

KNOWLEDGE OF INDIGENOUS HEALERS ON MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

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ABSTRACT: Culture shapes the expression of mental illness as well as the pathways to mental health care. The prevalence of seeking the help of Indigenous healers for mental health problems is more common in the Southern part of Karnataka, where, having the belief of supernatural causation of mental illness, people of this region worship Spirits (Bhootas) and conduct spirit dance rituals to seek the solution for mental health problems. Though few healers have some success stories in treating a person with mental health problems, due to lack of knowledge, some of the practice of the healers associated with potential harms.

The study was undertaken in the Udupi district of Karnataka State for which, One group pre-test post-test experimental design was used to assess the pre and post-test mental health knowledge of the Indigenous healers. Snowball sampling was used to collect data from 100 spirit dancers and self-prepared mental health intervention module was used to impart information about mental health to the Indigenous healers.

Organized and well-trained indigenous healers could play a crucial role in providing better community mental health care, therefore it is very much essential for every mental health professional to understand the need for enhancing mental health knowledge of the traditional healers.

KEYWORDS: Cultural Beliefs, Indigenous Healing, Mental Health Knowledge, Mental Illness, & Spirit Dancer.

I. INTRODUCTION

For more than five thousand years, human beings evolved a set of complex practices that involved religion, magic, and indigenous healing. These practices were to appease the gods and goddesses, who appeared to relieve them of their problem, pain, and suffering, and to heal them of their illnesses (Moodley & Stewart, 2010). Indigenous healing is a community accepted specific rituals carried out by designated figures to relieve symptoms of distress and holds those beliefs and practices relating to disease, which are the outcome of indigenous cultural development and are not explicitly derived from the conceptual framework of modern medicine (Sarkar & Seshadri, 2015). Prevalence of seeking Indigenous healing practices such as treatment offered by astrologers, priests, black magicians and so forth, is high among people with mental health problems. (Rajan et al., 2016). Indigenous healing is used for not only treatment and protective purposes but also cause evil and in which the mysteries of illness and healing procedures are made understandable and rationalized to the people who seek help. In traditional healing, the accuracy of diagnosis and efficacy of treatment is not given much importance, instead, they substituted by the prospect of help and a sense of hope which contributes directly to the patient's improvement. All traditional types of therapy reflect the local beliefs regarding man's nature which establish the close links between an individual's one side and their ancestor and the spirit world on the other side (Avasthi, Kate, & Grover, 2013).

Indigenous healing for mental health in India reflects the cultural belief of people who still practiced without much change either in methods or in techniques. Though people consult multiple healers to get relief from the illness to an extent that a failure or unsatisfied outcome from one healer forces them to consult another healer. Some of the motivational factors that determine the choices for healing practices could be listed as follows (Kar, 2008; Ram et al., 2017).

- Strong belief on family members or relatives who decides approaching healers,
- Easy availability and approachability of the healers
- The social stigma associated with psychiatric consultation,
- The belief about the causation of mental illness,
- Lack of awareness among common public, and