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## World wide existence of traditional healing or complimentary alternative medicine: A review

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### Abstract

WHO (World Health Organization) defines health as a complete state of physical and mental wellbeing, and not merely the absence of disease or weakness. Traditional healing is used for the health treatment, dealing with the health problem, knowledge related the traditional healing and faith. Traditional healers play the important role in the traditional therapy. It is found that the traditional therapy depends upon the faith and believe on the traditional healer. Aim of this study was to find out the existence and there future aspect of the traditional healing in the societies of developing countries. Some countries are focusing on the development and research framework for traditional therapy. After the study it was concluded that most of the developing countries including India, peoples believes in traditional therapies. If they are suffering from any disease they choose to prefer the traditional healer after that they prefer to go to the medical practitioner. Although there is no side effect of traditional therapy, so it is important that traditional healing should be incorporated with western medical therapy. Some rule regulation and education framework should be created for the therapy by the government of respective countries.

**Keywords:** Traditional healing, WHO, complimentary medicine, alternative medicine

### Introduction

Traditional healing is used for the health treatment, dealing with the health problem, knowledge related the traditional healing and faith. This technique incorporate herbal, animal, zeolite medicines, spiritual therapies or physical techniques. This definition is in line with the practice of traditional healers who look at the whole body (physical, mental, spiritual). This practice is an important and essential part of healthcare systems in nearly all countries of the world <sup>[1]</sup>.

According to WHO, Health is defined as a complete state of physical and mental wellbeing, and not merely the absence of disease or weakness. Traditional healers are potentially valuable partners in the delivery of health care. They are already available, ever-present in most cases, and share the same culture, beliefs, and values as their patients. Their methods are effective in certain illnesses (eg, psychosomatic illnesses) as is their use of local herbs and medicinal plants for therapeutic purposes. They are skilled in interpersonal relations including counselling, and can fill the vacuum in health care created by the shortage of biomedical health personnel for delivery of primary health care. Traditional and complementary medicine is an important and often underestimated issue of healthcare. It is found in nearly all countries of the world and the demand for such services is expanding. Traditional medicine of proven quality, safety, and efficacy, contributes to achieving the goal of ensuring that all people have access to care <sup>[2, 3]</sup>.

According to the World Health Organization 2013, it is estimated that about 80% of the unwell population in developing countries including Bangladesh depends on complimentary medicine for their primary healthcare needs, Which is presently known as 'alternative medicine' had its origin in the West. According to the Fifth Plan Document (1992), more than half a million traditional healers are present in India. This number, of course, includes all practitioners of unconventional medicine <sup>[4, 5, 7-9, 17-21]</sup>. Traditional healing comes under the complementary and alternative medicine. The terms complementary and alternative describe practices and products that people choose as adjuncts to or as alternatives to Western medical approaches. Increasingly, the terms CAM and TM are being used interchangeably <sup>[27-30]</sup>. Endless varieties of practices are scientifically unproven and poorly accepted by medical authorities. For the sake of organizing an agenda for research into these approaches, the U.S. National Institutes of Health has grouped them into five somewhat overlapping domains as follows:

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**Biologically based practices:** These include use of a vast array of vitamins and mineral supplements, natural products such as chondroitin sulfate, which is derived from bovine or shark cartilage; herbals, such as ginkgo biloba and echinacea; and unconventional diets, such as the low-carbohydrate approach to weight loss espoused by the late Robert Atkins.

**Manipulative and body-based approaches:** These kinds of approaches, which include massage, have been used throughout history. In the 19th century, additional formal manipulative disciplines emerged in the United States: chiropractic medicine and osteopathic medicine. Both originated in an attempt to relieve structural forces on vertebrae and spinal nerve roots that practitioners perceived as evoking a panoply of illnesses beyond mere musculoskeletal pain [22, 23, 35].

**Mind-body medicine:** Many ancient cultures assumed that the mind exerts powerful influences on bodily functions and vice versa. Attempts to reassert proper harmony between these bodily systems led to the development of mind-body medicine, an array of approaches that incorporate spiritual, meditative, and relaxation techniques.

**Alternative medical systems:** Whereas the ancient Greeks postulated that health requires a balance of vital humors, Asian cultures considered that health depends on the balance and flow of vital energies through the body. This latter theory underlies the practice of acupuncture, for example, which asserts that vital energy flow can be restored by placing needles at critical body points [37].

**Energy medicine:** This approach uses therapies that involve the use of energy either biofield- or bioelectromagnetic based interventions. An example of the former is Reiki therapy, which aims to realign and strengthen healthful energies through the intervention of energies radiating from the hands of a master healer [61, 62, 39].

#### Types of complementary and alternative medicine

There are many different areas which make up the practice of complementary and alternative medicine. In addition, many parts of one field may intersect with the parts of another area. Eg: acupuncture is also used in conventional medicine. In the U.S., complementary and alternative medicine is used about 38% of adults and 12% of children. Eg: Traditional alternative medicine. In this field there are many mainstream and accepted forms of therapy, such as acupuncture, homeopathy, and Oriental practices. These therapies have been practiced for centuries worldwide. Traditional alternative medicine may include [24, 26].

- **Acupuncture:** The practice of inserting needles into the body to reduce pain or induce anesthesia. More broadly, acupuncture is a family of procedures involving the stimulation of anatomical locations on or in the skin by a variety of techniques. There are a number of different approaches to diagnosis and treatment in American acupuncture that incorporate medical traditions from China, Japan, Korea, and other countries [31]. A study was conducted in Pain management unit in a public primary care center in southern Spain, over a period of two years, to analyze the efficacy of acupuncture as a complementary therapy to the pharmacological treatment of osteoarthritis of the knee, with respect to pain relief

reduction of stiffness, and increased physical function during treatment; modifications in the consumption of diclofenac during treatment; and changes in the patient's quality of life. 97 patient was enrolled for the trial Patients were randomly separated into two groups, one group of 48 patients was receiving acupuncture plus diclofenac and the other group of 49 patients was receiving placebo acupuncture plus diclofenac. 88 patients completed the trial. In the intention to treat analysis, the Western Ontario and McMaster Universities (WOMAC) index presented a greater reduction in the intervention group than in the control group (mean difference 23.9, 95% confidence interval 15.0 to 32.8) The reduction was greater in the subscale of functional activity. The same result was observed in the pain visual analogue scale, with a reduction of 26.6 (18.5 to 34.8). The pain of quality of life in the chronically ill (PQLC) results indicate that acupuncture treatment produces significant changes in physical capability ( $P = 0.021$ ) and psychological functioning ( $P = 0.046$ ). Three patients reported bruising after the acupuncture session. It was found that acupuncture plus diclofenac is more effective than placebo acupuncture plus diclofenac for the symptomatic treatment of osteoarthritis of the knee [63].

- **Ayurveda:** Ayurveda is one of the oldest alternative medicine practice that evolved in the Indian subcontinent. From the large number of literature spanning over three millennia on diverse aspects of managing health and wellbeing, both in Sanskrit and regional languages of the subcontinent, it can be deduced that it has had a dynamic and unbroken knowledge tradition. Contemporary Ayurveda has been formalized and institutionalized on aspects such as education, clinical approaches, pharmacopeia, and product manufacturing starting from late nineteenth century. In the post-independence period in India, it has been recognized and legitimized as one of the formal healthcare systems of the country [32]. According to a study, arthritis and various musculoskeletal disorders are the leading causes of disability in persons between 18 to 65 years of age and are common causes of disability related to employment. Among them ankylosing spondylitis is a chronic, systemic, inflammatory disease that affects primarily the sacroiliac joints and spine with the symptoms of muscular spasm, stiffness and limitation of movement of spine. It is classified under seronegative spondyloarthritic disease. Traditional practice of Ashtavaidyan Ayurveda line of management has been tried to evaluate the efficacy in ankylosing spondylitis. A combined treatment with internal medication and external therapeutic procedures of Ayurveda has been taken up to assess evaluate the effect on the functional improvement and safety in ankylosing spondylitis. Diagnosed cases of ankylosing spondylitis (n=30) (20-60 yrs) have undergone the prescribed classical Ashtavaidyan Ayurvedic therapy; the total study period was 57 days which included 21 days each at inpatient and outpatient basis and 15 days of follow up. Initially Pizhichil (Kayaseka) with Ketakeemooladi Taila with Panchatikta Ghrita was performed along with internal medications for first 7 days later same internal medication is continued with Sathaila Tila Pinda Sweda and followed by Panchatikthaka Ksheera Basti for last 7 days. Same internal medicines and oil application were continued for next 21 days on

outpatient basis and Balaguluchyadi Taila was applied regularly on scalp for all these days. The laboratory parameters used to evaluate the liver and kidney functions did not show any significant change that indicates the prescribed treatment is safe. It was concluded that Traditional Ashtavaidyan Ayurveda therapy is effective in improving functional ability. Moreover, there was no adverse drug reaction recorded during as well there was no significant change observed in liver and renal function tests [64].

- **Homeopathy:** Homeopathy, also known as homeopathic medicine, is a medical system that was developed in Germany more than 200 years ago. It's based on two unconventional theories:

“Like cures like”-the notion that a disease can be cured by a substance that produces similar symptoms in healthy people

“Law of minimum dose”-the notion that the *lower* the dose of the medication, the greater its effectiveness. Many homeopathic products are so diluted that no molecules of the original substance remain [33]. A survey was done in the Los Angeles metropolitan area between January 1994 and July 1995. Participants completed a self-administered questionnaire before undergoing diagnosis by the homeopath. Follow-up interviews were conducted by phone 1 month after diagnosis and face to face 4 months after diagnosis, along with a self-administered questionnaire before the final interview. A total of 104 participants entered the study; 77 completed all data collection. In results clients sought homeopathic care for a wide array of largely chronic conditions. Respiratory, gastrointestinal, and female reproductive problems were the most common primary complaints. Most clients were highly educated, but had limited knowledge about homeopathy before entering treatment. Approximately 80% reported earlier, unsuccessful attempts to get relief from mainstream care. Four months after treatment, general measures of health status showed improvement, and only 29% of participants reported no improvement for the primary complaint leading to treatment. Satisfaction with homeopathic treatment was high regardless of outcome. Three outcome measures of perceived change--overall health status, primary condition for which treatment was sought, and outlook on life--were predicted by different combinations of study variables. It was concluded that homeopathy does not divert people from seeking mainstream care. The use of alternative modes of care such as homeopathy can be understood as attractive and satisfying to educated individuals with chronic problems [65].

- **Naturopathy:** Naturopathy is a distinct type of primary care medicine that blends age-old healing traditions with scientific advances and current research. It is guided by a unique set of principles that recognize the body's innate healing capacity, emphasize disease prevention, and encourage individual responsibility to obtain optimal health [34]. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), depression is common worldwide, affecting about 121 million people. Untreated depression can lead to suicide, and the WHO estimates that 850,000 people worldwide commit suicide every year. Depression is the leading cause of disability worldwide and was the 4th leading contributor to the global burden of disease for the year 2000, according to the WHO [10]. Their estimates project that depression will rise to 2nd place in the global burden of disease listing by the year 2020. In many

patients, mild to moderate depression can be successfully treated with a variety of naturopathic and holistic options, such as dietary changes, dietary supplements, exercise, massage, herbs, and sunlight.

Naturopathic medicine is based on the philosophy of addressing the basic underlying cause of any health condition. Proper nutrition is a foundational component of any natural medicine program. Nutrition affects mood through the many substrates and nutrients needed for proper neurotransmitter synthesis and function. A healthy diet is not only essential for proper neurotransmitter balance, but it affects the immune system in ways that then affect neurotransmitter function. The inclusion of exercise is also of utmost importance in any program addressing mood disorders. In addition to nutritional intervention and exercise, there are many other therapies that may improve mood in patients with mild depression. Following are a number of evidence-based, effective alternative/naturopathic treatments for depression, including dietary supplements, massage, herbs, sunlight, and more [66].

Since the early days of medical care, body touch has been used in medicine. Touch healing is based on the idea that disease or wound in an area of the body can damage all parts of the body. Body techniques are related with those of the mind. Examples

- **Massage:** Massage therapy is used to help manage a health condition or enhance wellness. It involves manipulating the soft tissues of the body. Massage has been practiced in most cultures, both Eastern and Western, throughout human history, and was one of the earliest tools that people used to try to relieve pain [36]. In human body connective tissue massage produces relief of pain and increases microcirculation in a number of vascular beds. According to a study the concentration of plasma beta-endorphins has been measured in 12 volunteers before and 5, 30 and 90 min after a 30-min session of connective tissue massage. There was a moderate mean increase of 16% in beta-endorphin levels from 20.0 to 23.2pg/0.1 ml (P = 0.025), lasting for about 1 hr with a maximum in the test 5 min after termination of the massage. It is assumed that the release of beta-endorphins is linked with the pain relief and feeling of warmth and well-being associated with the treatment [68].
- **Yoga:** The use of Yoga to gain a sense of power, i.e., to develop muscular power, the power to concentrate, the power to do difficult postures, the ability to work over and extended period of time, etc. This is called the application of shakti-krama or energy centers (chakras) and channels (nadis) of the body. This is Chikitsa-Krama [38]. The use of Yoga to heal specific problems, such as eliminating impurities in the organs (doshas) Yoga has potential for benefit for patients with coronary artery disease though objective, angiographic studies are lacking. This study evaluate the possible role of lifestyle modification incorporating yoga, on retardation of coronary atherosclerotic disease. In this prospective, randomized, controlled trial, 42 men with angiographically proven coronary artery disease (CAD) were randomized to control (n = 21) and yoga intervention group (n = 21) and were followed for one year. The active group was treated with a user-friendly program consisting of yoga, control of risk factors, diet control and moderate aerobic exercise. The control group was managed by conventional methods i.e. risk factor

control and American Heart Association step I diet. At one year, the yoga groups showed significant reduction in number of anginal episodes per week, improved exercise capacity and decrease in body weight [67].

- **Reiki:** Reiki is a form of alternative therapy commonly referred to as energy healing. It emerged in Japan in the late 1800's and is said to involve the transfer of universal energy from the practitioner's palms to their patient [40]. Reiki healing is a process that is give strength to make by decreasing stress and gain access to psychospiritual resources. Research lead to the belief that Conventional and Alternative Medicine users are seeking therapies conformity with their values, beliefs, and philosophical vantage point on life and wellbeing. Reiki is a relaxing practice that is experienced by the patients, free of article of faith, that connect them to spirituality. The creation of a combined medical practice would be make progress by hospitals collaborating with professional healers. Reiki training is a simple, effective practice to support personal well-being, enhance clinical skills, and deepen their appreciation of what Conventional and Alternative Medicine offers, in terms of both techniques and perspective [44-48].
- **Qigong:** Qigong, which is sometimes spelled Chi-Kung (and pronounced chee-gung), is the study and practice of cultivating vital life-force through various techniques, including: Breathing techniques, Postures, Meditation, Guided imagery [41]. Qigong as a part of the traditional Chinese medicine is similar to western "meditation", Indian "Yoga" or Japanese "Zen", which can all be included in the category of traditional psychotherapy. A series of physiological and psychological effects occur in the course of Qigong training, but inappropriate training can lead to physical and mental disturbances. Physiological effects include changes in EEG, EMG, respiratory movement, heart rate, skin potential, skin temperature and finger tip volume, sympathetic nerve function, function in stomach and intestine, metabolism, endocrine and immunity systems. Psychological effects are motor phenomena and perceptual changes: patients experienced warmth, chilliness, itching sensation in the skin, numbness, soreness, bloatedness, relaxation, tenseness, floating, dropping, enlargement or constriction of the body image, a sensation of rising to the sky, falling off, standing upside down, playing on the swing following respiration, circulation of the intrinsic Qi, electric shock, formication, during Qigong exercise. Some patients experienced dreamland illusions, unreality and pseudo hallucination. These phenomena were transient and vanished as the exercise terminated. Qigong deviation syndrome has become a diagnostic term and is now used widely in China [69].

After studying all different types of complimentary alternative medicine it was found that most concepts of traditional complimentary alternative medicine are based on assumptions, this therapy has not established a basis for scientific validation and its own basic medical science. Traditional therapy still lack of experience in developing a system which effectively combines education and heritage of its medical skills, as that by Western modern medical societies [11-18].

It is found that traditional medical treatment in the Northern Territory is widely practiced, this information is found by

Review of Rehabilitation Services (1987). The Territory Health Service acknowledged the job of traditional healers. This treatment includes plant medicines, the conventional healer, singing/chanting, etc. In plant medicine there are a several number of substances used for plant medicine and many plants are symptom specific. More than 22% of aboriginal people had used plant medicine in the last 6 months in most of the areas of Northern Territory. Due to increasing rate of easily available of western medicine in the market it is found that there is decreasing the use of plant medicine, but it does not mean that people are losing the believe in its efficacy [50-56].

In sub-Saharan Africa there are few communities, who consult to the traditional healers for the treatment and other form of care. Between 2002 to 2004, a national survey conducted by WHOCIDI to generate Diagnostic and Systematic Manual of Mental Disorder-IV for common mood, anxiety, and substance use disorders [6, 49]. Minority of patient was diagnosed with the disorder in which 9% of the patients consulted by the traditional healers while 11% consulted by spiritual healer, 29% of patients consulted by western practitioner and 20% was consulted by alternative practitioner. It is found that patients whom consulted by traditional healer were old age patients, black race, illiterate and unemployed [57-59].

After studying about the whole traditional therapy practices it is found that the healing therapy is helpful in mental health, skeletomuscles relaxation, heart problems, bone related problems etc. more than medical treatment. In spite of the fact that traditional therapy gave the satisfactory or better results for the healthy wellbeing in clinical trials. Healing is helpful to reduce anxiety, stress, liver disease etc. this therapy is helpful for them who cannot take the medical treatment or medicine is not reducing the disease or with whom poly pharmacy treatment is showing the adverse effect [60].

## Discussion

After reviewing the articles it is concluded that traditional therapy or complimentary alternative medicine are used in rural areas of developing countries, like: India, Bangladesh, South Africa, China, central Africa, etc. It is found that traditional healing can be useful for the mental health, arthritis, heart disease and many other diseases as well as there is no side effect of the therapy. There may be different method can be applied for the healing in respective countries but main aim of the therapies is to improve the health related problems. Traditional healing not only cure the disease as well as it also find out the reason and duration of disease.

So it is important that complimentary alternative therapy should be incorporated with the western medicine therapy, because there is no side effect of the therapy. After the western medicine therapy or surgery patient needs to acquire the healing for wounds or mental health. Healing is the only process which can be helpful with medicinal therapy, it can be used like synergistically. It has been shown that in some communities' Alternative practitioners, including traditional healers and religious advisors, playing a notable role in serving of psychiatric health care. The World Health Organization claims that they are interested in traditional healing techniques, WHO wants to do research on Diet, Massage, Bone- setting and Plant medicine.

So the question is arising that:

- Why traditional healing or alternative medicine is not important into health care system?

- Why traditional healers cannot work co-operably with medicinal professionals?
- Why not recruit them to help disseminate important public health information?
- Encourage them to treat the disorders for which these techniques are appropriate and trained them to refer patient with problems that they cannot address to the appropriate professionals.

It is important that government should make the policies regarding the traditional healing therapies, this policy should manage the organizational framework and research platform for the practice and development of the traditional therapy. It is also notable that to make the research on traditional therapy, education and proper training is required to maintain its quality safety and efficacy.

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