felt sorry for the young lady, knowing that the pastor's prayer certainly would not work and attempting vaginal delivery anywhere would spell disaster for both mother and child.

Subsequent care was in the Church prayer/maternity home. Eventually she went into labour there and had a vaginal delivery! But before you say "Alleluia!" "Praise the Lord!" listen to the pathetic facts of the "successful" vaginal delivery: (i) the Pastor's prayer over the X-ray film did not work; (ii) the vaginal delivery was achieved through heartless, criminal forceful pulling out of the breech; (iii) the baby was "delivered" battered and dead; (iv) the young woman's lower uterine segment was badly torn in addition to her sustaining an extensive 3rd degree perennial tear, and (v) she was in a state of shock from blood loss. However, emergency admission to the Hospital for blood transfusion and surgery saved her life. Yes, indeed she survived but the door to motherhood, the pride and joy of every married woman was closed to her for ever, because the uterine tear was very extensive for conservative repair that the uterus had to be removed. Fortunately for her, the availability of an experienced medical team with adequate facilities including blood transfusion, for correct and timely surgery (hysterectomy and the repair of the 3rd degree perennial tear) saved her from the tragedy of faecal/urinary incontinence (that would inevitably have compounded her problem).

That surely was another "achievement" for Spiritual Churches!

This case narrated is only but an iceberg in the ocean. He further attested that many more similar cases, with some ending in maternal death, are still occurring in this our country as can be attested to by other experienced medical practitioners involved in the health care of women. He seriously castigated all persons who have encouraged the so-called spiritual or miraculous cures, whereby the name of Jesus Christ is used to cheat, exploit, maim or kill our unwary women.

2 THE EXPERIENCES FROM THE SAFE MOTHERHOOD PROGRAMME IN ANNANGLAND SINCE 1983.

In an interview with the Assistant Nursing Officer³¹ in-charge of the Safe Motherhood Programme at St Mary's hospital, Urua Akpan, Essien Udim Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State. She narrated how the incessant interference of the Spiritualist Movements in females' reproductive health has led to the initiation of The Safe Motherhood programme in 1983. According to her, the hospital witnessed so many cases of women's reproductive organs

being destroyed due to interference by Spiritualist. Despite the Safe Motherhood programme, the hospital is still witnessing cases of women being abused by unskilled Spiritualists. From 1983- 2001, six hundred and ninety-seven (697) cases of women whose childbirth were unsuccessfully attempted by Spiritualists have been referred to the hospital. Of these number, forty-seven of them died before anything could be done to save their lives, a greater percentage of them sustained server injury in their reproductive organs some lost the babies³². Despite these programmes of enlightenment and services, women are still vulncrable to the problems of Spiritualists who delved into medical cases they know nothing about. She narrated the case of a female nurse who was attending antenatal clinics normally. In one of the church services, it was prophesied that her mother-in-law would kill her in the hospital if she opted to deliver there. She decided to have her baby in a prayer house. In an attempt to deliver the baby her health condition was worsening. She was rushed to the hospital but she died just on arrival. According to her, there are very many cases of interference by Spiritualist in female health issues.

3. DATA FROM FIELD RESEARCH³³

In the process of this research, I visited a number of villages³⁴ and held Focus Group Discussions with many women in order to know how the Spiritualist Movements are affecting their reproductive health. Here are our findings:

This is a true-life experience of Mrs. X³⁵ who has been married for ten years without a child. The pressure of the patriarchal society and particularly that of the husband's family made her desperate and willing to take all kinds of spiritual risks in the bid to have children. She resorted to spiritual treatment when according to her the medical had *failed*. This spiritual search took her to thirteen Spiritualists Movements and each gave her the under-listed *assignments* respectively to carry out in order to become pregnant:

- i. She was asked by the Spiritualist to sweep the floor of the prayer house, pack the sand to the Spiritualist who mixed it with water and olive oil for her to drink.
 - ii. In the second place, she was asked to plant some plantain trees that had been blessed by the spiritualist. The number of the new offshoots would represent the number of Children the woman would have.
 - iii. She was again asked to buy a chain and padlock, these were to be used to open her womb that had been locked by witches. The ritualistic locking and opening the padlock was to open her womb spiritually for her to become pregnant.
 - iv. At another place, she was to buy assorted fruits and olive oil. The Spiritualist ritually sprinkled the olive oil on the fruits seven times. She was then asked to eat the fruits along seven streets and this would cause her to be pregnant.
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- v. She was asked to buy seven new pants and to bring N7 [in coins]. The Spiritualist turned each of the pants and coin around her head for seven times. These actions were repeated four times in her father's compound and three times in her husband's family home. This was to result in pregnancy.
- vi. In another Spiritualist's home, vegetables and fruits were distributed. She was instructed to eat the fruits on her way home while the vegetables were to be cooked and eaten with her husband at home.
- vii. Flowers were distributed ceremonially and randomly by the Spiritualist and each twig received were to represent the children she was later to bear. She managed to receive five twigs in the hope of having five children.
- viii. The eighth Spiritualist explained to her that the reason for her infertility was that her womb had be spiritually shared by witches into sixty parts and each part was kept at the witches coven. To redeem her womb for fertility, she was asked to pay to the spiritualist one thousand naira for each of the sixty covens. This money she was told was to be used for the spiritual articles needed to redeem her shared womb from the covens.
- ix. She was again to buy three children-size clothes, a wrapper and 60 bottles of olive oil. The Spiritualist explained that this would be used to redeem her womb from the witches' world.
- x. Another Spiritualist asked her to buy seven bars of keysoap. A piece were to be cut from each bar and each piece used for bathing for 3 days with rainwater. The ritualistic bathing was to be done by the Spiritualist for a total of twenty-one days.
- xi. She was directed by yet another Spiritualist to drink some concoctions for 3 days, take enema for one day and make saraka³⁶ for children. After that she was asked to fast for three days, 6.00 a.m. to 3.00 a.m. Then clay was robbed on her belly for three days and these utterances "let this womb be fruitful in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit" were made by the Spiritualist three times.
- xii. She was asked to stand naked at mid-night before the altar and pray for fertility. This action would disgrace her spiritual enemies and she would have as many children as she wanted.
- xiii. She was to invite seven members each from her family as well as from her husband's family for judgement at the home of the Spiritualist with the sum of two hundred naira per family. The Spiritualist would inform them who the witch is in the family. Then one hundred and twenty naira was to be paid to the spiritualist to break the covenant of fruitfulness in the witchcraft coven.

After the thirteenth *assignments* or rituals, she decided to call off the search, as she did not become pregnant any way. These spiritual *assignments* have kept her impoverished, sick and emotionally unstable, as she did not become

pregnant after all the ordeal. Some of these *assignments* are clearly unhygienic and could cause other health complications. It is to be noted that the woman in question is not an illiterate. Furthermore, these *assignments* are so ridiculous that it is difficult to see how the fulfillment of such *task* could lead to pregnancy. She was willing to do anything if only the Spiritualists would solve her problems of fertility. It is worth noting that none of the Spiritualist suggested the option of medical treatment. The Spiritualists most often trivialize the causes of female infertility and lay the blame at the doorstep of Witches rather than encourage thorough medical examinations or the humane option of child-adoption if reproduction is impossible.

Case 2: The woman in this second case said she had been married for 12 years and had no child. She and her husband were directed to a Spiritualist to assist in solving their infertility problem. The Spiritualist as is characteristic of the trade prayed for her and gave her *assignments*. Her *assignment* was to pick up some quantity of sand from seven footprints at a road junction. The Spiritualist then mixed this with olive oil and water. She was to drink this mixture once a day. The constant drinking of sand caused her untold stomach disorders. She went back to inform the Spiritualists about the pains she was experiencing. The Spiritualist added another *assignment* of fasting from 6.00 a. m. to 6.00 p.m. for seven days. The Spiritualists explained that the enemies caused the pains she was experiencing and that the fasting would relieve her of the pains. That was not to be. The *assignments* however did not yield any fruitful result.

4. INFORMATION FROM THE TRAINED TRADITIONAL BIRTH ATTENDANTS

We conducted three sessions of Focus Group Discussions with some trained Traditional Birth Attendants³⁷, at different locations in Annangland and they confirmed that many deliveries around their villages were undertaken by Spiritualists. They also said that they are sometimes called to assist in the Spiritualists Home³⁸. They narrated a number of cases of mismanagement of deliveries in the Spiritual Churches. Madam Grace Effiong Akpan and Madam Grace Sunday said they were invited to an Apostolic Church and the Church of Christ respectively in their villages to assist in the case of delivery where the placenta would not descend after the baby was delivered. Madam Mary Etim Akpan also said that she was invited to The Apostolic Church to assist in delivering a breech, which was not possible though, the woman in Labour had to be rushed to the hospital. Madam Mma Atim Sampson Umoren also shared an experience that she was asked by the members of *Edidem* Church to assist in the delivery of a woman who had a Ceaseran Session in the previous delivery. She advised the church members that the woman be referred to the hospital to avoid possible complications since she had a Cesarean Session before. This intervention saved the life of both mother and child. Madam Margaret Emmanuel Umana narrated an incident in a spiritualist home where she was invited for assistance. The placenta descended before the baby. The Labour was very complicated and she was unable to manage it. She encouraged the Spiritualist and the family of the woman in question to refer the case to the hospital. Madam Mary Etim Akpan informed us that a pregnant woman who was under her care and was almost due to deliver was

abruptly taken from her to a Spiritualist Home according to a prophetic message received about her there. The prophetic message was that the mother of the pregnant woman was a witch and had *tied-up* the birth –carnal thereby making delivery impossible. On the Way to the Spiritualist, the labour started. The husband rushed back to inform Madam Mary Etim Akpan who was by proximity nearer. She attended to her in a nearby compound and the delivery was without any hitch. These cases raise doubts on the authenticity of many Spiritualists operating in our society.

SUGGESTED REMEDIES TO THE SPIRITUALISTS AND FEMALE HEALTH PROBLEMS

In a religious pluralistic Annang society, the Spiritualists Movements play important role in health issues of women. I proffer the following suggestions to aid in curbing the menace of sham spiritualist Movements.

1. PSYCHIATRIC AND PSYCHOLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF THE SPIRITUALISTS

For any Spiritualist to operate freely in the society particularly those dealing with the issues of female health, the government should ensure that such a person undergoes a psychiatric and psychological examination to ensure that such a person is in a sound mental condition and is also psychologically balanced. This is because their activities and the *assignments* they give to women have sometimes led to disastrous ends for the women who hold them in high esteem. Some of their activities seem to suggest that a good number of them could have psychological problems. Those so identified are not to be allowed to operate freely in the society to safeguard the health of citizens.

2. ALLIANCE WITH THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH

The policy makers and the government should ensure that there exist a pact between the Ministry of Health and the Spiritualists. A form of Registration should be encouraged with the Ministry of Health to ensure supervision and monitoring of the activities of the Spiritualists. This would go a long way to protecting females' reproductive health. Each *assignment* given to any woman is to be expurgated by the representatives of the Ministry of Health to ensure that it is hygiene and not pernicious to reproductive health. The Spiritualists should be made to work in very close collaboration with the Medical Practitioners to ensure objectivity and sound handling of cases. Each Spiritualist may be assigned to a medical doctor so that they can share experiences towards the wholistic treatment of their clients. Periodical seminars, workshops, Camp meeting on female reproductive health should be conducted for the Spiritualists so that they may have basic knowledge of female reproductive anatomy and physiology to update a wholistic knowledge on women issues.

3. LEGAL ACTIONS ON PROPHECIES³⁹ THAT FAILED

The government at all levels should set up structures where all cases of failed prophecies that result in the death of pregnant women in the Spiritualist homes should be documented and reported. These cases should be made public and the Spiritualists involved made to give explanations. Legal actions could then be instituted against such spiritualists and this would act as deterrent to others who may wish to engage in such practices.

4. THE FORMATION OF INDEPENDENT MONITORING TEAM

Each village is to be encouraged to have an independent monitoring team to check the activities of the Spiritualists for the protection of females' reproductive health. This team would make periodical reports to the government of the obnoxious things that go on in any Spiritualist Movements in their locality.

CONCLUSION

In the Annang patriarchal society, women suffer considerably in the process of achieving pregnancy or in fulfilling reproductive function of childbirth. Women who are married are expected to give birth to children at all cost. In this traditional society, very little or no thoughts are given to the possible impotency of a man, which may result in childlessness as well. The religious climate of this patriarchal society encourages women to seek the aid of Spiritualists in the bid to solve these problems. Economic factors and considerations have led to the multiplication of unauthentic Spiritualists in the Annang society. Consequently, women in this society are easy victims of Spiritual sham. Many women consent to undergoing *assignments* pernicious to their well being as long as such are prescribed by the spiritualists. To reverse this trend, the big *Iroko tree*⁴⁰ must fall. The Annang settings of the patriarchal society need to be revised so that women may begin to look inward and consider what is good for their health first and foremost rather than spend their lives for the expectation of the society only. Women need to live without fear and maintain a certain degree of equilibrium so as to understand the implications of reproductive health matters. The government of the land and policy makers need to consider the health consequences of sham Spiritualists on women and enforce laws to eradicate any form of religion that is maleficent on female health.

END NOTES

¹ McKenna, Brieger & Libersaf, Henry : *Miracles do Happen* Veritas Publications, Dublin 1 Ireland, 1987. See also: *Genesis* 17:15-22; Gospel of St. Matthew 9:18-26ff, Gospel of St. Luke 1: 24-26ff.

² St John's Gospel (Book of Signs) 4-6

³ McKenna, Brieger op. cit.

⁴ The Annang people are the second largest ethnic group in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. They occupy the northwestern part of the State. Their territory lies between latitudes 4.25 and 7 north and longitudes 7.15 and 9.30 east [See Enang 1979:5ff]. The Ngwa and Ndokki Igbo of Abia State are their northern neighbours while to the west; they are bounded by the Isurogu Igbo of Abia State. *The Ibibio-land forms their eastern and southern boundaries. The landscape is generally flat and low-lying with no point rising to 300 feet above sea level. Vegetationally, the area lies within the rich forest zone, which aids the growth of palm-wine trees, palm trees and huge lofty tropical vegetation. There are two main seasons: the wet or rainy season, which starts from April to October, and the dry season from November to March. The typical rainfall pattern is bi-modal with a two week spell or break in August commonly referred to as "August Break". The harsh harmattan wind occurs between December and January. Akwa Ibom State is located just north of equator and within the humid tropics, consequently, the Annang land is generally humid [Ekong 1983:1]*

⁵ Abasi Ibom is the Annang name for the Supreme God who creates all things.

⁶ Messenger, S. C. "Religious Acculturation among the Annang Ibibio", in *Continuity and Change in Africa Culture*, ed. Bascom and Herskovits (Chicago, 1959. Pp.281ff.

7ENANG, K. The African Experience of Salvation: Based on the Annang Independent Churches of Nigeria. London: M.& C. Publisher, 1979, p.22.

8 The Literally translation means: The Ghost of Adultery.

9 In a Focus Group Discussion on July 2 2002, on the Issue of Ekpo Nka Owo with a group of 12 women from Ikot Osurau and Abiakpo villages in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area, the women narrated that they were recently informed that one woman from their village died in Lagos during child birth. A cause of the death they identified as punishment from *Ekpo Nka Owo*. According to the women, they claimed that this woman would not have died had she not committed adultery. In their opinion, the woman who died did not believe that *Ekpo Nka Owo* would spot her out in the far away Lagos.

10 Diviners are traditionally known as *Abia Idiong*

11 C.A. Dime, "Divination: The Penumbra of African Traditional Religion", *Orita: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies*, vol., xiv, No. 2, (Dec. 1982), pp. 90-107.

12 Ibid P. 120

13 Harold W. Tuner "The Approach to Africa's Religious Movements in African Perspective 1976 Vol. 2 Religious Innovation in Modern African Society. Afrika-Studiecentrum, Netherlands, P. 14

14 The term *Assignments* refers to the rituals that the Clients in the Spiritualist Movements are given to do in order to achieve their desires.

15 Lanternari, V. *The Religion of the Oppressed: A Study of Modern Messianic Cult*. London: Macqibbon and Kee, 1963. P. 48-49.

16 S.C. Messenger, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 279ff.

17 Prior to the creation of Akwa Ibom State in 1987, The Annang people were in the Calabar Province

18 Messenger, S.C. *Op. Cit* P. 279

19 Lanternari, V. *Op.Cit*, 1963, P. 48.

20 Ibid P. 279

21 Interview with Madam Matilda Udom, aged 48 years on June 9, 2002 of Abasi Ima Prayer Ministry.

22 Rev. George Wilson Udouko founded Christ Redeemed Church in July 24 1983.

23 Interview with Pastor Mfon Tom Udo, June 20, 2002.

24 The Founder of this Spiritualist Movement Rev. George UdoUko explained that most of the Pregnant Women are admitted in to the Church with Ghost seated spiritually on their Laps. Their enemies who would not want the woman to have a safe delivery send these Ghosts. These Ghosts unless is exorcised and the woman thus delivered, childbirth would led to maternal mortality. This interview date was on 4 July 2002 at his residence in Abiakpo Ikot Abasi Inyang, Obot Akara Local Government Area.

25 Deaconess Mfon E. Nelson told me that she offers great assistance to the Spiritualist [in the Christ Redeemed Church] who claimed that she has no need for training. Deaconess Mfon was trained as a Traditional Birth Attendant at St. Mary's Hospital Urua Akpan in 1989. Interview date was 4 July, 2002.

26 N.S. Xavier, M.D. *The Two Faces of Religion A psychiatrist's View*. Theological Publications, St. Peter's Seminary, Malleswaram West, Bangalore, India. 1989, p. vi.

27 Field Work 1. Interviews with women in the Rural villages

28 This rally was organized at Ikot Osurua, Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area, where I was born and breed and where I have witnessed innumerable interference of Spiritualist on female's health.

29 Culled from a Paper "Effects of Religion on Female Health" presented On September 29, 2001 by Obong (Dr) Daniel P. Essien. *MB.BS (London), FMCOG, FWACS, FRCOG*.

30 Culled from a Paper "Effects of Religion on Female Health" presented On September 29, 2001 by Obong (Dr) Daniel P. Essien. *MB.BS (London), FMCOG, FWACS, FRCOG*. He has also published these stories in *The Sorrows of Eve Desmac Medical Ltd. Abak Nigeria. P.324-331*.

31 Interview with Mrs. Ekaette Umoh- Assistant Nursing Officer-Urua Akpan Hospital

12/06/2002

32 Ibid. These patients are often referred to the VVF hospital at repairs and surgery.

33 These Data has been collected from the fieldwork from 1998 till date.

34 Ikot Osurua, Abiakpo Ntak Inyang, Urua Akpan, Abiakpo Ikot Abasi Inyang, Ibiakpan Ikot Abia, Ikot Inyang.

35 For reasons of Privacy the woman in question requested that she be kept anonymous.

36 This is a traditional ceremony, which involves the cooking rice for children who must eat it with their fingers. After eating, the Children would rub their dirty fingers on the belly of the woman. By so doing, the children are spiritually asking a new baby to *enter* the woman's womb.

37 Madam Stella Johnna Akpaka from Ubon Akwa, trained in 1989, Madam Mfon Edward Bassey of Abia Okpo Ikot Abasi Inyang trained in 1989, Ete Titus Umana of Imama trained in 1986, Madam Atim Sampson Umoren from Nto Eton trained in 1998, Madam Grace Emmanuel and Madam Elizabeth Okon of Ibiakpan Ikot Abia, of Obot Akara Local Government Area, who were trained in 1984 by the Team of the Safe Motherhood Programme complained that the Independent Churches around the village had taken over the cases of delivery from them and as a result they have very few clients.

38 Deaconess Mfon E. Nelson said that when ever there are cases of difficult deliveries at Christ Redeemed Church, she is often sent for to assist.

39 Jeremiah 14:14 -The Prophecies that fails are not from God. The Propounder of failed Prophecies is to be regarded as a dupe and treated as such.

40 The patriarchal structure is so deeply rooted and operating in the Annangland that I am willing to describe it as an Iroko tree because of its firm grip of every societal fabric.

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THE JERUSALEM BIBLE: See – The Book of Genesis 17:15-22; The Gospel of St. Matthew 9:18-26- Gospel of St. Luke 1:24-26 etc. Cf St John's Gospel (Book of Signs) 4-6

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