

Indigenous Healing Practice and Beneficiaries' Perception

¹Prakasha Amin & ²Mohan A.K

¹Research Scholar, Department of Social Work, Central University of Kerala(India)

²Associate Professor, Department of Social Work, Central University of Kerala,Kasaragod, Kerala(India)

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*Corresponding Author

Email:mohanak[at]cukerala.ac.in

ABSTRACT

The concept of Indigenous healing has been regarded as a non-invasive medical practice for centuries, and despite the development of clinical treatments, many still depend on Indigenous healing practice for mental health. It is estimated that 80% of the population living in rural areas in developing countries depend on Indigenous healers for their health care needs (WHO, 2001). Despite the development of hospitals and educational institutions, people from the southern region of Karnataka, believe that entire unnatural occurrence is due to Bhootas (Spirits) and a certain portion of the population attribute mental illness is due to witchcraft and supernatural causes. In order to over from such obstacles, people approach healers for a miracle solution. Acknowledging the significant role of the belief system of people seeking the help of traditional healers for various problems, the present study was conducted to understand the perception of beneficiaries' on Indigenous Healing. A cross-sectional, interview survey was adopted and purposive sampling technique was used to select the 30 beneficiaries' approaching Indigenous Healing healers in Udupi and Dakshina Kannada District of Karnataka State. It was found that most of the beneficiaries approached Dharshana cult artists (Spirit Dance) (40 percent) to seek the solution for various problems, such as spirit possession (10 percent), the curse of the serpent (16.66 percent), health issues (53.33) and so on. The Herbs / Coconut/Lemon/ Kumkum were the common treatment method adopted by the healers (60percent), exorcism was a method of treatment adopted for spirit possession (30percent). Based on the findings it can be concluded that, belief system remains prominent in every aspect of the life of individuals who seek the help of healers while indigenous healers need be trained in order to provide better mental health care to the patients.

1. Introduction

Beliefs and help-seeking behaviours are highly correlated with each other and are greatly influenced by the culture¹. The culture contributes a major part in determining the different causes of mental illness and shapes the treatment process accordingly². It provides an explanation of the causes for the sufferings of the people and way through which they can heal their problems³. Culture contributes to the manifestation of mental illness and attributes the cause of mental illness as a supernatural power, magical spirit, or possession by evil spirits⁴. More than two thirds of people with mental illness and their family members have a strong belief in the supernatural causation of mental illness, and this belief forces them to consult traditional healers before resorting to modern health care. Belief on super natural causes on mental illness exists even today in many cultures in rural as well as urban societies for which, people seek the help of priests, mystics, shamans, and diviners, who practice magic, sorcery, and rituals to alleviate social, economic as well as moral crises.

2. Traditional healing

South India is a land of temples, where the belief in the efficiency of 'pujas' and 'temple worship' is very strongly rooted⁵. The practice of Traditional healing at these region found in every nook and corner of the society, which follows the belief that "various supernatural influences operating in the environment affect an individual's physical and mental health",

and then pursues treatment for the health problems through rituals and spiritual healings performed by the healers⁶.

The concept of Traditional healing has been regarded as a non-invasive medical practice for centuries, and despite the forms of clinical treatments available, many still respect this alternate medical practice. traditional healing is, 'the sum total of all the knowledge and practices, used in diagnosis, prevention and elimination of physical, mental, and social imbalance and depending on practical experience and observation handed down from generation to generation⁷'. As stated by Siddharth, traditional healing as community accepted specific rituals, carried out by designated figures with the aim of relieving symptoms of distress⁸. According to Struthers R, traditional healer is "a person who is recognized by the community in which he lives as competent to provide health care by using vegetable, animal and mineral substances and other methods based on the social, cultural and religious background, as well as on the knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs that are prevalent in the community regarding physical, mental and social well-being and the causation of disease and disability⁹". Traditional healing is the oldest form treatment method which functions based on underlying philosophy and set of principles.

History of traditional healing practices in India:

Initially, traditional healing practice was an integral part of semi-nomadic and agricultural tribal societies. As per the archeological evidence, the existence of traditional healing can