



Effectiveness of Traditional Healers in Treating Mental Disorders: A Systematic Review

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One-Sentence Summary: This article addresses the aims to fill the gap of the little systematic examination done of traditional healers' effectiveness in treating mental illness or alleviating psychological distress with a focus on quantitative outcomes.

Reviewer: Amiya Fellows

Methods: The authors conducted a literature review, searching four databases and reference lists for papers that measured the effectiveness of traditional healers on mental illness and psychological distress. They included papers that intersected three areas: traditional healing, effectiveness, and mental disorder. It was suggested that traditional healers should provide a psychosocial intervention to help relieve distress and improve mild symptoms in common mental disorders, like depression and anxiety. On the other hand, they found little probability that the intervention can change the course of severe mental illnesses, like bipolar and psychotic disorders. Traditional healers rarely used western psychiatric diagnoses, and this absence of diagnostic rigor is reflected in the published papers. These papers consisted of psychiatric diagnoses, non-specific psychological or behavioral complaints, and any studies that assessed mixed complaints if they reported a psychological outcome.

Main Findings / Recommendations:

- The authors found 32 eligible quantitative papers from 20 countries and the results showed common mental disorders are more likely to respond to traditional healing interventions than severe mental disorders. Many aspects of the papers lacked the usual standards needed to assess the effectiveness of a psychiatric intervention, leading to the overall poor methodological quality of the papers. Convenience sampling had selection bias, study designs lacked randomization and control groups, and many papers did not record the large number of patients lost to follow-up. Few papers presented sufficient information and a complete report on the results.

Potential Issues:

- Most of the essays were poor quality in terms of rigorous psychiatric research.

Useful Summary Stats, Quotes:

- "Harding and colleagues' 1973 study of patients with psychosis admitted to a traditional healer's compound in Nigeria reported significant rates of improvement that were similar to those achieved with the psychiatric treatment of the time."
- "Salan and Maretzki's sample of patients attending Indonesian traditional healers with a wide variety of complaints reported high rates of improvement (60%) for psychological and psychiatric problems."

Reviewers Opinions:

	Strongly Disagree (1)		Strongly Agree (5)		
	1	2	3	4	5
Impactful for Indian Country?		X			
Novel?		X			
Trustworthy?			X		

Reference: Nortje, G., Oladeji, B., Gureje, O., & Seedat, S. (2016). Effectiveness of traditional healers in treating mental disorders: A systematic review. *The Lancet Psychiatry*, 3(2), 154–170.
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