

The Many Faces of Pain Experience in Life: A Transcultural Approach



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Received 19.10.2025

Accepted for publication 23.12.2025

Published 23.01.2026

Abstract

The problem of death and dying, and how to cope with death, is still a taboo theme in different cultures. In this exposé, different aspects of pain will be illustrated, and I will narrate 10 stories, each named after a newborn baby whose family experienced a death. These Names given to newborns help families cope with the pains that arise in the course of family history. Every African name has a history. The names given to Children after a long episode and encounter with death, pain, and dying disclose the way and manner the Igbo people in Nigeria cope with death and also their hope in life. Death is personalized in these narrations. The effectiveness of such stories in therapy is enormous.

Keywords: Positive Psychotherapy, transcultural approach, death, grief, pain

Introduction

We experience pain every day, each person in his or her own way. "Pain is always a subjective Experience and therefore depends on various factors in terms of its intensity, frequency, and duration" (Bonica, 1979). The litany of pain is complex and multifaceted. Think of the pain caused by various catastrophes, when relationships break down, when illness takes over, when people harbour feelings of hatred towards others, when the inevitable losses in life plague us, such as loss through death, unemployment, unforeseen fates, manipulation of all kinds, enslavement, wars, inner worries about survival, and also through the global economic crisis.

When pain arises, the whole individual is affected in the areas of body, achievement, contact, and belief systems.

For this reason, every culture has developed its own appropriate methodology to help people not only alleviate pain, but also to endure it, grow through it, and gain new insights from it.

Currently, various forms of pain therapy are available. For example, light therapy, chemotherapy, physiotherapy, psychotherapy, hypnotherapy, reincarnation therapy,

aromatherapy, crystal therapy, spiritual therapy, and palliative medicine.

In this expose, I would like to present the different faces of pain. For example, 1. The face of consolation. 2. The face of sacrifice. 3. The face that shows courage and the ability to endure painful circumstances. 4. The face of tension release.

Methodology

2.1. The faces of pain are compared with the story of an Elephant

The Onlookers and the Elephant

"Once upon a time, there was a certain king in Shravasti. He commanded his servant: Gather all the blind people in the city in one place. When this was done, he had an elephant brought before the blind people; he let some of them touch its head, saying, "This is what an elephant is like." " Others touched the ear or tusk, the trunk, the foot, the hindquarters, the tail, the tail hairs. Then he asked: What is an elephant like? Those who had touched the head said: It is like a pot; those who had touched the ear said: like a woven basket for winnowing grain; those who had touched the tusk said it was like a ploughshare; those who had touched the trunk

said it was like a plough beam; those who had touched the body said it was like a storehouse; those who had touched the foot said it was like a pillar; those who had touched the hindquarters said it was like a mortar; which had touched the tail, like a pestle which had touched the tail hairs, like a broom. And with the cry: "The elephant is like this and not like that," they beat each other with their fists, to the delight of the king. (Peseschkian 2016)

Many cultures try to explain how to deal with and cope with the pain, especially in the situation of losing someone through death, loss, or other psychological calamities. In the Igbo culture in Nigeria, names are given to newborn babies as a necessary psychological relief and endurance of pain.

2.2. The different Expressions of Pain in Transcultural Disposition

Pain is seen as a means of comfort and consolation:

There are people around the world who have developed a pain strategy to elicit comfort from others when they experience pain. I had such an experience with a woman who had suffered from headaches for 40 years. Every time I meet her, the first thing she tells me is how much her head hurts and pains. Which attack she has overcome, which medication she has taken, and which therapy is coming up. She has developed the ability to describe and recount everything in detail. Any kind of advice or recommendation is promptly met with the statement: "It doesn't help me anymore." Countless people seek comfort in this way. My child has been dead for 20 years, I have been unfairly divorced, my disability makes my life difficult, a disaster has destroyed my house or flat, we have been living here as refugees for several years, I have been retired for some time, I was bullied, and I lost my job. Etc. The agony of this kind of pain is that it never stops.

Such people want affection, attention, and mindfulness. They depict the face of pain seeking comfort and understanding. What helps is just being there, listening, encouraging them, and giving a few recommendations.

Pain experience is seen as a means of sacrifice from the victim's perspective:

In various places around the world, people are deprived of their freedom, dignity, rights, and livelihoods. Whether through oppression,

infliction of pain, humiliation, brutal physical or psychological injury, etc. These individuals experience the stigma of inner humiliation. A story from the Old Testament illustrates this kind of suffering:

When the Israelites had been oppressed for many years, God called to Moses: "I have seen the misery of my people in Egypt, and I have heard their loud cries against their oppressors. I know their suffering." (Ex. 3:7-8)

Some people suffer as victims of a dramatic and painful experience that was inflicted on them from outside. All attempts to ask the "why" question always remain unanswered.

A man from Rwanda told me how the Tutsi killed his wife and six children back then. "The pain is still omnipresent today. To this day, I have found no answer. Rather, my conscience torments me, and I feel guilty. My inner voice tells me: 'I did little to save my family'. This face of pain is always associated with feelings of guilt. With powerlessness, with inner anger. The scars of pain are not easy to heal.

Pain acceptance through Endurance and a strong capacity for courage.

People with deep religious connections and strong belief systems often experience this third type of face of pain. People tend to endure pain and suffering when they feel that there is a reward behind it. Buddha achieved "nirvana" through his endurance, Jesus accepted suffering in order to fulfill God's will, and Mohammed went through great suffering to receive his revelation from the angel. In my African tribe, we can only pass our initiation rites by proving our courage and enduring pain.

Many people transform such endurance. However, some people, through suffering, become hardened in their attitudes toward life.

The face of pain is a release of tension.

Nowadays, it has become fashionable for many people to inflict pain on themselves in order to feel relaxation. Young people and young adults cut themselves to make their conflicts easier to bear. Some people prefer sadomasochistic practices to reach orgasm. During pilgrimages, many people walk long distances (e.g., the Way of St. James) and endure considerable suffering. Some experience heavenly feelings as a result. There are even soldiers who injure themselves in order to be freed from the theatre of war.

Such pain is seen as a Defence against guilt and sin, or as self-punishment undertaken in

penance, so that God will show mercy. Think of the penitential belts of the Opus Dei.

Some people believe that such pain purifies the soul, enabling one to see clearly again.

Such pain is perceived as a source of pleasure.

Discussion

3.1. Specific Approach of dealing with the pains of demise in Igbo culture.

Every culture has developed ways of coping with loss through death. In my country, Nigeria, especially in my tribe, we have developed a unique philosophy of life and beliefs to cope with the pain of departure through death.

These stories about death from Igboland are real events. Names of newborn babies contribute to the remembrance and endurance of painful experiences. However, every culture has its own way of dealing with death. These stories are a small contribution to dealing with pain, grief, and death from an African perspective. These stories affect the four areas of the balance system of positive and transcultural Psychotherapy.

1. Onwudebe "Death, please keep."

My Grandmother had difficulty conceiving children. She gave birth to 15 children, and all died. She had some hope at each childbirth that they would survive, but unfortunately, none survived the 4th birthday. My Grandmother, in her agony, said these things: "Death, you have taken away everything from my life. I'm now very downcast. I would like to enter into a specific agreement with you and see if we can understand one another. At the death of my first child, I thought the gods had punished me, so I tried to reconcile myself with the gods. I had to undergo certain penitential rites. I went into the dense forest and stayed for several days, fasted, cleansed myself of evil thoughts, and distributed alms. By the death of my second child, I thought that the enemy, witchcraft, killed my child. The village's native doctor had to perform some cleansing. Despite all these, all my 15 children died one after the other."

I was totally upset. "I asked myself several questions. What is the problem with me? Did my children have some genetic illness? Are the gods annoyed with me? Wasn't I very careful? Did I neglect something?" Etc. etc.

My mother was the 16th child. Her name was "Onwudebe", death please keep. Death is asked

to take custody of my mother, and he is permitted to deal with her appropriately.

My mother was the only child who survived. She got married and had 6 children. Unfortunately, she died at the age of 36. "Onwudebe" is recognition of death. Death receives a mandate and is given some responsibility to carry out.

2. Onwuagbaoso "Death cannot run."

It was Christmas time. The three sons of "Ekele" had purchased many items for the family's festive celebration, which was being held in "Opobo," a town in Nigeria. In Nigeria, as in other parts of the world, such festivities are highly tense. The route to their hometown is by sea. They joined a ship with another 200 passengers. The ship's captain sought to maximize revenue during this period. Overloading of ships and other means of Transportation is so common. In Nigeria, the ships are secondhand and outdated. The way to "Opobo" with this ship went very smoothly. But a few miles before anchoring, an Atlantic wind with a very strong Velocity bashed at the ship, and it sank. All on the ship drowned, including the three sons of "Ekele".

The Family received the news of this tragedy with great distress. The mother of these Children lamented with the following words: "God Almighty. You have done much to shake my faith. Your punishment is exorbitant. In one moment in time, I lost all three of my children. Death cannot run."

"Ekele" was again pregnant and gave her son the name "Onwuagbaoso, " meaning" death cannot run. With this name, the story of the death of her sons will be remembered. In this way, she can share her grief with her sons, and her hope remains alive. In her sorrow, she wished that death could run. If the possibility were there for death to run, her sons might not have died on the same day and time. "Onwuagbaoso" is an appeal to death not to extinguish human lives instantaneously.

3. Onwubiko "Death, have mercy."

An epidemic occurred in a small village called "Mgbe". Many people are dying in mass. Philanthropic associations are trying to combat the spread of the disease. The suffering of the inhabitants is felt. Pregnant women have fears about their newborn children. Will they die after birth? is the question.

Children are automatically given the name "Onwubiko"- "death has mercy." This name

appeals to death to slow down his aggressiveness. Death should show humans some forgiveness. Death is seen as a person. Death should practise some tolerance.

This manner of negotiating with death has an old tradition and is practised by many religions. When people suffer from a disaster or experience discomfort, they pray. Most people believe that through such acts, God will show his mercy. Prayers have powerful effects that can stop the spread of negative forces.

The name "Onwubiko," God have mercy, gives mothers some hope in life. The "Igbos" in Nigeria use the word "Biko" as a means to soften the hearts of people.

4. Onwuchakwa "Death, please wait a moment."

A very big festival approaches. A Centenary feast. Very few will like to celebrate the "Ikeji" fest. The entire village has prepared for the feast through various rituals. Goats and other animals required for the festival are well nourished. Animals for temple services have been purified. It is the wish of all the inhabitants of the village to avoid evil at this period of time. This will protect them from bad omen. Many activities, such as processions to particular deities, reconciliation rites, and other customs, are undertaken to secure the favour of the gods. Women, who give birth to new babies at this point, name them "Onwuchakwa" - death, please wait for a moment, do not come to visit us yet. Please allow us to celebrate our feast. If you do come, we will all experience sorrow, and this will affect our festivities.

This attitude among the Villagers is widespread: that communication with the dead as persons is a possible means of interaction. Death listens. Such names for death could bring him (DEATH) into some uneasiness, which can then influence his decision to come. Christianity and Judaism also hold that penance, good works, and praise of God are efficacious means of obtaining God's favour. God is the ultimate giver of life and death. (The story of Abram and Yahweh, or the request of Jesus that whoever asks receives, depicts this belief system.) Genesis 18, 1-15. Or Matthaesus 6, 5-15.

The inhabitants could consider death talking to itself in this manner: "Why must I wait? But if someone asks me to wait, I'll wait. I will come at my own tempo.

Most Africans tend to bargain. In different marketplaces, bargaining is a way of life. Nothing

goes without bargaining. Marriage, Heritage, initiation rites, Etc. Also with death.

5. Onwuka "Death is the strongest."

"Mgbeke" lived in a small Village called "Umudoro". She was the 4 Child of a family of ten. She married at the age of 15. For many years, the marriage was childless. But fortunately for her, after many years of waiting, "Mgbeke" delivered. The family's joy was tremendous. Childlessness is often regarded as a curse within the family. Women suffer the most. "Mgbeke" was so relieved after this birth. She had experienced many miscarriages.

She named her son "Onwuka," meaning Death is the strongest. With this name, death is exonerated. With this name, a type of relationship is established. Under this name, death assumes a special place in the family's history. Once "Onwuka" is mentioned anywhere in the village, the history of his procreation will be remembered. The name suggests that death plays an important role in human life.

6. "Onwuzurike" Death, please have a pause.

Every year in this part of northern Nigeria, people experience drought. There are always some mishaps. The rivers dry up, animals die due to inadequate nutrition, and farmers cannot harvest their crops. Famine is the other side of the day. Most people leave their villages in search of water and food. No one has an answer to this terrible situation. The problem is interpreted as a disharmony between nature and humans. It is the work of the elderly to help restore equilibrium in the village. People believe that only through a type of balance in nature can one restore this climatic disorder.

Children who are born in this period of time are named "Onwuzurike". Death should have a pause. This name suggests that death should heed people's suffering. He should please give humans some sort of chance to revitalize. It is also a principle of life that a pause in life is necessary for convalescence. After a time of a severe hurricane comes a time of low tide; after a time of darkness comes a time of light; after a time of disaster comes a time of recovery. This interchangeable principle of life is the wish of the inhabitants for death. Death is advised to follow this way of natural forces. Death should please try to stop its powerful adventure.

7. Onwueri "Death, you cannot destroy."

The war has lasted more than 20 years now. The family of "Enu" happened to escape many

tragic situations. Their house was destroyed; they were running for their lives from place to place. They lived in several refugee camps. At this period of time, "Onwueri" was born. He survived the episode of war. Nothing happened to him.

The family narrated the following story: "It was a very difficult period of our lives. We had to run for our lives. We made more than 300 Kilometres on foot. We encountered numerous dangerous animals, such as snakes, scorpions, spiders, and other wild animals. The fear of dangerous insects was profound. We had no food, no water, and no sleeping facilities. We had to share all our daily needs with wild animals. It was very awful. There were certain periods of time when we wished ourselves death. Doubts and hopelessness accompanied us throughout our flight for life. It is still a mystery how we survived this odyssey. Our child was given the name "Onwueri" to remember this time. His will to survive was tremendous. He never got sick and did not give us any problems."

The name "Onwueri" is given to children who have survived disasters, dangerous situations such as wars, and other unfortunate circumstances. Such children are proud of their history. They could survive despite all urges.

A song is sung for such people:

*"Death came, but could not take me away.
Death came, but did not have time for me.
Death came, but omitted me.
Death came, but left me alive."*

8. Onwuzuribo "Death is everywhere."

There is a tradition in "Igbo land" where deceased persons from one family are buried in their homes. Sometimes, more than 5 people could be buried in a room. Through this means, an intensive relationship between the living and the dead is established. On special occasions, libations in honour of the dead are spoken. Wine or food is used. The performance of this ceremony buttresses the spiritual union of the living and the dead. Sometimes, only the names of adults who have begotten children are mentioned, and in some families, only adult men.

This type of communication with the dead and remembrance of the dead gives the Ibos some sort of calmness towards death. Death is a reality, but the pains attributed to dying are somehow minimized through interaction with

the deceased. Children whose names are "Onwuzuribo" convey the message that death is a reality and ubiquitous. This attitude and belief system of the Ibo is noticeable in the way they live. So many Igbo are wanderers.

9. Onwusirike "Death is so powerful."

"Aro" is very lonely. The whole of his family died from food poisoning. His wife and seven children.

In his sorrow and pain, he lamented by using the following words:

"Death, it is not easy to understand your power. You have taken everything from me. All my precious belongings. What will I do now? I can't cry any longer. My tears are all dried up. A new beginning is not possible. My home is empty. Why? Why? I do not have any trust in marriage and the procreation of children anymore. We are not sure anymore how you will react if we begin anew". He wrote this letter to death."

Dear Mr. Death!

I am now at my home and waiting for my wife and my seven children. Perhaps they have visited the neighbourhood. Perhaps they have gone shopping. Perhaps my children are at school now. How long should I wait before receiving information from you? I have no more appetite. I have no more joy in my life. Death! Why do you have so much power? Why do you have the power to destroy everything, without thinking of the outcome? It is not easy to believe that I will never see my family again. It is also very painful to accept your reasoning, if there is any. I have only one wish: whenever you strike again, please do not kill the members of a family all at once.

A child was born in the kindred and was named "Onwusirike", as a remembrance of this incident. The entire village still recalls this tragic situation whenever "Onwusirike" is present.

10. Onwuoma "Death is just."

Two indigenous families are struggling for a title in the village. The family of "Uzoh" is highly educated but not particularly wealthy. Most of their family members studied abroad. The other family of "Isi" consists entirely of businesspeople and possesses considerable wealth. Both families disagree on certain life principles. According to the custom of the village, whoever receives the title should govern the village. The "Uzoh" kindred are not ready to accept an uneducated person as their village leader,

because they believe that the villagers can only gain through wisdom. On the other hand, the "Isi" family maintains that a person without some wealth cannot lead the village because he cannot bring progress and prosperity to it. These two opposed philosophies divide the village into two camps. There are no democratic elections; title holders are nominated through internal consensus and random selection. And only these two families are privileged to receive the title.

The opposing families wish death to their opponents. They maintain that only death can resolve this leadership problem. If one of the title seekers dies, then the other family can become the leader. Death is seen as a just redeemer.

Everywhere in Ibo land, children receive this name "Onwuoma" as recognition of death, the just redeemer. Death does not recognise richness or academic title.

Conclusion

The ten naming stories from Igboland illustrate a unique cultural approach to coping with death and pain. Through names like "Onwudebe" (death, please keep), "Onwubiko" (death, have mercy), and "Onwuagbaoso" (death cannot run), the Igbo people transform unbearable grief into enduring memory and psychological relief. Death is personalized and

engaged as a presence with whom negotiation is possible. These names serve as permanent memorials, keeping tragic events within the collective consciousness while enabling families to continue living with hope. Every time the child's name is spoken in the village, the story is retold, the pain is shared, and the community participates in the ongoing process of grief work.

From the perspective of Positive Psychotherapy, this naming practice demonstrates how cultures develop sophisticated psychological systems for managing pain and loss. The integration of painful experiences into a child's identity provides a model for resilience that honors both suffering and hope. As the blind men who touched different parts of the elephant, each culture perceives and processes pain differently. The Igbo methodology – transforming tragedy into narrative, personalizing death, and embedding memory in daily life – affects all four areas of the balance system: body, achievement, contact, and belief systems. Such indigenous approaches deserve serious attention in transcultural psychotherapy as they offer valuable alternatives for understanding how humans endure suffering while maintaining dignity, community bonds, and hope for the future.

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