

Cultural Notion of Mental Health and Role of Local Deities: A Case Study of North-Western Himalaya

Authors : Randhir Singh Ranta

Abstract : The attempt to achieve and maintain an optimum state of health has always drilled the human mind and consequently, a number of healing systems have evolved around the world. Communities have contrived procedures to alleviate the wearisome condition arising out of ailments, using their own system, which differ from one community to another. Each culture has evolved a viewpoint regarding the cause of disease and the same is embedded in their belief systems. In India, the elementary proposition of mental health is within the community. From the theoretical perspective, the individual obeying and adhering to the institution of village deity represents the two changeovers i.e. from biological to psychological and from psychological to spiritual. In order to understand the cultural notion of mental health and role of local deities, a study was conducted in North-western Himalaya with a purpose to study the belief system of people in context of institution of village deity and establish a relationship between religiosity and general well-being among the believers. An effort was made to compare the mental health status of people facing psychosomatic disorders with the normal. Quantitative and qualitative methods were used for the purpose. Case studies were made to have an understanding of nature of mental and behavioural disorders and the role of institutions of local deities in managing the same. The results revealed that mountain communities have firm beliefs in local deities. A significant difference was found on the scores of belief and wellbeing, and a positive correlation was found between the belief assessment and general wellbeing.

Keywords : culture notion, mental health, healing system, deities

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