

An Ethnomedicine Study among Women in Uremia (North-West Iran)

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ABSTRACT

During the recent years, ethnomedicine has attracted a great deal of attention among the investigators throughout the world. Although ethnomedicine seeks, in the first place, to compensate for a biological need through providing cures for disorders, it, however, is of a cultural nature, too, in that it investigates people's behaviors and reactions toward health and the issues related to it. Consequently, traditional health must be counted as a component of a society's culture. Investigations of people's views toward traditional medicine are capable of throwing light on acquaintance with their conducts, customs, traditions and behaviors, as well as the social-economic conditions prevailing in their environment. In addition, such investigations of public medicine bring about familiarities with gradual developments in traditional medical methodologies as introduced by culture, economic, or social factors, first into the society, then medicine. Familiarizations with cultural diversities in relation to medicine are the end results. The present paper comprise an anthropological approach toward investigation of ethnomedical practiced by women of Uremia (North-West, Iran)

Key words: ethnomedicine, women, Iran, Uremia

Introduction

Today about 80% of the world's population rely predominantly on plants and plant extracts for healthcare¹. In addition, of the top 150 proprietary drugs used in the United States, 57% contain at least one major active compound currently or once derived from plants².

The spiritual aspects of health and sickness has been an integral component of the ethnomedicinal practice for many centuries, a dimension ignored by biomedicine practitioners, because of the difficulties involved in validating its success using scientific principles and experiments. The ethnomedical systems (primitive medicinal systems or traditional medicine) has two universal categories of disease, i.e., aetiology: natural and un-natural (supernatural) causes. Natural illness explains illness in impersonal systemic terms. Thus, disease is thought to stem from natural forces or conditions such as cold, heat and possibly by an imbalance in the basic body elements³. Un-natural illnesses are caused by two major types of supernatural forces: occult causes which are the result of evil spirits or human agents using sorcery and spiritual causes which are the results of penalties incurred for sins, breaking taboos or caused by God⁴.

However, despite the lack of scientific validation of the usefulness of the spiritual component in ethnomedicine, some institutions in the United States and elsewhere, are incorporating it into their services⁵. Similarly, spiritistic practitioners working in some countries such as the Puerto Rican and Balican hospitals have indicated positive results, based on the fact that patients spent reduced time in these institutions^{6,7}.

According to data released by the World Health Organization (WHO), ethnomedicine has maintained its popularity in all regions of the developing world and its use is rapidly expanding in the industrialized countries⁸, for example, in China traditional herbal preparation account for 30–50% of the total medicinal consumption. In Ghana, Mali, Nigeria and Zambia, the first line treatment for 60% of children with malaria is the use of herbal medicine. In San Francisco, London and South Africa, 70% of people living with HIV/AIDS use traditional medicine. Today the annual global market for herbal medicine stands at over US \$60 billion⁸. Western trained physicians should not ignore the impact of ethnomedicine on their patients.

Present paper examines the ethnomedicine healing methods practiced by the women residing in Band village, a rural district of Uremia in western Azerbaijan province.

Ethnomedicine, similar to other healing and treatment mechanisms, is intended to restore health and heal patients. Although the very primary aspiration of traditional medicine is to secure physical healthiness of man, it constitutes part of the inherent culture of the people. It is in fact a cultural phenomenon that reflects the reactions and behaviors of the members of every specific community in the face of physical healthiness and the issues that are associated with it.

Undoubtedly, all human groups unceasingly continue to protect themselves against diseases in order to maintain healthy individuals; however, the procedure varies in different societies. Medical procedures originate from every particular society's culture and since the society is viewed as a system composed of a set of social relations and norms, culture as a factor that constitutes these relations, dictates explicit living patterns to individuals, whereas behaviors as cultural reflections include all individual performances, either physical or mental.

Hence, conducts and reactions of individuals within a society in the face of healthiness and matters related to it, are believed to form part of this general behavioral system³.

This is in fact the culture that determines the customs and procedures for the preservation of healthiness, identification of the patient, satisfying the needs of the patient as well as the traditions that have something to do with matters such as how to behave and take care of the patient.

Meanwhile, such crucial cultural factors can serve as impediments in the way of acceptance of modern preventive and healing methods⁴.

Through patterns and orders that are specific to it, culture develops varying systems in terms of diagnosis of the disease and comprehension of its concept and content. Such peculiarities serve to affect other aspects including the manner and quality of the expression of pain and as to how the disease is justified. Hence, the concept of diagnosis of disease enjoys biological as well as cultural aspects.

Research area

The city of Uremia is located in Northwestern Iran. This city has a moderate climate and is known for Uremia Lake that is located in its eastern neighborhood. The salt content of Uremia Lake is extremely high and in summer and warm season, many people come to this destination in order to benefit from the medical properties of Uremia Lake's water, sludge and waterlogged mud.

Azeri, Assyrian, Armenian, and Kurdish ethnic groups inhabit Uremia. Over 50% of the population in Uremia lives in rural areas while cattle breeders and farmers constitute major occupational groups in the area.

Our case study targets Band village in Uremia with a historical background of over 500 years. Band is an entirely vegetated village surrounded by beautiful heights. Abundant water resources are available for rewarding farming operations on the rich and fertile soils here. Kurds who are mostly from the Sunni sect of Islam constitute the major portion of the inhabitants of the village while women constitute 50% of the population. Majority of the residents of Band village are engaged in farming while animal husbandry and poultry come next.

The vital share of women in these activities can by no means be neglected, however, as noble housewives; they have primarily dedicated themselves to raising and educating their children. Taking care of a patient in the case of incidence of a disease in the family is also a task, which is undertaken by these women. Women in this village are especially keen to collect medicinal herbs. They are well aware of the medical properties contained in these herbs. In addition to using medicinal herbs in the treatment of diseases, the rural women residing in Band village also use non-herbal and especial methods for healing patients such as traditional beliefs, customs and experiments that are effectively applied to help to prevent incidence of diseases and preserve hygienic conditions. They are living certain groups of women in this region who allegedly specialize in healing ailments. These women are highly respected in the community. Traditional medicine has in fact turned into an economic activity and a source of income for these rural women, a course that has led to deeper cooperation and collaboration among them.

Methods

The study procedure in this research work includes collection of information by means of observation and interview. Such a procedure has a historical background in Iran and dates back to the past times when various writers and travelers visited Iran and during their stay in this country filed accounts or travel logs about the lifestyle of the Iranian people. Many books and papers have been authored on the social and cultural beliefs and about what is today known to be folk medicine as well as customs and traditions that prevailed in various ethnic groups^{9,10}.

Results

Illness

Throughout history, illness has been approached differently by various nations insofar as the nature, variety, abundance, public and specialized diagnosis as well as community reaction to illness is concerned. As a matter of fact, what is commonly called an illness may vary depending on the type of the community and the various stages within which a disease may be communicated¹¹.

For instance, the result of a survey conducted on Malaria in Uremia has proved that many years back, Malaria had plagued the area so extensively that many peo-

ple viewed it as an ordinary event and part of their daily life. On the other hand, certain diseases became epidemic in certain periods of time but were eliminated in later stages and nothing was left of them but a memory. In other cases, demonstration of certain behaviors that are in contrast with the society's well-established behavioral patterns could be regarded abnormal (resembling mental illness) and at times viewed as social deviation.

Evidently, despite the apparent simplicity of the term »illness« and multiplicity of its application, there resides no transparent definition of this term. The problem lies in the fact that when defining the term »illness« the interaction between social, psychological and biological factors should be taken into consideration as well.

A general definition of the term »illness« shared by almost all communities would be that: »Illness is a state associated with some kind of anguish and distress, pathetic physical and mental performance and weakness that threatens the survival of the individual in the future«^{12,13}.

The following are different categories symbolizing an illness:

1. Deformation of the body organs.
2. Physical and mental malfunctioning.
3. Incidence of a state of discomfort in the individual.
4. Occurrence of psychological and social imbalance in the individual

In response to this question as to what they regarded as symptoms of a diseases, the rural women responded: Expression of pain and suffering, insomnia and restlessness, anorexia, paleness of the body organs' skin, deformation of body organs, fever, waste discharge problems, bleeding, severe irritation, weakness, sickness and drowsiness, and in the case of mentally ill individuals, restlessness and anxiety, offensive approach towards others and finally self isolation and carelessness about others.

In all these cases, the major concern of a rural woman residing in Band village is the very fact that with the incidence of any illness she or any other member of her family will no longer be able to contribute to the family income.

Meantime, these women believe that physical fitness and preparedness to work, good appetite, freshness and lack of any pain or suffering symbolize healthiness that is a gift and blessing from God for which they have to be grateful.

Peoples' awareness and inclinations concerning hygienic affairs and healthiness in the rural communities are closely linked with the degree of social, economic and cultural development. Influenced by the rural style of life, these people define healthiness and dynamism. According to them, there is not much variety attached to the most dangerous diseases. In most cases, their perception of an illness or disease is based fundamentally on the physical symptoms. For instance, illnesses that have to do with the eyes and ears and emphasis is primarily placed on pain felt in an organ. Believing that some diseases are communicable makes them isolate patients

from others in specific cases in order to avoid possible spread of the disease and its becoming epidemic.

According to these people, the origin of illnesses and diseases should be sought in the following factors regardless of the source of these factors:

- Microbes and parasites
- Feebleness and old age
- Nutritional habits and diets
- The influence of supernatural factors
- The effect of evil eyes.
- The effect of being cursed by others and foes

Farmers' involvement in agricultural work together with animal husbandry produces some kind of direct relationship between them and nature. Hence, villagers are at all times exposed to the threat of unpredicted events and climatic conditions.

Meantime, those factors that are chiefly responsible for the hygienic problems of the village should be blamed for the problems that the village inhabitants face insofar as the drinking water, housing, soil pollution, nutrition, sewage system, disposal of waste and spread of diseases are concerned. These same factors also affect issues such as prevention and treatment of diseases.

Evidently, the village women are involved in farming and animal husbandry, and those are the kind of jobs that require work in the open air. From the point of view of vocational hygiene and healthiness in general, these women are plagued with certain disorders that are categorized below:

Diversified respiratory diseases, heat and cold stroke, lightning shock, insect sting, fatigue, general exhaustion of body and appearance and ultimately premature old age because of exposure to severe direct sunlight mingled with dust and issues related to the physiology of work such as muscular disorders in hands and feet, incidence of rupture because of lifting heavy loads, emergence of incidents as a result of the lack of vocational training, application and use of non-standard and unsafe tools and equipment and the direct contact between man and animal in rural areas that give rise to epidemics and diseases that are shared by man and animals such as, Tuberculosis, Anthrax, Rabies, Tetanus, Aleppo boil, etc.

In addition to the above-mentioned cases, there have been reports of the incidence of a disease as a result of specific factors that approached differently in various cultures. For instance, in cases when a person comes across sudden premature death, the villagers do not seek the reason in a particular disease and instead attribute that kind of death to the execution and practice of harmful magic. Belief in supernatural factors that are responsible for the incidence of diseases has served to be another aspect of the process for the diagnosis of illnesses.

Belief in the influence of these factors in the development of illnesses in Iran dates back to the ancient times and perhaps to 500 BC. The results of a study conducted in Southern Iranian coasts are illustrative of very interesting points concerning the influence of supernatural

factors in the occurrence of a wide variety of illnesses. In some cases too, evil eyes and cursing of people are believed to be influential in the incidence of a disease or illness. Disrespect for the elderly and sanctities are also believed to be within the same category. In numerous cases, these people rely on the experiments of their ancestors and rightly diagnose a certain disease or illness in the same manner that modern medicine would.

In this region, similar to many other regions in Iran, people believe in the four humors namely the four fluids of the body, blood, phlegm, choler, and black bile, whose relative proportions were thought in ancient and medieval physiology to determine a person's disposition and general health. They also believe that foodstuffs and diseases have physical constitutions and therefore extravagance in the consumption of a specific food will disturb balance, hence leading to the incidence of illness. Relevant to this kind of traditional diagnosis, there exist specific methods for preventing incidence of illnesses. For instance, in cases where evil eye is claimed responsible for an illness to occur, the people burn Esfand seeds (a medicinal herb believed to prevent infections) or they carry and wear glazed clay balls in a variety of colors particularly blue ones. In other cases they place a pin into the shoe sole of an individual suspected of being an evil eye or they may cut part of his coat and burn it in fire in order to nullify the effects of his or her evil eyes.

In cases where the illness is diagnosed to be the effect of supernatural creatures, the people took a variety of measures. For instance, in the past, the people believed in a satanic creature called Aal. Aal appeared in the form of a red face witch who trapped pregnant women on the farm or in the acres particularly in the evening or at dawn in order to eat their heart and liver and take their infants out. Aal was believed to be visible by no one but the pregnant woman. Again, Aal was believed to approach the pregnant woman ten days before or after delivery. According to the local people, when attacked by Aal, the pregnant woman would first feel exhausted, then her heartbeat would intensify and fever would dominate her body. At this stage, she would turn unconscious and gradually lose her life.

In order to prevent Aal from attacking a pregnant woman, the people would not leave her alone ten days before and ten days after her delivery. In some cases they stayed with the pregnant woman and her infant for 40 days. During the delivery and after that, a male relative was asked to stay at home. During delivery, they placed a knife, stick or axe under the pillow of the pregnant woman. They meantime hanged the liver of lamb or cow on the wall in the hope that Aal would feed from them and avoid attacking the mother and her infant. On the upper end of the mother and her infant's bed was placed a bowl of water, a mirror and some salt as protective elements. Aal was believed to be frightened of water, salt and mirror. The house would be cleaned up just a few days before the baby was expected to be born and this was because Aal was scared of cleanliness.

Esfand was burnt inside the house every morning. They skewered garlic and onions and hanged them from the ceiling above the pregnant woman's bed because they imagined that Aal hated the smell of garlic and onion.

In order to prevent Aal from approaching the mother and her infant, the people drew a line in any color but red on the wall or around the bed.

When a disease or illness was believed to have occurred because of disrespect for religion and sanctities, in that case, the people would go on ritual trips to sacred and holy places where they repented and paid charity and alms.

Women resort to a host of traditional methods to ensure that they conceive a child and that their infants will be safe at birth. For this purpose, they pay religious alms and donations. Some customs and beliefs appear to be more symbolic. For instance, a lifeless item becomes the symbol. They believe that if a pregnant woman finds a knife, sword or steel bar by accident, that means that her child will be a boy however, the baby is expected to be a girl if the mother comes across a nail, a pair of scissors or a napkin. There exist certain glazed clay balls that symbolize eyes and are used to check devil eyes.

At times, an animal or its body organs become symbols. For instance, they believe that in case a pregnant woman consumes camel's meat, her pregnancy will be prolonged.

Some foodstuffs also symbolize girls or boys. Date and wall nuts in this category symbolize boys while grass pea symbolizes girls.

Names and titles also carry certain characteristics and usually intermingle with the personality of the child. For instance, they choose such a name as Bemani Khanom (may God grant you long life lady) for a girl in the hope that she will live a longer life.

Some customs represent the state of commonalty that exists between the mother and the kid and certain feelings that they share. For example, when circumcising her son, the mother soaks her leg in the water in the hope that her child will suffer less pain.

In some traditions and customs, it is generally believed that certain items and objects such as magnet, glazed clay ball and horseshoe contain powers that are effective in nullifying evil eyes and curses. The same beliefs include some garments and food items such as sugar and bread.

Treatment of diseases

Taking into consideration the women's traditions, customs and sources of information concerning the causes of various diseases and preventive methods, we approach two distinctive treatment methods in this region; Herbal and Non-herbal treatment procedures.

1. Herbal treatment of illnesses

This method is applied in a wide spectrum of diseases and illnesses. Various parts of herbs are administered to heal a certain disease.

In this region, similar to other spots in Iran, people believe that human beings, herbs and diseases enjoy physical constitution and when there occurs an illness, the physical constitution is no longer in balance and therefore, depending on the type of the disease, they prescribe a specific kind of medicine and the whole procedure forms the foundations of the traditional healing systems. Medicinal herbs are applied as remedy under various fashions and in most cases they are used to prepare a meal and then administered as medicine. On other occasions, herbal extracts are used and sometimes herbs are burnt to produce a medicinal ash. At times, medicinal herbs are used as suppository agent and on certain other occasions medicinal herbs are used as ointments. Medicinal herbs are also brewed and applied.

A wide variety of herbs have been discovered in this region in which people have built confidence. Esfand, which is used to check evil eyes, is an instance. Medicinal herbs are at times mixed with non-herbal materials to produce a specific medicine. For example, in the case of incidence of uterus infection, the roots of *Malva Silvestris* together with the fresh leaves of *Plantago Major*, *Ziziphora Renuior*, *Urtica Pilulifera*, *Borgo Officinalis* and *Mentha Longofolia* are mixed and then boiled in some milk. When the solution becomes rather thick, they rub it under the stomach of the patient or they undress the patient and expose the lower parts of the body from the waist downward to the herbal steam, or the patient is soaked into the solution. In order to cure infertility in women, people heat *Terebinthina* and apply it into the uterus.

Medicinal herbs

Medicinal herbs constitute an inseparable portion of traditional healing methods in this region. In these rural communities, the villagers use tens of available herb species to treat their illnesses. Uremia region is rich in these herbs and can meet the public demand in medicinal herbs.

The younger members of the community use the experiments and experiences of the older women who specialize in medicinal herbs. The expertise has been transferred from a generation to the other and each generation has included fresh additions to it.

At times, individuals come across a herb about whose properties they have no special knowledge. In such a case, they select the herb by taste, that is to say, the villagers consume a little amount of the herb and opt to consume it if it does not taste bitter and if they discover certain useful medicinal properties in that herb. In other cases, they observe for themselves that the livestock are not harmed when they feed from certain herbs; hence the people make sure that a certain herb is harmless.

Sometimes of course, the people who have lost hope in a patient to restore his or her health, try a large variety of unknown herb species in the hope that they can offer the patient relief. At any rate, small amounts of medicinal herbs are applied initially and provided that they

prove to be effective in healing an illness, more volumes of that herb are applied.

Rural women may also learn about the properties of medicinal herbs when they refer to traditional herbal pharmacists or through new immigrants who are familiar with the properties of non-native medicinal herbs.

Traditional herbal pharmacists usually identify women who collect herbs in the villages and hire them. The individuals who independently collect and sell medicinal herbs in Uremia display their products in the city's grand bazaar. Various herbal species are priced differently depending on the amount of time and energy that has gone into their collection.

These herbs are cut with simple tools such as knives, sickle and scissors.

In majority of cases, men are paid higher wages. Harvest and collection of medicinal herbs is a hard and risky task. These individuals are exposed to the threat of being attacked by wild animals, being abused by strangers and premature aging as a result of hard labor. The people who are engaged in the harvest and collection of medicinal herbs live under critical economic conditions. Most women who choose this job is either widows or their husbands are unemployed.

Harvest and collection of medicinal herbs begins in late winter and continues until early fall. Pussy Willow for instance, is collected before the start of spring rainfalls because otherwise the flowers will be devoid of aroma and properties.

Herbs are dehydrated in two ways:

They are exposed to sunlight and dehydrated

They are dehydrated in the shade

When dried properly, herbs are poured into cloth bags and kept somewhere inside the kitchen.

2. Non-herbal methods of treatment are diversified and include:

Dairy products such as liquid yogurt, which is administered as sedative to heal sunstroke, or yogurt derived from buffalo milk that is used for the same purpose, and egg to treat diarrhea.

Animal body organs and blood. For instance, the blood of turtle and rabbit as well as mule milk for the treatment of whooping cough or honey applied to heal cuts and ulcers.

Minerals such as sulfur, copper and iron oxide that are prescribed to heal headache.

Aqua therapy – drinking from and bathing in mineral water springs and spas, giving the patient massage, rubbing or kneading of parts of the body inside water especially to aid circulation, bathing in the salt water and sludge of Uremia lake to relieve pain in the joints.

Suction used as a method to treat sterility, extraction of blood through cupping aimed at healing headache and heating of an ulcer for instance in the case of Aleppo boil. Leech is also used for the treatment of some skin diseases.



Fig. 1. Location of the research area.

Spit, and milk discharged from human beings are also sometimes used to heal certain illnesses. For instance spit is used to heal impetigo and the milk of a woman who has just given birth to a girl is used for the relief of pain in the eyes. A patient was quoted as saying that a woman living in Uremia had once dreamed of some kind of a power that had been granted to her enabling her to heal patients using her spit.

Prayers and benedictions

In Band village of Uremia, the residents strongly believe in the healing effects of benediction and prayers. Women for instance, refer to amulet and charm writers in the hope that they will become pregnant and overcome infertility. In such a case the amulet writer inscribes prayer words on their stomachs with saffron solution.

Ritual visits to the holy places, fastening pieces of cloth to the trees or soaking in springs include other methods that the women suffering from infertility perform. There, in these places, women pay alms and sacrifice animals in order to become pregnant and have a baby.

Shock therapy

According to women residing in this village, mental shocks are the origin of many diseases and illnesses that can be treated through another kind of shock.

Conclusion

Although the government and health care systems do not officially recognize traditional methods of medical treatment, the women residing in this region commonly practice these methods. The cultural and social beliefs of these people are central in the acceptance of such methods of medical treatment.

This paper suggests that disease is a biological and at the same time social phenomenon. In its biological aspect, disease has to do with man's conformity with the environment, from the social point of view however, it contains a series of specific meanings, relationships, values, behaviors, ideas, beliefs and performances that allow the members of a group from a certain culture to engage in diagnosing and introducing a variety of diseases and rush to struggle with them within their cultural frameworks and use their available simple facilities to deflect those diseases.

Within such cultural framework, some of malfunctions are regarded as disease and/or illness and the rest are either basically not diagnosed or appear to be entirely normal to the people. The reaction of the people to the illness, the treatment method that they select and finally their attitude towards the patient come within patterns, principles and beliefs that can be easily be defined in cultural terms and at this point it is that the environment and culture interact.

This research work illustrates that the community women acquire knowledge about a disease from a variety of sources. These sources of information are diverse and content wise, in some cases incongruous.

These sources include:

- Medical traditions and customs that have their origins in history.
- Ethnic traditions and behaviors.
- Beliefs, traditions and customs.

In certain cases, for a host of reasons such as hygienic and health care trainings, availability of modern mass communication media, higher levels of education, the members of a community opt to integrate scientific medicine with traditional healing methods.

Based on these four elements, the diagnosis of diseases appears to have various aspects in different cultures.

In some cases they relate the incidence of an illness to evil eyes and witchcraft by the foes and on other occasions, they claim disrespect for a taboo or insult to sanctities responsible for the incidence of illness in a person. And at times, relying on the past experiences, they properly diagnose a disease. Hence, it becomes evident as to why specific methods such as heating or hanging of stones and glazed clay balls are applied. An anthropologist is therefore required to pay in-depth attention to the meaning or concept of every specific object, day or action.

This paper has also sought to clarify the interrelationships between the type of the community and the disease or illness. Illness implies an event that takes place within the community's general conditions and its reflections cover the relationship between the individual and his surrounding environment.

A glance at the relationship between the type of diseases and the number of treatment methods discovered for these diseases by the residents illustrates the very fact that in the rural community under study in this pa-

per, various infectious diseases are dominant. Infectious diseases should naturally be attributed to environmental factors. Diarrhea scars and wounds are some examples that occur during work on the farm. However, the general structures and build up of vulnerability to disease and illness are on the constant change taking into consideration the community's general conditions. For instance, under circumstances when certain infectious diseases such as smallpox are uprooted, other illnesses are on the increase. These include stress and cardiac diseases, etc. which are more dominant in the urban societies. In such an area, the role of education, medical trainings as well as other social and cultural changes and modifications is undeniable.

This research work was meantime intended to determine as to how effective such factors as education, communications, health care and hygienic trainings as well as technological changes can be in improving the rural women's understanding of healthiness and health care.

The information collected by the author concluded that the influence of the above-mentioned factors in im-

proving the rural women' approach is also undeniable. For instance, her approach towards a creature known as Aal will gradually change as the rate of fatalities in women during delivery becomes less.

Some beliefs such as evil eyes responsible for the incidence of disease keep sway among the rural women. The author believes that some beliefs have gradually lost ground because the people have now discovered the origins and agents responsible for the incidence of a disease or illness and are well equipped with the tools that are required to eliminate those diseases. On the contrast, some beliefs have become yet stronger due to the fact that the people have failed to acquire knowledge about the agents responsible for the occurrence of a disease or illness. Hence, such factors as age and education are determining in the rural persons inclination for traditional medicine during illness.

This research work reveals that low levels of education or illiteracy, old age and lack of communication with the outside world are effective factors that push individuals towards traditional medicine.

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ETNOMEDICINSKO ISTRAŽIVANJE MEĐU ŽENA U UREMJI (SJEVEROZAPADNI IRAN)

SAŽETAK

Etnomedicina u posljednje vrijeme privlači mnogo pažnje istraživača u cijelom svijetu. Iako etnomedicina prvenstveno teži pronalasku lijekova za poremećaje i bolesti i time pokušava nadomjestiti prirodnu potrebu i povratiti prirodno stanje, ona također ima i kulturološku dimenziju. Ona istražuje ponašanje i reakcije ljudi s obzirom na zdravlje. Prema tome, tradicionalno poimanje zdravlje se mora uzeti u obzir kao sastavni dio kulture određenog društva. Proučavajući stavove i mišljenja ljudi o tradicionalnoj medicini dobivamo uvid u običaje, tradicije i ponašanja određene zajednice, kao i socio-ekonomske uvjete koji prevladavaju u određenom okruženju. Također, takva istraživanja javne medicine pojašnjavaju i postepeni razvoj metodologije tradicionalne medicine na koju utječu razni kulturološki, ekonomski i socijalni faktori. Krajnji cilj takvih istraživanja je upoznavanje s kulturnim različitostima u okviru medicine i ovaj rad daje uvid u antropološku perspektivu istraživanja etnomedicine kako ju prakticiraju žene u Uremiji (sjeverozapadni Iran).