

A Medical Anthropology Study on the Challenges Faced by Traditional Medical Practitioners in the Jaffna Tamil Community

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Traditional medical practitioners (TMPs) operate at the primary level of healthcare in Sri Lanka and hold a crucial role in providing healthcare services to the community. This study aimed to assess the challenges of traditional medical practitioners in the Jaffna Tamil community. A qualitative study was carried out among purposefully selected TMPs in the Jaffna Tamil community. The primary data were gathered through 15 case studies and one key informant interview and secondary data were also used in this study. The researcher strictly adhered to ethical guidelines throughout the research. The results highlight the categories of TMPs: spiritual healing practitioners, black magicians, herbalists, home medicine, bone settlers, insect bite healers and physiotherapists. Additionally, this study reveals the challenges faced by TMPs. These challenges include insufficient financial resources to sustain their practice, limited expertise in treating illnesses, patient-related issues, and a lack of proper training. Furthermore, they face additional challenges from Western medical systems, such as the exclusion of traditional medicine in hospitals and a lack of opportunities for collaboration with Western medicine practitioners. Moreover, Western practitioners may hold negative attitudes towards Traditional medicine systems. In addition, there are several challenges in their practices in integrating with the Western system due to lack of knowledge and opportunities. Therefore, this study recommends that the Sri Lankan government recognizes the role of TMPs as important resources in primary healthcare services.

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