

The Roles of Non-Codified Traditional Medicine in a Suburban Village in Kerala, India

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Abstract : This study aimed at implicating a current community health in South India focusing on a Vaidya, a non-codified traditional doctor, based on long-term field works. As the prevalence of colonic diseases is increasing in all over the world, it is needed to know the potential of non-codified medicines and how they can effectively take in a part in community health. Describing the people's treatment seeking behaviours in a suburban village which is susceptible to modernization can give us a new insight for studying Indian medicines, that is included not only non-codified but also codified traditional ones, affected by global, national and local communities. Both qualitative and quantitative data were gathered via participatory fieldworks and open-ended interviews to a Vaidya and his 97 patients and 31 individuals who lived in a community near the Vaidya's station. It was found that the community members seldom consulted the Vaidya while a number of patients outside the village (mainly from urban nearby area) daily visited the Vaidya. Thus, the role of the Vaidya as the community's primary health care provider had nearly disappeared. Nonetheless, the Vaidya was deeply respected as one of the community's leaders by its members because of the spiritual and financial support he provided to them. The reasons for choosing the Vaidya for the patients from urban area are characterized by several social factors of the patients such as their religious belief, seriousness, occupation and medical history. Meanwhile, not only the Vaidya but also other codified traditional medicines, e.g., Ayurveda, were less popular among the community members. It sounds paradoxical given that the traditional Indian medical system has been becoming popular as an alternative medicine in societies outside of India, such as in Europe. The community members who are less educated and engaged in religious activities in daily life preferred to allopathy, the biomedicine in Indian context. It is thus concluded that roles of non-codified medicine has changed depending on its cultural and social contexts, even though its medical system is not authorized by the government. Nowadays, traditional medical effectiveness is recognized as evidenced by scientific survey and the codified medical doctors treats diseases rather than people. However, this study implicated that people's treatment seeking behaviors are likely based on the social context in which people live their lives even though evidenced based codified medicine is provided in their community.

Keywords : medical pluralism, non-codified medicine, south india, treatment-seeking behaviours

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