

“A Study of Indigenous Healing Center for Mental illness Available in Lakhimpur Kheri District”

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Abstract—Mental illnesses are among the most important contribution to the global burden of disease and disability. Despite this, people have far lesser attendance in psychiatric clinics and hospitals. Various studies have shown that vast majority of people with mental illness seek help from indigenous healing centres.

Objective of the study: To understand the indigenous healing centres for mental illness available in Lakhimpur Kheri District.

Research methodology: This study comes under mixed method research design. In this research used snow balling and purposive sampling. Fourteen healers were selected for interview. For the data collection semi-structure interview guide and observation check list were used and data analysis done by qualitative method.

Result: During the course of field research, researcher found fourteen indigenous healers and healing centers which are frequented by people with mental illness for their mental health care. These fourteen healers and healing centers in Lakhimpur Kheri District categorized into four categories. These categories include first, faith healer, second, ritual healing at the religious site, third is shaman and fourth is the godly tree.

Conclusion: This research shows that indigenous healing plays an important role in mental health care; especially for mental health care and many people get relief from these indigenous healing centres, primarily because these healing centres use a holistic approach and share similar cosmology of health and well-being and give psychological and social support to the people with mental illness. Indigenous methods of healing and their understanding of mental health are less stigmatized in comparison to medical treatment.

Indigenous Healing for Mental Illness

Indigenous healing is used worldwide for treatment of mental illness as well as other illnesses. Originating in Africa, and developed later both locally and internationally, indigenous healing refer to certain universal forms of healing that is distinct from modern medicine. Its belief in the inter-relatedness of the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual aspects of human beings gives indigenous healing a holistic nature.

According to a WHO report in 2001, traditional/ indigenous healing is a major source of health care for more than two thirds of the world's population. Indigenous healing practices have gained popularity in western countries especially because of immigration, multiculturalism, failure of modern medicine

and in non-western societies due to greater access to traditional indigenous healers and belief about the cause of illness. Mass scale migration has also led to the presence of well-trained traditional healers from home countries. They possess profound knowledge and understanding of the community's historical, religious and cultural beliefs, thus playing a pivotal role in the life of the community, providing stability under conditions of economic despair, political conflict and changing values (Moodley, 2008).

Working within the framework of traditional cultural beliefs concerning health and illness, the traditional healers are familiar with the behavior, beliefs, values, and often, the language of the clients. They can interpret illness in a way that has familiar implications and thus, prescribe a predictable course of treatment. Even in cases where the healer may use techniques that may be unknown to the client, the treatment is nevertheless harmonious with the client's worldview, since traditional healers are familiar with the cultural meanings of health, illness and healing of the community (Moodley, 2008).

Yeh et al (2004) have highlighted that the divergent worldviews of various cultures produce different concepts of mental health, physical well-being and spirituality. Indigenous healers often share the client's cultural norms and are therefore individuals from whom people seek various forms of assistance, healing and guidance. There are several definitions of indigenous healers that reflect various cultures of origin. From the beginning of human existence, all cultural groups have developed not only their own explanations of abnormal behaviors, but also culture-specific ways of dealing with human problems and distress. Those particular culturally bound methods are referred to as indigenous forms of healing. Most cultural groups also have specially designated individuals or groups considered to be healers, who comfort the ailing. Their duties involve not only curing physical ailments but also dealing with problems related to psychological distress or behavioral deviance as well as coping with newer socio-cultural environments.

Type of indigenous healing and healing methods

There are diverse set of practices that one can call indigenous healing, which can be used for both mental and physical illness. Indigenous healing has several traits such as having a local origin, being vernacular/oral, being unorganized and having the function of healing people through shamanic or faith healing methods. The sites for indigenous healing are temples, dargah, churches, shrines and cults. (Davar and Lohokare, 2009).

According to the WHO (2002) report, traditional medicine is the sum total of the knowledge, skills and practices based on the theories, beliefs and experiences indigenous to different cultures, whether explicable or not, used in the maintenance of health. What is important to recognize is that the application of diagnosis and treatment methods is largely influenced by the culture and beliefs dominant in a particular community to the extent that they may be ineffective when applied in a different context. Kirmayer (2004) has mentioned that healing practices has great diversity in and around the world. He described some common system of healing such as: Ayurveda (diet, purification medicine), Chiropractic (physical manipulation), Christen healing (prayer, restitution, and demonic exorcism), and Divination (offering or propitiation), Islamic medicine (recitation of Quran), possession cults (possession by spirit allows propitiation) and shamanism (shamanic healer travels to spirit world and with aid of spirit helper).

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Result

Categorization of Indigenous Healers and Healing Centres

Categorization of indigenous healers in Lakhimpur Kheri District is made according to their healing methods because these healers use different healing methods with respect to rituals and materials. However, during the course of the research, it became evident that many authors use varied terms for the same healing methods. Most authors' uses spiritual or religious healing for faith healing and ritual healing is often used interchangeably with religious healing and spiritual healing. Moreover these healing methods overlap with the other categories of the healers because they use mixed methods for healing. As a result, it is difficult to categorize one healer in any one category. Yet, reseracher has categorised the healers in some category or the other with reference to the scholarship available. Since the place and method are

significant in the healing process, researcher has broadly looked into healing methods and place of healing of the healer. During the course of field research, researcher found 14 inddegenous healers and healing centers which are frequented by people with mental illness for their mental health care. These fourteen healers and healing centers in Lakhimpur Kheri District can be categorized into four categories, based on the healing methods that they administer on the patients and on the healing place.. These categories include first, *faith* healer, second, *ritual* healing at the religious site, third is *shaman* and fourth is the *godly tree*.

Faith healer

The categorization of this group is based on the healing method. Faith healers claim that they are blessed with spiritual powers and that they can evoke a divine presence and authority through prayers and rituals. They believe that mental health problems are caused by evil spiritual powers, bad deeds and witchcraft. These healers adopt prayers “dua” and “prathana”, lamps and holy water, recite the holy Quran, write Arabic text “*ayaat*” from the holy Quran for healing.. The researcher found eight healers who come under this category. These healers are Maulavi at “mastanmiyakimazaar” at Devakali, “paani wale baba”, “miyajeeBheera”, “maulavi at Zind baba kimazaar”, “sokha”(local name given by the rural community of Lakhimpur Kheri District, who goes to patient’s home for healing), “maulavi at kila, Kheri” , “maulavi at zind baba kimazaar in Lakhimpur” and “Guru jee”. They give holy water, ash, incense stick, amulet, cloves and iron spike and other raw food for healing and apart from these, one healer also burns the patient with incense sticks, and some also perform certain kinds of rituals for healing.

Ritual healing at the religious site

Ritual healing is more holistic in nature as it treats the mind, body and spirit together. Ritual healing is followed by religious healers, faith healers, shamans at healing centres, Muslim shrines such as *dargah* and *mazaar*, and Hindu temples. These rituals could be religious rituals (worship, chanting, artietc) and ritual of exorcism as is famous at Muslim Shrine *dargah* and *Balajeetemple*. Exorcism can be a one-on-one ritual (puja) between the patient and the exorcist, or it can be a pubic affair, involving the whole community. The researcher found that ritual healing done at Hindu temples, Muslim shrines and even when it is at the patient’s home, the healers demand that the patients perform particular religious rituals and offer food and money to God in gratitude in Lakhimpur Kheri District. At Balaji Temple and the Muslim shrine, the patient comes for getting rid of their possessing spirits through a temple ritual and shrine rituals. Sufferer attends exorcism in the temple and shrine court, *peshi*. This category has three healers and healing centres. The first one is *Mata jee*, second is *mastanmiyakimazaar at Khurd* and the third is *Balaji temple*. Mata jee and Guru jee perform rituals (worship, arti, songs and dance) at the Durgamata

temple. Mastanmiyakimazaar and balajee temple are famous for rituals of exorcises. People come here to get rid of spirit possession.

Shaman

Researcher found one local healer in Lakhimpur Kheri District. In certain villages of Lakhimpur Kheri, people use the term *Sokha* for that person who does healing at the patient's home. He has the power to connect with the spiritual world and communicate directly with the spirit and calls on the spirit onto his or the sufferer's body during healing process. People call him *Sokha*. As mentioned above, *sokha* is the name given by the rural community of the Lakhimpur Kheri District. He heals patients at their home. This healer is categorised as "Shaman" on the basis of his specialization and healing method.

Godly tree

The researcher found two godly trees in Lakhimpur Kheri District, which are extensively used by the patients, suffer from evil spiritual problems, mental problems, chronic pain and other kinds of physical problems. These trees are symbolized as "Zind baba" and "Veer baba". The researcher did not find any literature about these spiritual trees used by people with mental health problems for their treatment.

The researcher found that people with mental illness approaches four types of healers for their mental health care, faith healer, ritual healing at religious places, shaman and godly trees in Lakhimpur Kheri District. These healers use different methods for healing. Faith healers do healing on the basis of prayer, and in this healing, the placebo effect plays an important role. Ritual healing focuses mainly rituals according to religion such as *puja*, *path*, *fasting* etc. and rituals of exorcism also takes place at religious places for healing. Ritual healing gives therapeutic atmosphere to the people with mental illness and their family, as well as gives a platform from different religious and cultural backgrounds for sharing their pain and suffering. Exorcism also helps the people with mental illness to act out their unwanted, otherwise unacceptable emotions and pain from the society. This is known as "catharsis" in psychotherapy and after that process, people with mental illness feel relaxed. Shaman operates with collective myths and individual myths for the healing. Godly trees embody a belief in the presence of a Holy Spirit residing in the tree which has the power to heal patients. People with mental illness and their family go to these places because they have faith that these healing practices are effective for their problems. Catharsis and placebo are major components of healing making these practices effective.

Conclusion

This research shows that indigenous healing plays an important role in mental health care; people with mental illness get relief from these healing centres, primarily because these healing centres use a holistic approach and share similar cosmology of health and well-being and give psychological and social support to the people with mental illness. Indigenous methods of healing and their understanding of mental health are less stigmatized in comparison to medical treatment that separates the physical and the mental. Medical treatment is also more stigmatized.

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