

## **Culture and Mental Health in Nigeria: A Qualitative Study of Berom, Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo Cultural Beliefs**

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**Abstract :** Cultural understandings of mental health problems are frequently overshadowed by the western conceptualizations. Research on culture and mental health in the Nigerian context seems to be lacking. This study examined the linguistic understandings and cultural beliefs that have implications for mental health among the Berom, Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo people of Nigeria. A purposive sample of 53 participants underwent semi-structured interviews that lasted approximately 55 minutes each. Of the N=53 participants, n=26 were psychology-aligned practitioners and n=27 'laypersons'. Participants were recruited from four states in Nigeria, Plateau, Kaduna, Ekiti, and Enugu. All participants were self-identified as members of their ethnic groups who speak and understand their native-languages, cultural beliefs, and also are domiciled within their ethnic communities. Thematic analysis using socio-constructionism from a critical-realist position was employed to explore the participants' beliefs about mental health, and the clash between western trained practitioners' views and the cultural beliefs of the 'laypersons'. Data analysis found three main themes that re-emerged across the four ethnic samples: (i) beliefs about mental health problems as a spiritual curse (ii) traditional and religious healing are used more often than western mental health care (iii) low levels of mental health awareness. In addition, the Nigerian traditional and religious healing are also revealed to be helpful as the practice gives prominence to the native-languages, religious and cultural values. However, participants described the role of 'false' traditional or religious healers in communities as being potentially harmful. Finally, due to the current lack of knowledge about mental health problems, awareness creation and re-orientation may be beneficial for both rural and urban Nigerian communities.

**Keywords :** beliefs cultures, health mental, languages religions, values

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