

# ZOOTHERAPY: THE USE OF DOG MEAT FOR TRADITIONAL AFRICAN MEDICINE IN KANKE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA

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## **Abstract**

*This study centers on fragrant meat consumption which is a cultural phenomenon associated with some communities in Nigeria. The healing of human ailments using therapeutics based on medicines obtained from animals or animal parts is known as zoo-therapy. The utilization of animals and animal parts in the preparation of several products employed in diverse ways for health care delivery via traditional medical practices enjoys very wide acceptance across Nigeria. Thus, this research is aimed at documenting the tradition practice of the use of dog meat for therapeutic purposes in Kanke communities. This study made use of a purely exploratory research design, with qualitative instruments as the method of data collection. Consequently, the study revealed that Kanke people uses fragrant meat to repel witches and wizards, neutralize poison, boost body immunity and libido and make love charms. The study also provides the basis for further scientific validation of the efficacy of various traditional zoo-therapeutic measures in the area. Furthermore, the researchers call for more studies on this subject particularly by health institutions so as to boost this spectrum of knowledge and professionally advance it for the treatment of the associated diseases.*

**Keywords:** Dog Meat, Zoo-therapy, Beliefs, Kanke People, Plateau State.

**Introduction**

The healing of human ailments by using therapeutics based on medicines obtained from animals or ultimately derived from them is known as zoo-therapy (Eraldo & Costa, 2005). Traditional African medicine, in its diversity and richness has been in existence long before the advent of modern medicine and the people depended largely on traditional medicine as their only source of health care in the past (Adeola, 1992; Soewu & Adekanola, 2011; Okonkwo, 2012; Ejikeme & Ukaegbu, 2013). The World Health Organization stated that traditional medicine refers to health practices, approaches, knowledge and beliefs incorporating animal and mineral-based medicines, spiritual therapies, manual techniques and exercises, applied singularly or in combination to treat, diagnose and prevent illnesses or maintain well-being (WHO, 2000).

Traditional medicine was further defined by WHO (2000) as the sum total of all knowledge and practices, whether explicable or not, used in diagnosis, prevention and elimination of physical, mental or social imbalance and relying exclusively on practical experiences and observations handed down from generation to generation, whether verbally or in writing (Adesina, 2007; Soewu & Adekanola, 2011). These descriptions incorporate several elements of traditional medicine and encompass the various forms of medicines and therapies such as herbal medicine, massage, homoeopathy, mud bath, music therapy, wax bath, reflexology, dance therapy, hydrotherapy, mind and spirit therapies, self-exercise therapies, radiation and vibration, osteopathy, aromatherapy, preventive medicine, radiant heat therapy, therapeutic fasting and dieting spinal manipulation, psychotherapy among others (Adesina, 2007).

Zoo-therapeutic practices in Nigeria employ domestic as well as wild species of animals to treat various conditions and situations. In some instances, even waste products like urine and faeces of animals are employed in preparing zoo-therapeutic recipes used to treat some conditions in humans. Appeasing gods, witches, deities and ancestral spirits through the use of sacrifices also constitutes an integral part of the zoo-therapeutic healing systems in many societies in Nigeria (Soewu, 2008; Ejikeme & Ukaegbu, 2013; Opemipo & Osinem, 2019).

The use of animals for medicinal purposes is part of a body of traditional knowledge which is increasingly becoming more relevant to discussions on public health policies, and sustainable management of natural resources, biological prospecting, and patents (Okonkwo, 2012; Alves & Rosa, 2013). Fragrant meat is the flesh and other parts derived from dogs.

In Nigeria the use of dog and its meat for traditional treatment of ailments is a cultural phenomenon and the beliefs about its effectiveness is peculiar to some selected societies. Some ethnic groups in Nigeria cherish

the meat not only for its taste, but also due to its perceived medicinal properties (Garba, et al., 2013). As Marques (1994) states, "All human cultures which present a structured medical system will utilize animals for some medical solutions".

The utilization of animals and animal parts in the preparation of several products employed in diverse ways for curative purposes via traditional medical practices enjoys very wide acceptability across some societies in Nigeria. Thus, traditional medicine plays such a significant role in meeting the health care needs of the majority of Nigerians. As stated by Gamaniel (2005), about 75 - 80% of Nigeria's population patronizes the services of traditional doctors, an instance of which can be seen in the utilization of dog meat for medical purposes in Kanke communities.

While, some ethnic groups in Nigeria like the Ngas, Goemai and Mwangavul consider the consumption of dog meat as their cultural delicacy. Others like the Tiv of Central Nigeria and Jarawa of Plateau State forbid eating of dog meat whether for religious or social purposes.

More so, many people believe that eating of dog meat helps in building their immunity to diseases and also protect themselves against attacks from enemies (spiritual or physical). So many other people in Nigeria who eat dog meat believe it brings them supernatural powers, protect them from fatal diseases and cure illnesses. The meat is cleverly marketed to several people for cure and prevention of malaria as well as repels activities of witches and wizards (Brown, 2017). This brings about another important component of zoo-therapy in Nigeria, seen in the use of incantations and mystical word chants. Disease is considered as possession by evil spirits and should be treated using some natural products along with incantations (Sawandi, 2006; Soewu, 2008). These incantations are often reflective of the basic components in the preparation; the perceived behavioral and ecological features as well as mythological conceptions that informed the choice of that particular animal being prepared for healing (Soewu, 2008).

In some parts of Nigeria where fragrant meat is consumed it is believed that witches /wizards are too scared to attack people who eat dogs because dog meat neutralizes their powers, partly due to the dog's penetrating eyes (Brown, 2017). As a popular delicacy among the Ngas people in Kanke, dog meat is not only medicinal but could be used for protective charms and love portions (Garba, et al., 2013).

Elsewhere, in South-west Nigeria particularly in Ogun, annually (in the month of July) a three-day festival is held celebrate Ogun, the god of iron. Live dogs are sacrificed by tearing them in halves, from limb to limb. Other animals are also sacrificed to Ogun during this event. However, the highlight of the festival/sacrifice is when the dogs are torn in two and each

dog's head is ripped off and its body flung through the air as bystanders are covered in blood splatters (Brown, 2017).

In Burkina Faso, dog meat is a cultural luxury; it is usually eaten if someone has a death threatening dream. This is done as a sacrifice and a way of warding off death (Laura, 2017). In Poland, Dog Lard is Considered Medicinal. Apart from focusing on the consumption of the muscle or flesh of the animal, some people also use dog fat in making lard. It is believed that dog lard has medicinal uses, mostly involving joint pains and body aches (Laura, 2017).

In Ghana, dog meat is believed to have spiritual values. Dogs are sometimes eaten because it is believed to keep the body in safe state. They believe that since dog protects people faithfully while alive, when it dies and the people eat it, it guards their flesh as well (Laura, 2017).

The knowledge on the use of different animals in traditional medicine by different ethnic communities is generally passed orally from one generation to another. This knowledge is sometimes lost with the death of the elderly knowledgeable person. For most communities that eat dog meat, this is not merely about culinary preference or economic rationale, but is deeply embedded in traditional practices and holds strong symbolic values (Walraven, 2002). However, literatures on the rationale for dog consumption and traditional uses are scanty except newspaper tales. The paucity of research in this area informed the basis for this study. Hence, it unpacks the social and cultural drivers of dog meat slaughter and consumption among the Kanke people of Plateau State Nigeria.

### **Research Objectives**

The use of dog meat for traditional medicine towards the cure, prevention and continued immunity over diseases in Kanke communities is an essential ancient cultural practice that has survived into the present time. Claims from oral tradition and oral history gathered amongst the Kanke people indicate that, this traditional practice preceded the advent of Western contact with the African people. However, this fantastic African Indigenous Knowledge (AIK) is gradually going into extinct as many practitioners dies without transmitting the knowledge to younger generations. More so, seen that this traditional practice is difficult to discover through the investigation of archaeological sites in the area, it became pertinent to document the knowledge and its practice for the benefit of future generations. This is largely done to save the knowledge from going into total collapse and disappearance from the future Kanke, Nigerian and African societies.

### **Research Methodology**

This research paper is anchored on exploratory research design. The study employed qualitative method of data collection (Key Informant

Interview). Data were obtained through field survey conducted in the months of June and July 2018. A total of 29 respondents were selected and interviewed based on their knowledge of use of dog meat for traditional medicine. The study also employed non-participant observation to gather pictorial data. These respondents were native healers, dog buyers and sellers, farmers, and consumers. The respondents were between 17 - 53 years old. The selection of respondents was based on their knowledge of the consumption of dog meat in the communities and its medicinal uses.

The respondents were asked questions about the specific ailments and diseases treated with the use of dog meat. The respondents were also asked the modes of preparation of these remedies and how the medicines are administered, since this kind of information indicates how a given medicine can be therapeutically efficient in terms of the right ingredients, the proper dose, and an appropriate period of preparation/application. According to the respondents, their knowledge of medicine in relation to dog meat was acquired mainly through heredity or their experience about the medicinal values of dog meat.

Content analysis was used in analysing data collected from the Interviews. The analysis of the data was done manually and commenced when all the data from the interviews had been transcribed by the researchers. It was thematically organized and then analyzed using content analysis.

### **Background Information on the Study Area**

The area of study for this research is Kanke Local Government Area, Plateau State, Nigeria. The headquarters of Kanke Local Government Area is Kwal Town. It has an area of 926 km<sup>2</sup> and a projected population of 162,800 (NPC, 2016). Languages spoken in Kanke are Ngas, Myet, Boghom, Taroh and Badawa. Kanke Local Government Area is bordered to the north by Bauchi State, to the west and southwest by Pankshin Local Government Area, to the east by Kanam Local Government Area and to the southeast by Lano-Tano North Local Government Area. While Plateau State is bordered by Bauchi State to the north and northeast, Kaduna State to the northwest, Nasarawa State to the south and southwest and Taraba State to the southeast. It has an area of 26,899 Km<sup>2</sup> and an estimated population of 3.5 million people, it is located between latitude 81° 24'N and 10° 30'N and longitude 81° 32'E and 10° 38'E (Blench et al., 2003).

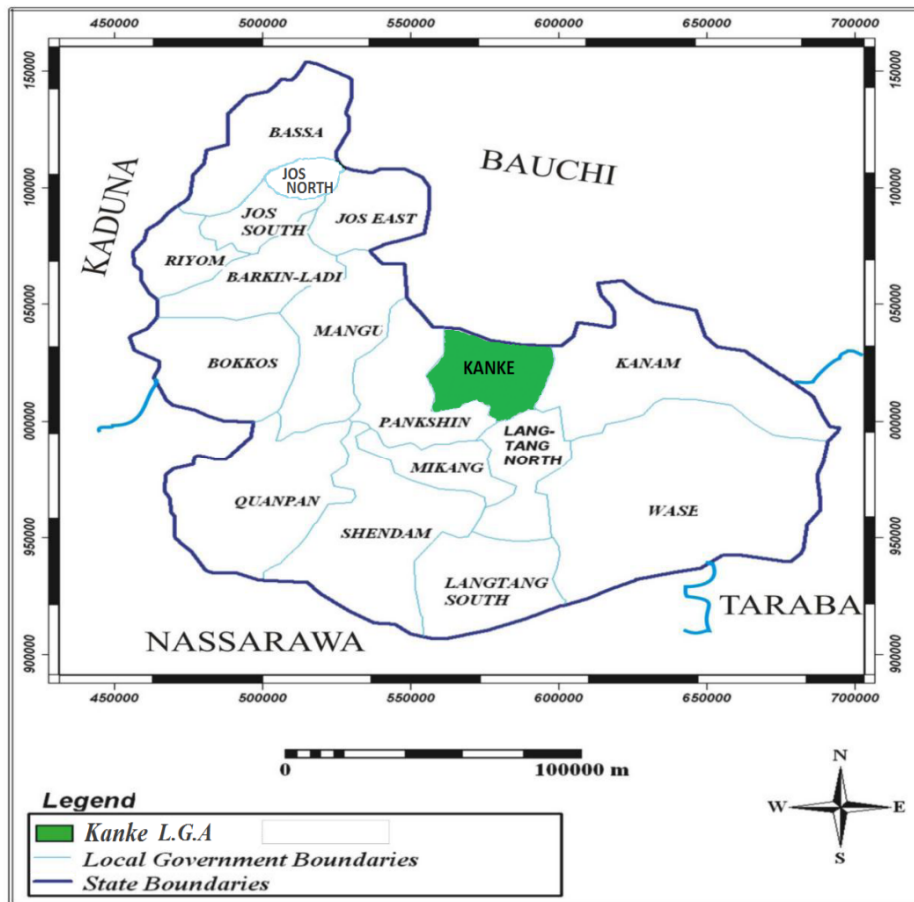


Figure 1: Map of Plateau State showing the Study Area.

Source: Map Gallery, Geography Department, ABU Zaria

### Discussion of Findings

One of the major reasons discovered in the course of the study as a basis for the consumption and use of fragrant meat, is its curative ability. Some ailment or diseases in Kanke are usually treated locally with the use of certain animals (both whole and part) in this case the use of some parts of dog to cure certain illnesses. It is also used to repel witches and wizards, neutralize poison, boost immunity, charms (protective and love charms) and to boost libido.

#### 1. Medicinal Uses of Dog Meat

The consumption and use of fragrant meat by the Kanke people emanates from its curative ability. Ailment or diseases are usually treated locally in the Kanke community with the use of animals (both whole and

part). In this study, emphasis is however on the use of dog meat to cure certain illnesses. A respondent stated thus:

I don't fall sick ordinarily, this is because of the dog meat that I eat. It helps to boost my immunity. Even if I fall sick, I treat myself with herbs that sometimes contain dog meat. Dog meat is the only meat that has no side effect. The last time I visited a hospital was six years ago and that was because I had an accident, I checked to ascertain any case of internal bleeding (Gambo, Pers. Comm., 2018).

From the assertions above it is evident that the respondent believe so much in the effectiveness of using dogs and fragrant meat for medicinal purposes. Fragrant meat is used to treat certain illnesses and also to prevent certain diseases, like malaria. It is also used for skin care especially on little children. Some scientists in China claimed to have found evidence that dogs naturally develops protection against malaria. There is a tiny change in dogs' genes that boosts their immune response to the malaria parasite; the gene is called ADGRE1 and is also found in West African dogs known to have high immunity to malaria attack. It was discovered that people who consume dog meat also develops strong malaria prevention in their body system (Doucleff 2017). The discovery by these scientists corroborates the claim by the people in Kanke of the curative use of fragrant meat that has been practiced and used by them for ages.

Thus, it was also discovered that, dogs are used in Kanke for the treatment of rabies. Rabied dogs are constantly brought to the market for sale; some of these dogs bite their handlers. Thus, from time immemorial the people have been treating themselves traditionally. Even in this present dispensation where formal medical services are available to some extent, they still treat this kind of diseases using the ancient methods. They claim that hospitals are quite expensive, and the cost of treating such diseases ranges from about ₦25,000 to ₦30,000 which is practically unaffordable to them. There are also claims by some respondents that veterinary doctors usually visit Kanke communities in search of rabies remedy from the healers. The healers have however, been restraining from divulging the information to the veterinarians. The treatment is secret and there is a special selection of people that are taught the trade, who are also expected to transfer same to younger generation.

In a similar manner, extracts from dogs are also believed to cure and prevent certain diseases for example, the stool of a black dog can be used to cure poison and sting venom of a scorpion or a snake. Although most scorpion stings don't need medical treatment, in a situation where the symptoms are severe, an individual may need to be treated using the stool of a black dog.

Also, the canine tooth of a dog is tied around the neck of an infant whose teeth are developing (Teething baby). A teething baby suffers discomfort and many other symptoms ranging from, fever, diarrhea, conjunctivitis and irritation. During such periods some mothers in Kanke would tie a dog's canine tooth round the child's neck to prevent the aforementioned experience (Dashi, Pers. Comm., 2018). It was also found that the people use the ribs of the dogs which they mixed with mahogany oil as a balm for aching bones. This belief has transcended histories.

## **2. Use of Dog Meat to Repel Witches/Wizards**

The belief in witchcraft is strong and widespread in Africa. The witchcraft mentality is dominant and informs popular thoughts, understanding and interpretation of different phenomena. Traditionally, African people attribute anything they do not understand and/or cannot explain to witchcraft. Therefore, people tend to attribute to witchcraft issues or 'forces' for which they are not contented with their rational or commonsensical explanations. This is because, human beings have in their quest for meaning and control of nature invested in metaphysical significance certain practices like ritual sacrifice (Igwe, 2010).

Ritual sacrifice among the Kanke people in Plateau State in curbing incidents of witchcraft involves killing of animals especially dogs and using their body parts to prepare some concoctions or perform some ceremony to placate or sway the so called supernatural forces. Some respondents were of the opinion that fragrant meat can be used to ward off witches and wizards hence their reason for consuming the meat. They also believed that dogs have the ability to identify witches and wizards, and be able to protect their owners from such attacks. One of the interviewees stated thus:

People who keep and eat dogs cannot be attacked by witches and wizards, the dogs will see them coming and alert its owner. (Gambo, Pers. Comm., 2018).

The respondent explained his point further with a narration of how a dog had stopped a witch from going into a home to attack a certain family. According to the respondent, as the dog prevented the witch, it allowed other people to enter the house at the same time. It was later discovered after a self-confession by the witch that she had bad intentions for the family and the dog prevented her from executing it.

Dogs are also believed to protect their owners even in death, as earlier stated by a respondent. The primary function of a dog is to defend and guard its owner. These duties are carried out even long after the dog dies. That is why it is believed by Kanke people that dog meat can be used for further protection. Other informants also corroborated this story; explaining how dogs have been protecting humans from danger in history. These



stories bring to mind the event that happened in Borno State in 2017 when a dog saved people in a wedding party from a suicide bomber. It was reported that the dog whose owner was a guest at a wedding wrestled with the suicide bomber until the bomb detonated killing only the dog and the suicide bomber. This story has attempted to validate the beliefs about dogs by the people of Kanke.

### 3. Use of Dog Meat to Neutralize Poison

The study also found out that fragrant meat is eaten by the people in Kanke because they believe that it has the power to neutralize poison. When someone is poisoned, the presence of fragrant meat in the body will neutralize the effect of that poison. A respondent explained thus,

there are rare cases of poisoning in this town, not because people are not poisoned by others, but because the poison does not work. The only ones affected by the poisons are those who do not eat dog meat and also those who do not believe that it works (Gokir, Pers. Comm., 2018).

### 4. Use of Dog Meat to Make Protective and Love Charms

Body parts of dogs are used by the people of Kanke to make charms. Some are charms that are made to protect oneself from enemies or to counter enemies' attack. While others are made to charm someone in attempt to make him or her love another. This is usually achieved using the heart of a female dog. Among the Calabar people for example, tortoise are used to make a seductive love portion (*Kop nno mi*) by the women to induce men. An informant narrated that,

the heart of a female dog can be used to make love charms, it is used alongside '*manta uwa*' (*Ansellia Africana*) and other ingredients. The dog heart remains the key ingredient in the charms (Nengak, Pers.Comm, 2018).

*Manta uwa* (*Ansellia Africana*) is a native plant found in Kanke communities. It forms one of the major ingredients along with the heart of a female dog in making love charms. The charms are not specific to any gender. Both male and females are affected by the charms depending on who applies it. The love charm as the name implies makes the victim to forget everybody else including ones mother and cling to the one who made the charm. The charm is said to last as long as the user commands during it application. When he/she is tired of the victim, another charm can be made to reverse its effect. However, it is believed that people can protect themselves from such charms. Counter and protective charms can also be made using the liver of a dog.



Plate 1: Manta Uwa (*Ansellia Africana*)

The plant has no specific place to grow; it can grow anywhere and can only be identified by special individuals. This charm is believed to be very effective, and widely used in Kanke. The researchers gathered that, only selected people in Kanke community concoct the charms, anyone not initiated into this secret practice may have all the materials needed to make the charms, but will be unable to make an effective one. Also it was found that anyone can be a victim of the charms whether the person believes in the practice or not, as long as the user believes, it will work perfectly.

##### **5. Use of Dog Meat to Increase Libido**

Libido is a person's overall sexual drive or desire for sexual activity. Sex drive is either influenced by biological, psychological or social factors. Biologically, libido is the sex hormones and associated neurotransmitters that act and regulate sexual drive in humans (Fisher et al., 2006). Social factors such as work and family, as well as internal psychological factors such as personality and stress, can affect libido. Sex drive can also be affected by medical conditions, medication, lifestyle, relationship and age (for example puberty and menopause). A person who has extremely high or a sudden increase in sex drive may be said to be experiencing hyper sexuality, while the opposite condition is hypo sexuality. Psychologically, a person's sexual urge can be repressed or sublimated. It then follows that, a person can engage in sexual activity without an actual desire for it. Multiple factors affect human sex drive, including stress, illness, and pregnancy.

Thus, dog parts are used by the Kanke people to boost libido in humans. For example, the penis of dogs is used by the men to boost their

sexual drive. Kanke people believe that when a dog penis is mixed with other herbs and consumed by a man, it can boost the man's urge for sexual intercourse. An informant posited that "the penis of a dog can be used to boost a man's stamina in the bedroom; other herbs are added to the mixture to increase and sustain its effectiveness (Sunday, Pers. Comm, 2018). More so, this was the testimony of several other informants on the effectiveness of using fragrant meat as a means of boosting human sexuality/immunity.

**Table 1: List of Dog Parts Used for the Therapeutic Purpose by Kanke People**

Parts	Added Ingredients	Application	Purpose
Dog Heart	Manta Uwa ( <i>Ansellia Africana</i> )	Dried particles are sprinkled on anything the victim would eat.	Love charm. Can be used by both men and women.
Ribs	Mahogany oil	The ash from a dog's ribs is usually mixed with mahogany oil to make balm.	Used as massage cream in muscular pain.
Dog fats		Given to infants and also applied on a baby's body.	To boost their immunity and replenish their skin. It also makes a child fatter. And can neutralize the effect of poisoning even for adults.
Canine tooth		Usually tied around an infant's neck with a rope.	To hasten teething and prevent teething related conditions like fever, and diarrhea.
Dog stool		The stool of a black dog.	Used to treat snake and scorpion bites.
Dog penis		Eaten as part of food by men.	To boost libido or sexual urge.
Dog hair		Applied on an open wound resulting from a dog bite.	Heals the wound faster and prevents other infections that may come as a result of the bite.
Dog meat		Eaten, either boiled or roasted. Can be eaten with or without other foods.	Cures and prevents malaria, neutralizes poison, lowers high blood pressure, and keeps witches and wizards at bay.

Black spotless dogs		Used for money rituals.
Live dogs	Kept at home to serve as guards.	Prevents evil (witches, wizards and other strange spirits) from coming close to its owners.

Field survey in Dawaki 2018

### Conclusion

Use of products derived from dogs for indigenous medicinal purposes in Kanke Local Government Area has been described as a primary health care measure. This study is the first effort to document the traditional zoo-therapeutic knowledge common among the indigenous inhabitants of Kanke community as regards dogs and dog meat. This traditional knowledge is not only significant for its pharmacological value, but also correlated with different cultural beliefs and sentiments of some Indigenous African People.

The study also indicate that the Kanke people have an ancient cultural practice that has been in continuity, seen that the people emphasize the effectiveness of this zoo-therapeutic practice and claims that it has been in existence from time immemorial. Some oral informants narrated that the knowledge was secretly passed down from generation to generation through storytelling, coaching or resulting from inheritance.

The study also provides the bases for further scientific validation of the therapeutic efficacy of various zoo-therapeutic traditions in the study area and elsewhere. It may also help to understand better, the traditional zoo-therapeutic medicine, its interrelationship with the socioeconomic and ecological values of the region among others.

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