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Influence of Deceptive Religious Messages on the Emotional Well-being of the People of Imo State of Nigeria: The Ecclesiastical and Civil Approaches

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Abstract **Original Research Article**

It is a serious problem to solve as deceptive religious messages from many men and women of God have caused destructive consequences on many people to the extent that some face emotional ordeal with the state of mind that someone is after their life or behind their difficult state. These deceptive messages are difficult to interpret to be false as they seem to be accurate when they indirectly construe what an individual is facing, but never come to reality. The purpose of this paper is to find out more about the influence of deceptive religious messages on the emotional wellbeing of the people of Imo State. Based on the findings from the interviews conducted messages that have to do with one's destiny have made victims remain slaves to their faith, their lots and the prophets, prosperity without work prophecy is the one affecting the people adversely, and it has also led to the people solely relying on prayer without resorting to orthodox medicine for cure of illnesses, thereby complicating their health. The theories used in this paper are James-Lange Theory of Emotion and Cognitive Appraisal Theory. Both theories discuss human emotions. It is recommended among others that church leaders should control these men of God in their churches from giving deceptive messages that come out of their minds claiming that they are led by the Holy Spirit to proclaim such messages, and \the citizenry should be sensitized. Heuristic inquiry, semi-structured interview and secondary sources of data collection were employed for this research.

Keywords: Influence, Deception, Deceptive religious messages, Emotional well-being, Ecclesiastical approach, civil approach.

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Introduction

Deceptive religious messages are prevalent these days, not only in Imo State, but also in other places. It has been a grave issue to solve as these messages from many of our men and women of God have caused detrimental consequences on many people to the degree that some face emotional trauma with the state of mind that someone is after their life or behind their unpleasant situations. These deceptive religious messages are difficult to interpret to be false as they appear to be precise when they indirectly explain the challenges people are going through, but never come to be real, thereby holding some individuals in bondage as they move about from one church to another visiting the men and women of God who can

predict the solutions to their problems who continuously keep on delivering the same and other new messages that have no solutions even after serious praying and fasting to end the unpleasant situations. It is surprising that after visiting some of these so-called spiritual men and women, people's problems remain unsolved, therefore creating fear and anxiety in them. Some of these deceptive messages that are terrifying have placed some individuals in continuous emotional ill-health as they do not know how to get rid of these long lasting situations. The most sorrowful part of this is when the message involves a relative or friend being behind one's predicament or if not persistent sickness. No particular church is attributed to delivering deceptive religious messages. All Christian churches are involved, not only Pentecostals as some individuals think that religious messages, especially deceptive ones are connected with Pentecostalism. Deceptive religious messages are also pronounced by members of other Christian strands other than Pentecostals, both ordained and laymen, who feel they are possessed by the Spirit.

This paper adopts a heuristic inquiry (personal experience) approach and information got from individuals who are well-grounded in the topic as a result of their clerical profession and laymen who have experienced the phenomenon under study. Deceptive religious messages have ruined the lives of many individuals as they live in perpetual fear of the individuals who allegedly have gone far to cut short their lives in the twinkling of an eye as proclaimed by the deceptive men and women of God. What baffles the researcher the most is the way many individuals allow themselves to be deceived by these so-called men and women of God who claim they have the spiritual gift of seeing visions which eventually do not happen as predicted. People still attend their churches irrespective of the messages not coming to happen in real life. Does it mean that they have been hypnotised or they foolishly want to continue attending the churches till miracles happen? The researcher has seen situations where some friends continuously spend money in the form of seed sowing and other payments demanded on request for problems predicted to be solved still the problems still persist till today. People engage in conversations in public vehicles concerning their experiences with these men of God. For the researcher, when one goes to a man or woman of God and the problem presented is not solved, it is imperative for the person to think twice and disassociate themselves from such man or woman of God so that continuous spending of money in the name of seed sowing will not drain one financially. The researcher has experienced instances in which prophecies were made concerning her and her relatives, but finally did not come to pass but caused emotional distress. So such experiences have taught her to stick to her church than moving from one church to another seeking for solutions where there are no solutions. The lessons from her experiences have taught her to pray directly to God without any human mediator which she sees as the best so far, that is personal prayer supersedes all when prayed with purity of heart and hope. The research was conducted against the backdrop of the adverse influence of deceptive religious messages on the emotional well-being of the people of Imo State of Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The main aim of the study is to examine the influence of religious messages on the people of Imo State of Nigeria and to find out the roles of the Church, government and the people in controlling the matter at hand. The Church as a Christian institution plays significant roles to actualize the restriction of the continued increase of the activities of these men and women of God who are bent on delivering deceptive religious messages for their own selfish ends. The government and the people are not left out in limiting the excesses of the activities of these men and women of God. They also have roles to play so that the deceptive activities of these men and women of God will be reduced or totally eliminated. These are what the study seeks to explore.

Methodology

The researcher employed heuristic inquiry for this research work which is a qualitative research methodology with the use of semi-structured

interview to elicit information for the accomplishment of the work. The researcher interviewed persons who are well-grounded in the subject of discussion as a result of their clerical profession and laymen who have experienced the phenomenon under study. Secondary sources like web materials such as journals, official websites, etc, were consulted to obtain information for the study.

Conceptual Clarification

Influence

According to Cambridge University Press & Assessment (2026), influence is "the ability to have an effect on people or events." Influence is the capacity to have an effect on the character, development, or behavior of someone or something, or the effect itself (Lingoland, 2026). Based on the two definitions it is understood that "influence" has to do with the strong effect someone or something has on another thereby controlling the way the individual behaves and this can be positive or negative. When it is positive it directs one to behaving properly both in the physical and emotional dimensions, but when it is negative the behavioural rhythm becomes disastrous and can lead to unexpected circumstances that would be injurious to either or both the individual and the recipient. In this paper, the infuence of the false message delivered can linger for a long time as the individual lives in perpetual fear and loss of hope when the message doesn't come into manifestation. The message can also lead to suspicion and malice on the side of the recipient as the accused individual becomes a target.

Deception

Deception is defined as the deliberate attempt, whether successful or not, to conceal, fabricate, and/or manipulate in any other way, factual and/or emotional information, by verbal and/or nonverbal means, in order to create or maintain in another or others a belief that the communicator himself or herself considers false. (Masip, Garrido, & Herrero, 2004, p.147). Merriam- Webster Dictionary (2026) defines deception as "the act of causing someone to accept as true or valid what is false or invalid: the act of deceiving." Cambridge University Press & Assessment (2026) defines "deceive" as "to persuade someone that something false is the truth, or to keep the truth hidden from someone for your own advantage."

From the definitions it is perceived that deception is intentionally misleading someone into believing a falsehood which the communicator knows very well that it veils the truth. In the case of this write-up deception can be true on the part of the communicator, but not delivered in the way it should be delivered because the communicator is acting on their own will and not with the power that is unseen, that is relying on one's sentiments or intuitions, rather than the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In this case the communicator is delivering a false message which they think is true as they are not in the control of the Holy Spirit, they believe it as true while it is false as it cannot come to reality.They have influenced the recipient's psyche to accept such information which is false. At times the communicator study the psyche of the recipient to make such conclusion, while sometimes the recipient unknowingly disclose information about themselves to the communicator who analyses it to make out their own prediction.

Deceptive Religious Messages

Deceptive religious messages are predictions, teachings, or utterances which contain religious undertone, but are intended to divert from the truth. They are firmly established in personal interest as opposed to spiritual reality, distorting the Scriptures to manipulate individuals who fall prey to their tricky motives in order for the deceiver to rise to prominence or achieve financial gain. Plafcan (2025, para.1) states:

> How is a Christian deceived? How does a Christian deceive themselves? To be deceived is to be lied to or to lie to oneself. It is the hallmark of the devil. It is the coat worn by the wolf among the sheep. Spiritual deception in the church doesn't always come from outside. It

> often begins within, when we start believing ideas about God or ourselves that are not true.

False prophets have been there from the start. Satan did not waste time in circulating lies to push away people from Jesus Christ. We are advised to test the spirits to know if they are true (1 John 4:1). The Bible is the exam we should utilise to find out if a message or person is genuinely from the Lord (Latta, 2022). Religious deception is regarded as one of the harmful categories of deception in the Scriptures. In contrast to flagrant lies or noticeable sin, religious deception conceals itself under the cloak of truth, rites, including religious language. It may seem holy, appear biblical, but still mislead many people. The Bible contains many grave illustrations of how God's people became victims of false teachings, deceptive worship, and unethical spiritual leadership (Seedword Christian, 2025). Deceptive religious messages have caused confusion in families as these messages cloud the thoughts of men to view events in their lives negatively as if one has changed the rhythms of their lives whereby situations become manipulated by some persons who have acquired mystical powers to control people's destinies or inflict perpetual harm which could be sickness or even death. The emotional condition of the individual can only be resolved when the ugly situation disappears, and for it to be seen no more a higher power must take control and as the message is not from the Spirit, it then means that the individual suffers the consequence of the message which is conscious deprivation of the reality of life which leads to prolonged emotional disturbance or malice towards the alleged cause of the distressing event or chain of unpleasant events the person is experiencing. C. Onyenze (personal communication, May 23, 2026) sees deceptive religious messages as teachings, revelations, prophecies or claims men of God present to the unsuspecting members of their churches or groups as divine truths from God. For her, such messages are usually deceptive and do not have scriptural support and claim. They get away with such messages because of the significant role religion plays in Nigeria mostly. Also K. Nwankwo (personal communication, June 2, 2026) explained deceptive religious messages as teachings that distort biblical doctrine for gain, fear, or control, examples prosperity-only gospel, coercive seed-sowing, predictive doom prophecies for money, every problem is a demon, doubt= death 2 Peter 2: 1-3; Jeremiah 23:16.

Emotional Wellbeing

Emotional well-being refers to the management and acknowledgement of our emotions, both positive and negative, primary ones, or those of a more complex nature. It is of utmost importance to humans who want to lead productive and healthy lives (Surana, 2022, para.3). According to the Mental Health Foundation, emotional wellbeing is a positive sense of wellbeing which enables an individual to be able to function in society and meet the demands of everyday life; people in good mental health have the ability to recover effectively from illness, change, or misfortune (Sussex MSK Health, n.d, para.1). Nevertheless, emotional well-being is possibly very important than physical health. This is because our mental health can have a direct or an indirect impact on the rest of our body and the people near us. Taking care of our mental health and accepting troubling thoughts is not something we intentionally decide to do. Nonetheless, it is of significant importance and should be checked regularly (Surana, 2022). As regards deceptive religious messages, if caution is not exercised the indivivdual will face severe depression because of fear that will consume his thoughts with the belief that if the problem is not addressed urgently the consequences could be fatal. Prolonged emotional instability can lead to life-threatening diseases like hypertension and heart attack. All in all, emotional health supports both physical and mental wellbeing.

The researcher has read about incidents in which individuals experiencing depression killed their fathers, mothers or other family members after being influenced by deceptive religious messages claiming that the victims were responsible for their predicaments. The researcher has also witnessed open confrontations in which individuals suffering from depression accused their parents of being witches or wizards who had hindered their progress. These accusations were made after the individuals

had received false predictions stating that their parents or other family members were responsible for their difficulties.

Ecclesiastical Approach

Ecclesiastical approach can be defined as a method rooted in the teachings, beliefs, practices, leadership or theological foundation of the Church. It focuses on established traditions of the Church, administrative authority, order of worship, and organizational structure instead of solely temporal or rational thinking. For the purposes of this paper, the Church has a crucial role to play in combating the activities of individuals who disseminate deceptive religious messages, which have inflicted significant harm on vulnerable individuals. Church leaders should not remain passive in the face of wrongdoing within their churches. As shepherds entrusted with the care of God's flock, they have a biblical responsibility to guard the Church against false prophets and deceptive religious practices. The Bible enjoined spiritual leaders to "preach the message, to insist upon proclaiming it, to convince, reproach, and encourage, as you teach with all patience" (2 Timothy 4:2). The Scriptures also instruct them to "keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock which the Holy Spirit has placed in your care. Be shepherds of the Church of God, which He made His own through the blood of His Son… The time will come when some men from your own group will tell lies to lead the believers away from them" (Acts 20: 28, 30). They are also warned "not to believe all who claim to have the Spirit, but test them to find out if the spirit they have comes from God. For many false prophets have gone out everywhere" (1 John 4:1). They are advised to "hold firmly to the message which can be trusted and which agrees with the doctrine...It is necessary to stop their talk, because they are upsetting whole families by teaching what they should not, and all for the shameful purpose of making money" (Titus 1: 9,11). In addition, Lord Jesus warned His followers to "Be on your guard against false prophets; they come to you looking like sheep on the outside, but on the inside they are really like wild wolves" (Mathew 7: 15).

In submission to these biblical commands, church leaders should set up and implement solid ecclesiastical regulations that ensure prophetic ministry remains faithful to the teachings of the Holy Scriptures. Ministers who intentionally alter the biblical doctrine of prophecy for their selfish motives or manipulate believers through deceptive messages should be compelled to face proper disciplinary measures. These actions not only safeguard the purity of the Church but also protect susceptible individuals from spiritual manipulation and maintain the credibility of Christianity.

Civil Approach

In this work the word *civil* encompasses both the citizens and the government because the citizens and the government have some roles to play in realisation of the approaches to stop the existence of deceptive religious messages. In this respect, civil approach therefore means strategies that are peaceful, people and government centred towards achieving positive goals in the eradication of reprehensible practices eroding the well-being of individuals in the society. The citizens are those who are affected by these deceptive messages that is why they should be involved in the fight against the continued propagation of deceptive religious messages which have done much harm than good to the overall well-being of individuals. The citizens are supposed to be at the forefront of attempts to combat the spread of deceptive religious practices because they are the recipients of these messages. The decision to stop the dissemination lies on them. The government on the other hand should enact laws that deter these men and women of God from engaging in such unacceptable practices.

Meaning of Religious Deception

Religious deception can be defined as a method geared towards leading astray people into believing false teachings, signs and wonders as if they are divine revelations or manifestations. Religious deception is the appearance of faith without inward reality of a life transformed by God (Falseteachersbible.com, 2026, para.1). Deception is the act of convincing people to accept untrue

information. The person who deceives others might know that the information conveyed is false, or the conveyer of information might be ignorant of the truth of the information conveyed (Daly, 2013 cited in Mussa, 2024, para.3). Deception can come from omissions, additions, misinterpretation, fabrication, exaggeration, understatements, and distortion of information (Mussa, 2024, para.2).

Since Adam and Eve obeyed the deceiver (the devil), deception hass been part of the universe. The devil is the master of deception. According to the Scriptures, he tricked the entire universe (Gospel Light Christian Church, 2013)).

Deceptive Religious Teachings

Deceptive religious teachings are designed to give false ideas or twist the Scriptures to mislead people for personal gain either for financial purpose or authoritative influence. One of the things that will come to pass in the eschatological age as we see in the Scriptures is that there will be deceptive spirits and demonic teachings. 1Timothy 4: 1-2 says:

> Now the Holy Spirit tells us clearly that in the last times some will turn away from what we believe; they will follow lying spirits and teachings that come from demons. These teachers are hypocrites and liars. They pretend to be religious, but their consciences are dead (Banso, 2019).

Religious deception is widespread, but basically unrecognized. When a person is deceived he is misled by false appearance or statement. Such a person thinks things are one way when in reality they are a different way. This sort of thing will abound in the last days, especially religiously. The end days are filled with terrible events. Among the things which characterize the perilous days at the end of this age (2 Tim. 3:1-5) is general deception from evil people: Evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived (2 Tim. 3: 13, (Corner, n.d. para. 1). False teachers are worse than false prophets. False prophets are those who say God said when God has not said; they only say that error is truth. But false teachers will make you understand why the error is truth by teaching error as truth and explaining it until you understand it as truth ((Oladele, 2019, para. 6).

Influence of Deceptive Religious Messages on the Emotional Well-being of the People of Imo State

Based on the interview conducted, there are social, economic, spiritual and psychological effects of deceptive religious messages on the people of Imo State. Before delving into the views of individuals interviewed, the writer is of the view that sociologically these spurious messages affect the relationship people have with one another. It is undoubtedly true that these unverified prophetic messages have destroyed family ties where familial relationship becomes sour and suspicion takes the lead as the messages point to a particular individual as an adversarial relative who is bent towards obstructing the progress of a member of the family. At times the broken relationship extends to their children as they become afraid of one another which might culminate in generational rancour. When such happens it hinders the future financial growth of the family because no one cares about helping others when faced with financial difficulty. These messages have also led to discontinuity in bearing families' surnames as some individuals try to disassociate themselves from bearing their families' surnames when they are made to understand that their family names need to be changed so that they will experience success in life as the deceptive religious men and women of God interpret their predicaments in relation to bearing idolatrous names which portray recognition of some idols in Igboland like Nwagwu (child of the god of health), Igwe (sky deity), Amadi, shortened form of the thunder deity "Amadioha," also connected with justice and retribution, Njoku, that is, Njoku Ji (god associated with yam or agriculture), et cetera. But it should be noted that no matter what African names speak the people's heritage and their religion is their birthmark irrespective of their religious affiliations. Therefore, Nzeh, Kokey, & Duruji (2019, p. 40) concurred with the view that:

> This religion is part of the African man, any attempt to disengage from the religion

> could affect the African man as it is just a congenital mark on him that depict his heritage. This is a religion Africans are born into, as a child being born into a family that professes a particular Christian denomination. Whether Christian or not, the African man follows certain aspects of it as it is part of the culture which cannot be completely eradicated.

Therefore, names are inherited and cannot be thrown away because of some religious superstitions which have nothing to do with the success or overall well-being of the individual. These names are identities which connect members of the family as they move on in life. This names can even bring good luck in future when an individual identifies himself as a relation to a member of the family. So disconnecting oneself from family name might deprive one from the good thing that awaits one.

As regards the economic catastrophe it could cause individuals, these prophetically inclined men and women of God insist that for problems to be solved individuals have to bring some amount of money which will be used to make prayers for them or buy things they will use for prayer to avert their future predicaments or solve their existing problems. In a situation where the induividuals do not have money, it becomes difficult and leads to borrowing money they are unable to pay back or might drain the individuals financially. M. Amaechi (personal communication, May 21, 2026) was of the view that deceptive prophetic messages lead to financial stress and trauma which is in line with the above view of the researcher as concerns financial depletion on the part of the recepients of the messages. K. Nwankwo (personal communication, June 2, 2026) pointed out that deceptive religious messages lead to indebtedness as he sees coercive fundraising in the areas of sowing rent money, first salary of the year as first fruit, and sale of land for the altar, making people believe that their breakthroughs are tied to these offerings. For C. Anyanwu (personal communication, May 20, 2026), spiritually, these deceptive religious messages of these men and women of God have affected the mental health of people as they have intensified social rejection and self-condemnation for mental ill health. These men and women of God make people understand that mental illness is caused by one's lack of faith, sin, ancestral curses and demonic attack. In line with C. Anyanwu K. Nwankwo (June 2, 2026) viewed that prosperity only theology teaches that poverty/sickness is because of weak faith. Psychologically, C. Anyanwu (personal communication, May 20, 2026) was of the view that these deceptive religious messages lead to depression, psychosis and anxiety as individuals experiencing these conditions feel ashamed of themselves and believe they are spiritually deficient which aggravates guilt, despair and suicidal ideation. As opined by C. Anyanwu these deceptive religious messages can lead to delay or escape in seeking medical attention as these prophets only prescribe prayer as the only solution to healing mental or psychological disorders and therefore tag taking drugs or requesting for psychatric cure as lack of trust in the Lord. As a result of this many people refrain from receiving medical treatment which might eventually worsen their health conditions leading to chronic health problems.In support of C. Anyanwu, V. Okoroafor (personal communication, May 26, 2026), said that deceptive religious messages troubles the mind. It results to depression. When one is depressed, it weakens one's faculty and fosters retrogression and stagnation. It also obscures reality from the people, causing them to live under an illusion. C. Onyenze (personal communication, May 23, 2026), view aligns with those of C. Anyanwu and V. Okoroafor that some men of God mislead their members by placing them in states of psychological distress such as using manipulation that gives them excessive worry, sleeplessness, chronic stress et cetera. S. Duruji (personal communication, May 30, 2026), states that messages that have to do with one's destiny have made victims remain slaves to their faith, their lots and the prophets, prosperity without work prophecy is the one affecting the people adversely, and it has also led to the people solely relying on prayer without resorting to orthodox medicine for cure of illnesses, thereby complicating their health.

The writer will delve into literature review on what some scholars have written on effects of deceptive

religious messages on recipients. These messages can lead to confusion, division, and withdrawal from the commandments of God. They can also lead to moral and spiritual decay as people are diverted from the reality of the Gospel (Topical Encyclopedia, 2026). Manipulated by unfounded predictions and miracle promises, many citizens become susceptible to disinformation, fostering a society increasingly divorced from reality and impeding its intellectual growth. This propagation of false prophesies does more than just damage faith; it compromises the ability of individuals to think critically. When this inability to think critically permeates the majority of the population, it represents a significant impediment to the nation's overall progress (Oyewole, 2023, para. 3).

Economically, this trend is similarly devastating. As citizens invest their resources based on these false prophecies-often in the form of 'seeds of faith' or donations to the churches in question-they inadvertently fuel a cycle of economic hardship. The financial drain on households caught up in these practices is significant, with some giving away their life savings in the hope of divine intervention, thereby exacerbating poverty and economic inequality (Oyewole, 2023, para. 4).

According to Dein (2018, p. 1) literature on prophecies that did not come to pass show that unfulfilled prophecies usually lead to intense distress and disillusionment and also in certain cases failed predictions can lead to slight psychiatric disorder. Nzeh, Nwanguma, & Kokey (2025) affirmed that deceptive religious messages can trigger emotional distress, anxiety, and depression, especially if the message has consequential effect such as mortality, illness, or financial misfortune.

The misuse of prophecy can lead to a form of spiritual dependency that stunts personal spiritual growth. When individuals rely excessively on prophetic words for decision-making, they may neglect personal spiritual disciplines such as prayer, Bible study, and discernment.This dependency can create a passive form of spirituality where believers wait for prophetic direction rather than actively seeking God's will through personal relationship and study ((AZ Research Consult, 2026, para.3).

Theories of Emotion

The work is anchored on two theories. They are James-Lange Theory of Emotion and Cognitive Appraisal theory.

James-Lange Theory of Emotion was propounded by psychologist William James and physiologist Carl Lange in the late nineteenth century and it is a psychological theory that deals with emotions. Both theorists worked indvidually in proposing this theory. The James-Lange Theory of Emotion suggests that our emotions arise from physical changes in response to external stimuli. This theory of emotion proposes that physical changes in the body occur before experiencing the associated emotion. Essentially emotions arise from interpreting your physical sensations (Cherry, 2026, paras 1-2). As the theory relates to this work, when an individual is given a message that has to do with death or severe sickness or even financial misfortune as concerns them or a family member the first thing the individual experiences is increased heartbeat before others like trembling, sleeplessness et cetera. These physical changes or bodily reactions which are increased heartbeat, trembling, sleeplessness result to fear and worry which are associated emotions. The individual has first of all experienced bodily reactions before fear and worry which have profound emotional distress on them.

Cognitive Appraisal Theory

This theory was developed by a psychologist known as Richard Lazarus. According to him,emotions do not arise from events alone. They emerge from a person's appraisal of those events-the rapid, often automatic evaluation of whether something matters, what is at stake, and whether one has the resources to cope. Our emotinal lives are shaped not only by what happens to us, but by how we interpret what is happening and what we believe we can do next (Murphy, 2025, paras 2-3). Lazarus' cognitive appraisal theory of emotion proposes that emotions are the product of thought- specifically, the way we assess a situation's relevance and meaning for our well-being ((Psychology. Town, 2025, para.1).In relation to the study, Individuals' cognitive appraisal

of these deceptive religious messages depends on how they perceive them. Some persons might see themselves being engulfed with severe mental trauma if they can't cope with the prophecy, especially when money is involved to avert the situation. A friend of mine once experienced such as an exorbitant amount of money was demanded to fulfil a positive prophecy which later did not come to pass and this greatly caused him mental trauma and blame on God for not fulfilling His promise. This coincides with what K. Nwankwo (personal communication, June 2, 2026) said about deceptive religious messages which lead to religious/spiritual anxiety and fear-based trauma, for example messages like your people have tied you, if you don't sow hundred thousand naira, you will die before December. I see an accident around you. This creates religious anxiety and a chronic state of fear of God, demons, and prophetic attack. For K. Nwankwo these prophecies have led to mental health effects such as elevated rates of Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD), panic disorder, insomnia, hypervigilance. Parents report that they can't sleep after night vigil because the prophet said something. It mimics the symptoms of PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) because the threat is presented as imminent and supernatural.

The Ecclesiastical and Civil Approaches

The ecclesiastical and civil approaches are steps taken by the church, the government and the citizens to curb or eradicate the spread of the activities of these deceptive religious men and women of God. Serious campaign should be mounted by church leaders on preachers of false doctrines. Church leaders should ensure that their pastors, reverends etc be giving adequate training in ethics, counselling, biblical interpretation and mental heath awareness (C. Onyenze personal communication, May 23, 2026).As stated by V. Okoroafor (personal communication, May 26, 2026), Church leaders should organise periodic conferences and seminars for their members. V. Okoroafor suggests that everybody should have a copy of the Bible for personal study. The researcher agrees with the above idea that individuals should have their own copies of the Bible to study the Word of God because many Christians do not have copies of the Bible at home. Some rely on their phone Bibles during church services which is not proper. Everybody has to have physical Bibles to read and assimilate the Word of God because this will help them to detect when they are being manipulated with deceptive words from these men and women of God who twist the Bible to serve their own selfish ends. To further support the idea H. Amolo (personal communication, May 21, 2026), opined that people should read their Bibles to understand the Word of God, not only believing what the man of God has said, this will help them find out if what the man of God is saying is true or false. They should study the Word of God very well and build their faith on it so that if anybody comes to say anything contrary, they will know that the person is deceiving them. To further support this statement (Olowu & Olulowo, 2026, p.115) viewed that accountability is strenghthened when adherents are informed, reflective participants rather than passive recipients. M. Amaechi (personal communication, May 21, 2026) proposes that ethical standards among religious leaders should be strengthened, there should be regulation and legal measures, and also responsible media regulation which will help curb the spread of deceptive religious messages. C. Anyanwu puts forward the idea that the society must promote critical thinking and education so that people can assess religious messages thoughtfully and discern the deceptive influence tactics used by these men and women of God. Individuals should also be encouraged to seek diverse sources of advice. The reseacher supports the idea because it will prevent them from falling prey to the manipulative techniques of these men and women of God as some people can recognise deceptive elements in religious messages. K. Nwankwo(personal communication, June 2, 2026) said that prophecy must be biblical, inspiring, imploring and reassuring, and also there should be legal protection for victims, that consumer protectiuon laws should address financial fraud concealed as seed/miracle money. Christian groups and leaders should organize and participate in national discussions about Christian doctrine and ethics of the ministerial assignment to assist the upcoming generation. Establishing and supporting

this will eventually give spiritual and moral education, challenge the tension of fake Prophets, and promote justice grounded in biblical teaching (Yerokun & Soneye, 2025, p.13). This point is very good because public discussions will significantly contribute to addressing the issue of deceptive religious messages propagated by some men and women of God as Christian doctrines and ethics are constantly highlighted so that deviating from established practices will be difficult because continuous reiteration gives way to moral transformation of false prophets**.**

Findings

The findings of the study are as follows:

1. Messages that have to do with one's destiny have made victims remain slaves to their faith, their lots and the prophets.
2. Prosperity without work prophecy is affecting the people adversely.
3. Deceptive religious messages have led to the people solely relying on prayer without resorting to orthodox medicine for cure of illnesses, thereby complicating their health.
4. It is undoubtedly true that these unverified prophetic messages have destroyed family ties where familial relationship becomes sour and suspicion takes the lead as the messages point to a particular individual as an adversarial relative who is bent towards obstructing the progress of a member of the family. At times the broken relationship extends to their children as they become afraid of one another which might culminate in generational rancour. When such happens it hinders the future financial growth of the family because no one cares about helping others when faced with financial difficulty.
5. These prophetically inclined men and women of God insist that for problems to be solved individuals have to bring some amount of money which will be used to make prayers for them or buy things they will use for prayer to avert their future predicaments or solve their existing problems. In a situation where the induividuals do not have money, it becomes difficult and leads to borrowing money they are unable to pay back or might drain the individuals financially
6. Deceptive prophetic messages lead to financial stress and trauma that is financial depletion on the part of the recepients of the messages.
7. These deceptive religious messages of these men and women of God have affected the mental health of people as they have intensified social rejection and self-condemnation for mental ill health. These men and women of God make people understand that mental illness is caused by one's lack of faith, sin, ancestral curses and demonic attack.
8. These deceptive religious messages lead to depression, psychosis and anxiety as individuals experiencing these conditions feel ashamed of themselves and believe they are spiritually deficient which aggravates guilt, despair and suicidal ideation.
9. These deceptive religious messages can lead to delay or escape in seeking medical attention as these prophets only prescribe prayer as the only solution to healing mental or psychological disorders and therefore tag taking drugs or requesting for psychatric cure as lack of trust in the Lord. As a result of this many people refrain from receiving medical treatment which might eventually worsen their health conditions leading to chronic health problems.
10. Some men of God mislead their members by placing them in states of psychological distress such as using manipulation that gives them excessive worry, sleeplessness, chronic stress et cetera.
11. These messages can lead to confusion, division, and withdrawal from the commandments of God.

12. They can also lead to moral and spiritual decay as people are diverted from the reality of the Gospel.
13. Influenced by unproven prophecies and assurance of miracles, many people become vulnerable to misleading information, thereby promoting a country greatly separated from reality and hindering the people's cognitive development.
14. The spread of these deceptive religious messages not only destroys people's faith, it also weakens individuais' potentiality to reason logically. When this incapacity to reason logically affects a large proportion of the population, it then indicates a considerable barrier to national development.
15. As the people expend their resources on seed sowing or offerings to these churches they contribute to the contiuation of financial deprivation. These messages affect some families as individuals spend their life savings in expectation of divine intervention, as a result worsening poverty and financial discrepancies.
16. Prophecies that failed to materialise often lead to serious mental anguish and a state of despondency and also in some situations can lead to mild psychiatric disorder.
17. Deceptive religious messages can cause emotional distress, anxiety, and depression, especially if the message has consequential effect such as mortality, illness, or financial misfortune.
18. When religious message is wrongly interpreted it can lead to a sort of prophetic dependency that suppresses an individual's spiritual development. When people focus too much on the words of the prophet to make decisions, they may disregard individual devotional practices such as prayer, Bible study, and discernment.This overreliance can generate a non-paticipatory approach to spiritual growth where Christians wait for prophetic guidance instead of diligently striving to understand and fulfil God's will through a personal relationship with Him and regular biblical study.

Recommendations

In the light of the preceding discussion, the following recommedations are put fortward to address the spread of decceptive religious messages and protect the spiritual and emotional well-being of individuals.

1. Church leaders should control these men of God in their churches from giving deceptive messages that come out of their minds claiming that they are led by the Holy Spirit to proclaim such messages.
2. The citizenry should be sensitized.
3. Government should ensure that all churches are registered, especially the newly established churches and also insist that for anyone to open a church the person must have at least a Bachelor's degree in Christian Religious Studies alongside theological training to be well-grounded in the Holy Scriptures.
4. Believers should seriously study the Bible on their own so that they can detect when the Holy Scriptures is misinterpreted.
5. Church leaders should regularly organise seminars and conferences for their members.
6. Individuals should undertake proper theological trainig before they are allowed to come out before the people to preach the gospel.
7. Churches should engage in pastoral counselling for individuals who are experiencing emotional trauma as a result of unfulfilled religious messages.

Conclusion

It is clear to all that deceptive religious messages have led to several emotional problems as individuals struggle to overcome the situations they find themselves which sometimes linger for long. Some families are in disunity because of some form

of prophecies that have targeted some members as villains who are bent to obstruct the progress of family members because of their envious disposition. People rush to these men and women of God for solutions to their problems but come back home disappointed as the problems remain unsolved and bring along with them psychological difficulties. These predictions at times seem real, but are never fulfilled. The disturbing aspect of it is when money is involved for the actualisation of the predictions which can drain the individuals financially if caution is not the watchword. Some people appear to be hypnotised as they blindly continue to believe the predictions after previous ones failed to materialise. People should stick to reading the Bible daily to be conversant with the Word of God so that they will discern when men of God deviate from it. The prophecies have affected the way people think as they wholeheartedly believe whatever men of God say whether correctly or not for the fact that they are men of God, thereby affecting their ability to think critically and making decisions for themselves.

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