

IGWEBUIKE MODEL OF AFRICAN PARENTHOOD: A PANACEA TO MODERN DAY DEPRESSION

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Abstract

The global surge in depression and related mental health disorders has prompted urgent inquiry into the cultural roots of psychological distress. This paper argues that the crisis is exacerbated by a pervasive Western individualistic ethos that encourages emotional suppression and social isolation. In contrast, it draws on African philosophical traditions – particularly Ubuntu and its more structured expression, Igwebuike – to propose a culturally grounded model of African parenthood as a therapeutic counter-paradigm. Igwebuike, which emphasizes collective responsibility, interdependence and familyhood, offers a framework for parenting that nurtures communal belonging, shared meaning, and emotional openness. Adopting the phenomenological method as a framework to examine the lived experiences of those nurtured under the differing models of parenthood, how it has shaped their understanding of life and meaning making; the study posits that Igwebuike model of parenting can serve as a potent antidote to loneliness and depression, especially in societies increasingly shaped by alienating modern norms. Through a conceptual synthesis of African communal ethics and contemporary mental health discourse, the study presents Igwebuike not merely as a cultural artifact but as a living model for restoring emotional connection and social harmony. It concludes that embracing Igwebuike-informed parenting can help rebuild the social fabric and offer a more compassionate approach to mental wellness in today's world.

Keywords: Igwebuike, African Parenthood, Depression, Ubuntu, Communal Wellness.

Introduction

Depression has become one of the most urgent public health challenges of the 21st century, affecting over one billion people globally according to the World Health Organization (WHO 2025). While often framed as a clinical disorder, its widespread prevalence invites a deeper interrogation into the socio-philosophical conditions that underlie this crisis. Beyond neurochemical imbalances and diagnostic criteria, depression increasingly reflects what may be termed a “pathology of disconnection,” a rupture in the social and existential fabric that once tethered individuals to community, meaning, and shared

emotional life. This disconnection is not merely incidental; it is symptomatic of a broader cultural ethos that has normalized isolation, emotional suppression, and the privatization of suffering.

At the heart of this malaise lies the Western individualistic paradigm, which valorizes autonomy, self-reliance, and emotional restraint as hallmarks of maturity and success. In such a framework, vulnerability is often pathologized, and communal interdependence is viewed as weakness. The result is a society where “anger and emotions are bottled up,” and individuals are left to navigate psychological distress in solitude. This internalization of emotional pain, compounded by the erosion of traditional support systems such as extended family networks and communal care-giving, constitutes a significant ethological factor in the rise of modern depression (Begue 2002; Santini et al. 2020).

Ethological perspectives, such as those discussed by Begue (2002) emphasize that human emotional regulation evolved within socially embedded environments, where distress was met with visible, collective response. The shift towards privatized suffering disrupts these evolutionary patterns, leaving individuals without the nonverbal cues, social mirroring, and communal soothing that once buffered psychological distress. Santini et al. (2020) further demonstrates that social disconnectedness and perceived isolation, manifested in diminished social networks and infrequent interaction, are strong predictors of depression and anxiety, particularly among older adults. Their analysis confirms that the absence of communal care-giving and emotional reciprocity not only worsens mental health symptoms but also undermines resilience.

This privatization of suffering refers to the cultural tendency to internalize emotional pain as a personal failure rather than a communal concern. In many western contexts, mental health struggles are framed as individual pathologies to be managed privately, often behind closed doors and with minimal social engagement. This ethos not only isolates the sufferer but also detaches healing from the communal rituals and support systems that have historically sustained human resilience. As Hoffman (2025) notes, “Contemporary Western culture strongly prefers locating the problems that bring people to psychotherapy within the individual,” reducing mental wellbeing to an individualized experience rather than a shared human condition.

Yet, within this bleak landscape, ancient wisdom offers a counterpoint. The adage “a problem half shared is a problem half solved” captures an intuitive truth about the healing power of connection. Similarly, the African philosophical principle of *Ubuntu* – “I am because we are” – articulates a worldview in which personhood is constituted through relationships, and emotional burdens are collectively held (Metz 2011). Metz (2011) argues that within the Ubuntu framework, a person becomes fully human not merely by existing, but by participating in harmonious relationships with others. This view posits that moral worth and identity are cultivated through acts of solidarity and mutual care. These ideas serve as philosophical precursors to the concept at the heart of this study: *Igwebuike*, a

structured communal ethic rooted in African thought, which emphasizes solidarity, shared responsibility, and the primacy of familyhood (Kanu 2016).

This study argues that the *Igwebuike* model of African parenthood, as an enhanced and systemic form of communalism, provides a viable philosophical and practical framework – a panacea – for mitigating modern depression. By rebuilding the communal bonds that cushion individuals against external and psychological distress, *Igwebuike*-informed parenting offers a culturally grounded alternative to the isolation norms of modernity. The structure of the study will unfold as follows: first, a critique of individualism and its psychological consequences; second, an exposition of *Ubuntu* and *Igwebuike* to parenting practices; fourth, empirical support from relevant psychological and sociological studies; and finally, a rebuttal of likely criticisms and limitations.

Theoretical Foundation: From Ubuntu to Igwebuike Parenthood

The concept of *Ubuntu* traces its root to the Bantu-speaking peoples of Southern Africa, where it emerged as not just a formal doctrine but as a lived ethic enshrined in communal life. Historically, *Ubuntu* was expressed through oral traditions, rituals, and everyday interactions that emphasized mutual care, reciprocity, and shared identity. As early as the mid-19th century, written references began to appear in literature, evolving from descriptions of human kindness to a full-fledged moral philosophy by the late 20th century (Kitakule 2024). *Ubuntu* gained global attention during South Africa's post-apartheid reconciliation efforts, where it was invoked as a framework for restorative justice and social healing. Yet its relevance extends far beyond politics, offering a foundational worldview in which human dignity is inseparable from relational existence.

Ubuntu, now often encapsulated in the words “I am because we are,” is therefore far more than a cultural proverb. It is a comprehensive ontological and ethical worldview that defines the African understanding of personhood, morality, and social existence. As articulated by John S. Mbiti, “I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am,” this philosophy asserts that the individual does not exist in isolation but is fundamentally constituted through relationships with others (Mbiti 1969). In this framework, being is not a solitary state but a communal reality; existence is affirmed and sustained through mutual recognition and interdependence. *Ubuntu* thus challenges the Cartesian notion of the self as an autonomous, self-contained entity, replacing it with a relational ontology in which identity is co-constructed within the web of community.

Rene Descartes, often regarded as the father of modern philosophy, introduced a radical method, laid the ground work for Western rationalism with his method of doubt and emphasis on reason as the path to truth. His famous dictum *cogito, ergo sum* (I think, therefore, I am) became the corner stone of his philosophy, asserting that the act of thinking is the undeniable proof of one's existence. In this way, Descartes envisioned the self as a disembodied autonomous mind, separate from the body and independent of others (Birhane 2020). This dualist framework known as *Cartesian dualism*, positioned the individual as a self-contained entity whose essence lies in rational thought, not in relational

or embodied experience. This legacy shaped centuries of Western thought, reinforcing ideals of independence, objectivity, and internal certainty as the basis of personhood (Birhane 2020).

In contrast to this, Ubuntu offers a radically different ontological premise: that identity is not discovered in self-isolation but emerges through relational interdependence. According to Birhane (2020), Ubuntu dissolves the rigid boundary between self and other, suggesting that one becomes a person only through meaningful engagement with others. The self, in this view, is not a static entity but a relational achievement co-authored through acts of care and mutual accountability.

This ontological orientation is inseparable from the ethical dimension of Ubuntu. It prescribes a moral order grounded in empathy, reciprocity and mutual care. The self is not only known through others but is also morally obligated to others. Ubuntu enshrines values such as compassion, hospitality, unity, and forgiveness; not as optional virtues but as essential expressions of what it means to be human. In this sense, Ubuntu is both descriptive and prescriptive: it describes how personhood is realized and prescribes how individuals ought to live in relation to one another. The isolated individual, in this worldview, is not merely unfortunate but ontologically incomplete – a contradiction in terms. As Metz (2011) argues, Ubuntu provides a fundamental moral theory that prioritizes communal harmony and shared humanity over individual rights and entitlements. It is this deeply relational ethic that lays the groundwork for understanding *Igwebuike* as a more action-oriented extension of Ubuntu.

Building on the ontological and ethical foundation of Ubuntu, *Igwebuike* emerges as its practical and action-oriented counterpart – a philosophy that translates communal being into communal doing. While Ubuntu articulates the metaphysical truth that personhood is realized through others, *Igwebuike* operationalizes this truth through collective presence and shared responsibility. Derived from the Igbo expression meaning “number is strength,” *Igwebuike* underscores the potency of unity and the imperative of togetherness in navigating the challenges of life (Kanu 2020). Kanu writes:

The African concept of the self is...communitarian. The individual is not defined in isolation but in relation to the community. In Igbo-African thought, the self emerges through participation in communal life, and identity is shaped by one's roles, responsibilities, and relationships within the group. This does not negate individuality, but rather situates it within a network of interdependence. The *Igwebuike* philosophy, which means 'there is strength in unity,' captures this dynamic – where the person is both a unique being and a member of a larger whole (Kanu 2021, 165).

It is not merely a cultural sentiment but a philosophical framework that affirms that strength, healing and meaning are found in the convergence of many. The African is relational and embedded in a moral universe governed by shared values.

In this sense, *Igwebuike* can be seen as the kinetic energy of Ubuntu; the movement from being to action. It is the process by which community is enacted, not just acknowledged. Where Ubuntu describes the state of interconnected existence, *Igwebuike* describes the mechanisms that sustain it: the gathering of people in times of joy and sorrow, the pooling of resources, the shared rituals of care, and the deliberate cultivation of *umunna* – the extended familyhood that binds individuals into a moral and emotional collective. This philosophy insists that no one suffers alone, and no one celebrates alone. It is a lived ethic that transforms abstract solidarity into tangible support, especially in the realm of parenting and care-giving.

Extending this philosophical framework into the realm of care-giving, *Igwebuike* parenthood emerges as a culturally embedded model that re-imagines parenting as a communal enterprise rather than a private obligation. In contrast to the nuclear family ideal that dominates Western societies, where the burden of child-rearing falls squarely on the shoulders of biological parents, *Igwebuike* insists that “*nwa bu nwa ora niile*,” meaning “a child belongs to the entire community.” This principle is not merely rhetorical; it reflects a lived reality in many African societies where aunts, uncles, grandparents and neighbors, participate in the upbringing of children (Nwobodo 2020; Katakule 2024).

Such a model fosters an environment in which children grow up with a deep sense of belonging and emotional security. Their struggles are not theirs alone to bear, and their achievements are not theirs alone to celebrate. The community becomes a buffer against psychological distress, offering multiple layers of support, guidance and affirmation. This collective parenting structure also serves as a mechanism for transmitting cultural values, emotional intelligence and social responsibility. It is within this web of relationships that children learn not only how to be individuals but how to be persons – engraved in a moral community that affirms their worth and shares their burdens. In this way, *Igwebuike* parenthood is not simply a nostalgic ideal but a viable therapeutic model for addressing the alienation and emotional fragmentation that characterize modern depression.

Moreover, *Igwebuike* parenthood does not merely distribute care-giving duties; it reconfigures the very meaning of parental authority and emotional availability. In this model, children are not raised in the shadow of isolated parental figures but within a constellation of relationships that offer diverse forms of guidance, discipline and affection. The multiplicity of care-givers enriches the emotional vocabulary and social adaptability of the child, allowing them to internalize a broader spectrum of values and coping mechanisms. It also alleviates the psychological pressure on biological parents, who are no longer expected to be sole providers of emotional and material support. Instead, parenting becomes a shared vocation, embedded in a network of mutual obligation and cultural continuity. In a world increasingly marked by parental burnout and emotional detachment, *Igwebuike* offers a restorative model that reclaims parenting as a communal act of love and

responsibility.

The Dialectic: Individualistic Isolation vs. Communal Cushioning

The modern world is increasingly shaped by paradox: while technological advancement and globalization have expanded the boundaries of human interaction, they have simultaneously deepened the experience of personal isolation. This paradox is most evident in the rising prevalence of depression, particularly in societies that valorize individualism. The dominant cultural narrative in many western contexts promotes autonomy, self-sufficiency and personal achievement as the highest ideals. Yet beneath this celebration of independence lies a growing sense of disconnection; a fragmentation of the social bonds that once anchored individuals within a web of mutual support.

The erosion of communal life, the decline of extended family structures, and the the privatization of emotional struggles have created a landscape in which many suffer silently, despite being surrounded by others. This background sets the stage for a critical examination of how philosophical orientations toward self and society can either exacerbate or alleviate psychological distress. The individualistic path to depression is paved with paradoxes. While individualism is often celebrated for its emphasis on personal freedom, autonomy and self-determination, it also carries hidden psychological costs. In cultures where self-reliance is valorized, individuals are subtly conditioned to internalize their struggles, suppress emotional vulnerability, and view dependence as weakness. This creates a climate of existential loneliness, where people are surrounded by others yet feel profoundly disconnected. The pressure to “have it all together” and to navigate crisis without leaning on others can lead to emotional exhaustion and a diminished sense of self-worth. This often plays out in individuals who feel compelled to maintain an image of competence despite internal struggles. For example, a young professional facing job insecurity, family expectations and personal orientation may suppress her emotions to avoid appearing weak or incapable. She thus privatizes her pain through self-imposed isolation, which over time, may erode her emotional reserve, leading to deep depression. Thus, the privatization of suffering, where emotional pain is seen as a personal failure rather than a shared human experience, further compounds the risk of depression.

Empirical research supports this critique. Santini et al. (2020) found that social disconnectedness and perceived isolation are significant predictors of depression and anxiety, particularly in societies where individualistic values dominate. Their longitudinal study revealed that the absence of meaningful social ties not only exacerbate mental health symptoms but also impairs recovery. Similarly, Begue (2002) links the Western cultural emphasis on individualism and materialism to higher rates of psychological distress. He argues that the belief in self-sufficiency and the pursuit of material success often come at the expense of emotional fulfillment and relational depth. In such contexts, the individual becomes a solitary figure, burdened by expectations and deprived of the communal scaffolding that could otherwise provide emotional ventilation and existential anchoring.

This communal model, as embodied in *Igwebuike*, offers a profound counterweight to the isolating tendencies of individualism. Where the latter fragments identity and privatizes

suffering, *Igwebuike* distributes both identity and emotional burdens across a network of relationships. In this framework, the self is not a solitary unit but a node in a web of mutual recognition and responsibility. Challenges of life are not interpreted as personal failures but as communal experiences that invite collective meaning-making. The community becomes a narrative space where suffering is contextualized, normalized, and shared. This reframing reduces the psychological weight of adversity, allowing individuals to see their struggles not as anomalies but as part of the shared human condition. As Onebunne argues, “every being is part of a whole and no being can be identified except in the whole” (2020, 3), affirming that belonging is not just emotional; it is ontological.

Emotional ventilation is another critical mechanism through which *Igwebuike* cushions against depression. In cultures shaped by this philosophy, the sharing of emotions is not merely permitted; it is encouraged and ritualized. The adage “a problem half solved” is not a platitude but a lived ethic. Individuals are socialized to express grief, anger, pain, confusion as well as joy within safe communal spaces, often through storytelling, communal gatherings, informal counsel from elders, or other means. This openness prevents the “bottling up” of emotions that is so prevalent in individualistic societies. Instead of internalizing distress, individuals externalize it into a receptive community that listens, empathizes and responds. This dynamic not only alleviate emotional pressure but also fosters resilience, as individuals learn to approach pain with the support of others.

Moreover, *Igwebuike* parenting creates a strong and layered support system that buffers individuals – both children and adults – against psychological collapse. In this model, the child is surrounded by multiple pillars of care: parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, neighbors, and community elders. Each figure plays a distinct role in emotional development, moral guidance and also in crisis intervention. Parents provide foundational care and discipline, while grandparents transmit cultural memory and offer stabilizing wisdom. Aunts and uncles act as auxiliary mentors, bridging generational gaps and offering alternative model perspectives especially in moments of family tension. Neighbors, as proximate observers, reinforce communal norms and provide informal surveillance that deters deviance, while elders embody the moral authority of tradition, guiding the child through ethical dilemmas. This multi-tiered support system not only protects the child against crises but also fosters a deep sense of belonging.

Again, the failure or absence of any one pillar does not result in emotional abandonment, because others are present to fill the gap. This redundancy of care ensures that no child is left to face adversity alone. It also extends into adulthood, where individuals continue to benefit from communal scaffolding in times of illness, unemployment, grief and other adversities. As Akinola (2025) reflects, we have indeed lost the deep-rooted tradition of community parenting, and with it, the emotional safety net that once protected individuals from the isolating effects of modern life. Akinola writes:

In my over 20 years of fatherhood, one painful truth stands out: we have lost the deep-rooted tradition of community parenting. I was born over fifty years ago into a close-knit compound where childbirth was not

just a family affair but a communal celebration. Every adult was a guardian, every elder a teacher, and every neighbor a watchful eye. Today, parenting has become an isolated struggle, confined to nuclear units and stripped of the shared wisdom that once shaped our children into responsible members of society (2025, para.6).

This passage highlights a lamentation over the erosion of communal child-rearing practices and a call for a revival of collective responsibility in parenting we referred to as “igwebuike parenting.”

The *Igwebike* model of parenthood, with its emphasis on communal parenting and collective responsibility, offers a psychological support system against depression by countering the isolation and emotional fragmentation that often heightens mental distress. Depression thrives in environments of disconnection where individuals feel unsupported and overwhelmed by personal burdens. In contrast, the *Igwebuike* framework embeds the individual within a lattice of relational support where emotional needs are met by a constellation of figures who provide affirmation, guidance, and intervention. This in turn normalizes help-seeking, reduces stigma and ensures that the parent does not suffer in silence. In this way *Igwebuike* becomes a therapeutic architecture that transforms community into a living antidote to depression.

Empirical and Contextual Support for the Model

The protective role of social support in mental health is one of the most consistent findings across psychological research. From adolescence to late adulthood, individuals embedded in strong social networks tend to report lower levels of depression, anxiety, and psychological distress. This is not merely correlation; it reflects a causal relationship grounded in the buffering hypothesis, which posits that social ties mitigate the impact of stressors by providing emotional and informational support. A systematic review by Garepy, Honkaniemi, and Quesnel-Vallee (2018, 4) confirms that “social support is consistently associated with lower risk of depression across Western population,” while Acoba (2024) emphasizes that perceived stress mediates this relationship, suggesting that social support alters how individuals appraise and respond to adversity. These findings affirm the universal truth that human beings are not designed to suffer alone; isolation amplifies pain, while connection cushions it.

Within the African philosophical framework, this is not just acknowledged; it is institutionalized. The *Igwebuike* model does not treat social support as an optional resource but as a structural necessity. It embeds individuals within a lattice of relationships that are emotionally available and morally obligated to intervene during crisis. This communal scaffolding transforms the abstract benefits of social support into lived realities. In contrast to the Western tendency to outsource emotional care to professionals or digital platforms, *Igwebuike* ensures that support is proximate, personal and persistent. The community

becomes a therapeutic space, not only for the child but for the care-givers themselves. This is especially critical given that parental wellbeing directly influences child outcomes.

Parental wellbeing is a cornerstone of healthy child development, and one of its most critical determinants is the presence of social support. When care-givers are emotionally isolated or overwhelmed, their capacity to nurture, guide and respond to their children diminishes. Boe et al. (2000) offer compelling evidence that contextual factors – particularly low social support – are significant drivers of parental depression. Their study found that “parents who reported low levels of social support were significantly more likely to experience depressive symptoms,” which in turn correlated with less responsive and more punitive parenting behaviors (Boe et al. 2000, 215). This chain reaction, where unsupported parents become emotionally unavailable or harsh – has profound implications for child outcomes, including increased risk of anxiety, behavioral problems and emotional dysregulation (disruption). The findings underscore that interventions aimed at improving child wellbeing must begin with the emotional ecology surrounding the parents.

This is precisely where the *Igwebuike* model of parenthood offers a culturally grounded solution. By embedding parents within a web of extended kinship and communal responsibility, it provides a buffer against the emotional isolation that often precipitates parental distress. In this system, care-giving is not a solitary endeavor but a shared vocation. A mother navigating postpartum depression, for instance, is not left to cope alone; she is surrounded by sisters, aunts, elders, and neighbors who offer practical help, emotional counsel, and moral encouragement. This communal structure not only stabilizes the parent but also preserves the emotional climate necessary for healthy child development. The *Igwebuike* approach thus addresses the root of the problem, not just the symptoms, by ensuring that care-givers themselves are cared for. It transforms parenting from a private struggle into a collective act of love.

Parenting style is a powerful determinant of adolescent mental health, and authoritative parenting has consistently emerged as the most protective model. Mandara and Murray (2000) found that adolescents raised in authoritative households, characterized by warmth, responsiveness, and firm expectation, exhibited significantly lower levels of depression and higher self-esteem. Their study concluded that “authoritative parenting was associated with the most favorable mental health outcomes among African American youth, including reduced depressive symptoms and increased psychological resilience” (Mandara & Murray 2000, 487). This model balances emotional support with behavioral regulation, creating an environment where children feel both secure and guided. In contrast, authoritarian and permissive styles were linked to higher emotional instability which underscores the importance of parenting approach that is both nurturing and structured.

The *Igwebuike* approach naturally leans toward this authoritative ethos, but it expands it beyond the nuclear family into a communal framework. In this system, the child is not solely shaped by the temperament or philosophy of one or two parents but by a constellation of caregivers; each contributing warmth, discipline and moral instruction.

Elders set communal standards, peers offer emotional companionship, and extended family members provide mentorship and correction. This creates what might be called an “authoritative community,” where high expectations are matched by high responsiveness. The child grows up in a relational ecosystem that affirms his/her worth, while guiding his/her behavior and buffering them against the emotional volatility that often accompanies adolescence. In this way, *Igwebuike* does not just replicate the benefits of authoritative parenting; it amplifies them through collective participation.

This communal framework extends beyond emotional support and parenting style. It also fills critical gaps in role modeling, particularly in contexts where father-figures are absent. Mandara and Murray (2006) found that father-absent boys were significantly more likely to engage in drug use than their father-present counterparts, even after controlling for socioeconomic status, neighborhood crime, and peer influence. Their findings suggest that the presence of father, or a consistent male role model, plays a stabilizing role in adolescent male development, especially for boys. The absence of such figures can leave emotional and behavioral voids that predispose youth to risk-taking and psychological distress. This is not merely a matter of discipline; it is about identity formation, emotional regulation, and the internalization of social norms.

In an *Igwebuike* system of parenthood, the absence of a biological father does not translate into the absence of fathering. The extended family structure ensures that children have access to multiple male and female role models who embody care, authority, and moral guidance. Uncles, grandfathers, older cousins, and community elders, step into the role of mentor and protector, offering the kind of consistent presence that research has shown to be vital. This multiplicity of role models also allows for a richer emotional palette; children learn to navigate different personalities, expectations, and relational dynamics, which strengthen their social intelligence and emotional resilience. The communal ethic of *Igwebuike* thus transforms what might be a deficit in nuclear family structure into a surplus of relational resources.

Even more importantly, this model resists the fragility of single-parent dependence. In many Western contexts, the absence or dysfunction of one parent can destabilize the entire emotional ecosystem of a child. But in *Igwebuike*, the emotional architecture of the child is built on multiple pillars. If one falters, others remain. This redundancy is not inefficiency – it is insurance. It ensures that no child is left emotionally orphaned, even when biological ties are strained or severed. In this way, *Igwebuike* model of parenting, offers not just a cultural alternative but a psychological framework for nurturing emotionally grounded individuals.

In societies where depression has become increasingly normalized, the *Igwebuike* model of African parenthood offers a counter-cultural structure that prioritizes presence, shared responsibility and interdependence. The communal parenting approach does not isolate care-giving to one individual but distributes it across a network of kin, neighbors, and elders. This diffusion of care creates a shield against the psychological weight that often accompanied isolation. Children and parents are likely to experience the chronic loneliness

and internalized pressure that fuel depressive states when they are embedded in a living and responsive community.

This model does not merely replicate tradition; instead, it adapts it to confront contemporary challenges. In urban settings where nuclear families dominate, the intentional revival of communal parenting – through mentorship and shared care-giving – can interrupt the cycles of silence and withdrawal that depression thrives on. The African parenthood model, grounded in *Igwebuike*, insists that no individual bears the burden alone. It is this insistence on togetherness (not as sentiment but as structure) that positions the model as a remedy to the growing epidemic of depression in modern contexts.

Addressing Theoretical Objections

Every philosophical model, no matter how compelling, must eventually face the test of critique. *Igwebuike*, with its emphasis on communalism and relational identity, is no exception. While its moral and psychological benefits have been well articulated, its viability in contemporary contexts demands scrutiny. The modern world is marked by urbanization, mobility, digital fragmentation, and a growing emphasis on individual rights and autonomy. These forces can appear to be at odds with the communal ethos of *Igwebuike*. Yet, rather than dismissing the model as anachronistic or culturally insular, it is more fruitful to engage its principles critically; asking whether it can be adapted to meet the demands of modern life. This section addresses four likely criticisms, not to defend *Igwebuike* blindly, but to clarify its relevance, flexibility and philosophical depth.

One common critique of communal models like *Igwebuike* is that they romanticize a bygone era – an agrarian, village-based lifestyle that seems incompatible with the fast-paced, fragmented realities of modern urban life. Critics argue that such frameworks, while emotionally appealing, are structurally obsolete. David Harvey, in his critique of New Urbanism, warns against “harking back to a mythological past” and cautions that the idea of community can carry “dangerous freight” when used as a panacea for modern alienations (Harvey 1997). The concern is that communalism, as envisioned in traditional African societies, cannot be meaningfully replicated in cities marked by anonymity, transience, and digital mediation. Even within African contexts, urban migration and globalization have disrupted extended family systems, making the logistics of communal living more complex than ever.

Yet this critique, while valid in its caution, underestimates the adaptability of *Igwebuike* as a philosophical framework rather than a rigid social blueprint. The goal is not to resurrect a pastoral past but to extract its enduring principles namely, mutual responsibility, relational identity, and shared emotional labor, and apply them to contemporary settings. As Onebunne (2020, 2) argues, *Igwebuike* is “an expressive modality of being and belongingness” that transcends geography and era. In practice, this could mean leveraging technology to strengthen extended family ties across distances, forming intentional communities within urban neighborhoods, or advocating for social policies that prioritize collective wellbeing over hyper-individualism. The essence of *Igwebuike* then is not in its

rural aesthetics but in its relational ethic. It invites modern societies to re-imagine connection; not as nostalgia but as necessity.

A second critique often leveled against communal models is that they suppress individuality; in other words, the needs of the group override personal autonomy thereby stifling freedom and self-expression. This concern is especially salient in liberal societies where autonomy is considered a fundamental value. Critics argue that communalism, by emphasizing conformity and collective identity, risks producing individuals who are dependent, passive, or unable to assert their own preferences. Philosophers like Isaiah Berlin have warned against “positive liberty” being used as a justification for social coercion, where the community claims to know what is best for the individual. In this view, communal frameworks like *Igwebuike* may inadvertently reproduce social pressure disguised as care, leaving little room for dissent or divergence.

But this critique misreads the relational logic of *Igwebuike*. The model does not subordinate the individual to the group; it nurtures the individual through the group. Drawing from self-determination theory, Chirkov et al. (2003) argue that autonomy is not the absence of social influence but the internalization of values through meaningful relationships. In *Igwebuike*, the community provides a secure base from which individuals can explore, assert and evolve. It is a “both-and” model, not an “either-or.” The child who grows up in a web of affirmation and accountability is more likely to develop a strong sense of self—not less.

The collective does not erase individuality; it strengthens it. As Metz (2011, 543) notes in his analysis of Ubuntu ethics, “the community is not opposed to the individual but is the context in which individuality is realized.” *Igwebuike* thus offers a vision of autonomy that is relational and deeply human.

Communal systems like *Igwebuike* are not immune to internal conflicts. Critics rightly point out that the same community that offers care can also become a source of harm through gossip, exclusion, or the enforcement of oppressive norms. The fear is that communalism, when poorly managed, can devolve into conformity, where dissent is punished and individuality is policed. Sociologists working within the conflict perspective have long argued that communities are not neutral spaces; they are arenas of power where dominant voices can silence others. Gossip, in particular, becomes a tool of social control, often used to shame or isolate those who deviate from communal expectations. These dynamics are not hypothetical; they are real risks that must be acknowledged if *Igwebuike* is to be taken seriously as a model for emotional wellbeing.

Yet the presence of conflict does not invalidate the model. It invites refinement. A properly understood *Igwebuike* system is not built on blind conformity but on mutual respect and dialogical engagement. The goal is not to erase difference but to restore harmony. In traditional African societies, communal correction often took the form of storytelling, proverbs, or elder-led mediation – methods that prioritize restoration over punishment. Metz notes that in Ubuntu ethics, “the community is not a coercive force but a moral space

where individuals are guided toward the good through relational accountability” (Metz 2000, 545).

Igwebuike inherits this ethos. It recognizes that conflict is inevitable, but it also insists that resolution must be relational, not authoritarian. The same collective that can exert pressure is also the one that provides care, correction, and healing. In this way, *Igwebuike* offers a model of community that is not utopian, but resilient; capable of holding tension without collapsing into tyranny.

A final critique concerns cultural specificity: is *Igwebuike* only applicable to African societies, or can it serve as broader philosophical model? Skeptics may argue that its communal ethos is too deeply rooted in African cosmology, kinship structures, and linguistic frameworks to be meaningfully exported. Indeed, *Igwebuike* emerges from the Igbo worldview, where identity is relational and personhood is affirmed through belonging. According to Kanu (2021, 165), “the African concept of the self is not atomistic but communitarian,” shaped by metaphysics of interdependence. This cultural grounding is not incidental; it is foundational. To transplant *Igwebuike* into societies built on liberal individualism may seem like forcing a square peg into a round hole.

Yet this critique overlooks the distinction between cultural origin and philosophical relevance. While *Igwebuike* is undeniably African in its genesis, its core insight – that human beings thrive in connected, supportive communities – is not culturally exclusive. It speaks to a universal human need. Jude Onebunne (2021) argues that *Igwebuike* should be appreciated as an expressive modality of being and belongingness, not just a regional ethic but a metaphysical orientation toward relational existence.

In this light, *Igwebuike* becomes a lens through which any society, especially those grappling with the alienation of hyper-individualism, can re-imagine its social architecture. Whether through co-housing movements in Europe, kinship-based networks in Latin America, or digital communities that prioritize emotional reciprocity, the principles of *Igwebuike* can be adapted, not adopted wholesale. It offers not a cultural export, but a philosophical invitation: to build lives not in isolation but in interdependence.

Conclusion

The argument traced throughout this work has been both empirical and philosophical: modern depression is not merely biochemical imbalance or a personal failing; it is profoundly rooted in the social architecture of isolation. As societies have shifted towards hyper-individualism, the emotional scaffolding that once buffered human beings from despair has eroded. The *Igwebuike* model of parenting offers a compelling alternative; not as a nostalgic return to the past, but as a culturally-rich and philosophically-grounded framework for re-imagining connection. It affirms that emotional wellbeing is not cultivated in solitude but in shared existence. Through communal parenting, relational identity, and distributed care-giving, *Igwebuike* provides a blueprint for restoring the social bonds that modernity has frayed. It is not a rejection of progress, but a recalibration of its priorities.

“I am because we are” is not a poetic flourish; it is rather a prescription for mental wellness. The brotherhood and companionship it fosters are direct antidote to the loneliness that underpins much of modern depression. In a world where many suffer silently behind screens and closed doors, *Igwebuike* calls for a return to rational living, where care is not outsourced but embedded in daily life. This is not to deny the value of clinical interventions or pharmacological support, but to insist that healing must also be social. The future of mental health may lie not in medications alone, but in the rebuilding of communal bonds that have always been the bedrock of human resilience. It is time therefore to re-examine our socio-philosophical foundations; not to abandon the individual, but to re-situate them within the embrace of the collective-we. In doing so, we may discover not only how to live, but also how to flourish.

“I am because we are” is more than a cultural aphorism. It is a psychological and existential orientation that speaks directly to the heart of human well-being. In the context of mental health, this principle becomes a lifeline. The epidemic of loneliness that characterizes much of modern depression is a lack of belonging; not simply a lack of company. People are surrounded by others yet feel unseen, unheard, and unsupported. *Igwebuike* counters this with a radical re-centering of the person within a web of relationships. It insists that healing is not a solo journey but a communal one. The companionship it fosters through shared parenting, extended kinship, and relational accountability, is not accidental but therapeutic. It truly offers what many clinical models overlook: the emotional infrastructure of everyday life.

This is not to romanticize community as a cure-all, but to recognize its irreplaceable role in human flourishing. The *Igwebuike* model does not deny the importance of personal agency or clinical care; instead, it complements them by restoring the social conditions under which autonomy and healing can thrive. In this framework, the individual is not swallowed by the group but sustained by it. The warmth of brotherhood, the constancy of companionship, and the ethic of mutual care become the antidotes to the emotional coldness of modern existence. “I am because we are” is, thus, a practical strategy for mental wellness; not just a philosophical stance. It reminds us that *to be well is to be with*. And in a world increasingly marked by fragmentation, this simple truth may be the most profound intervention of all.

If the crisis of modern depression is rooted in isolation, then the solution must begin with a re-examination of our socio-philosophical foundations. For too long, the dominant paradigm has treated the individual as a self-contained unit: autonomous, rational, and emotionally self-sufficient. This view, while empowering in some respects, has also left many people disconnected from the very networks that sustain psychological wellbeing. The rise of depression and anxiety is not merely a medical issue but a philosophical one. It reflects a world view that privileges independence over interdependence, privacy over presence, and achievement over attachment. *Igwebuike* challenges this framework by offering a different lens: one that sees human beings as fundamentally relational, shaped

and sustained by the communities they inhabit.

This is not a call to abandon science or clinical care but a call to expand the conversation. Medications may treat symptoms, but they cannot restore meaning or belonging. Therapy may offer insight, but it cannot replace the daily presence of a caring community. Mental health practitioners, educators, and policymakers should therefore begin to integrate *Igwebuike principles* into parenting programs, community mental health initiatives, and social policy. The future of mental health must move beyond isolated interventions toward integrated living. *Igwebuike* invites us to rebuild the communal bonds that have always been the bedrock of human resilience. It is not a relic of the past but a roadmap for the future. In a world increasingly fragmented by screens, borders, and ideologies, the simple truth remains: we heal in connection. To re-imagine mental wellness, we must first re-imagine what it means to be human. And in that re-imagining, *Igwebuike* stands not just as model but as a moral imperative. *Igwebuike* model of African parenthood reminds us that emotional health and healing begin not in isolation but in the embrace of shared life.

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