

MAGICO-RELIGIOUS BELIEF IN PSYCHOSIS

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ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND

Magico-religious beliefs are widely prevalent in India and eastern countries compared to western countries. This causes the patients and their families spending extra ordinary time, money and effort in seeking their treatment and it will also increase the duration of untreated psychosis. We wanted to describe magico-religious belief of caregivers and patients suffering from psychosis.

METHODS

A descriptive study was carried out among fifty consecutive patients attending the outpatient department of our Institute of Mental Health after enrolling them in the study. Participants were selected through a simple random sampling method. Data was collected through face to face interview using a structured questionnaire. Informed consent obtained. The process was explained to all.

RESULTS

24 patients had schizophrenia, 9 patients had bipolar affective disorder, 12 patients had psychosis NOS, 5 patients had alcohol with psychosis. 30 patients were in the 20-30 years age group. 16 patients were in the 30-40 years category. 4 patients were in the 40-50 age group category.

CONCLUSIONS

Supernatural beliefs are common in caregivers and patients with psychiatric illness. Many of them attribute the symptoms of mental illnesses to these beliefs. So, this will increase the duration of untreated psychosis and delays seeking treatment in psychiatric hospitals. Thus, there is a need to change the attitude of the general population towards people with mental illness through awareness campaign.

HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE: Velayudham, Picha R. magico-religious belief in psychosis. J. Evid. Based Med. Healthc. 2019; 6(20), 1482-1486. DOI: 10.18410/jebmh/2019/301

BACKGROUND

Magico-religious beliefs have long been believed to cause mental illness not only India, but in other countries well. A study done in 80 mothers of psychotic patients found that 85% entertained ideas related to metaphysical and magico-religious causation (Vlachos IO et al 1997).¹ Resorting to exorcism or magic was very common.

In a study from north India, they established that supernatural explanations, seeking magico religious treatment was very common therein schizophrenia, not only in affected individual their families but in communities as a whole (Kulhara et al 2000).²

Seeking magico-religious treatments and attributing religious causation is not unique to Schizophrenia but happens in bipolar disorder as well. (Grover et al 2016).³

Religiosity was high in schizophrenia patients a general method of coping. (Kate N et al 2012).⁴

Financial or Other, Competing Interest: None.
Submission 01-05-2019, Peer Review 04-05-2019,
Acceptance 13-05-2019, Published 15-05-2019.

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 DOI: 10.18410/jebmh/2019/301



In a study done in Pakistan majority held non-medical beliefs about schizophrenia.

Help seeking always has to understood in the context of beliefs held by the patients and the families.

According Hindu literature, mental illness is given explanations ranging from metaphysical entities to sorcery and witchcraft.

According to Ayurveda, mental illness is to imbalance between 3 doshas (Vayu Pitha Kapa) and due to improper diet, disrespect to elders etc; Their treatment involves herbs, mantras, religious rituals.

A study done Tamil Nadu established that 70% of caregivers believe in non-medical models.

It has also been proposed that educating not only patients, caregivers but also faith healers will also improve the overall scenario.

Similarly, in a study done in Bali, 87% had consulted a traditional healer before seeking medical help. Sometimes the faith healers also refer to medical help. (Kurihara T et al 2006).⁵

The accessibility and availability of helping agencies also crucial.

Psychosocial factors, stigma, financial factors, all play a major role in help seeking.

Many psychiatric patients from Philippines and Malaysia also sought help from traditional healers before seeking medical help for mental illness.

In China and Korea, patients alternated between traditional healers, western medicines and herbal treatment. Ascribing mental illness to Gods, deities, spirits is also common in various parts of India.

The term magico-religious beliefs refers to all supernatural influences believed a specific culture.

The treatment by indigenous healers, religious people is collectively called as, magico-religious treatment. Culture means a set of beliefs and attitudes practiced by a group of people.

Culture not only influences the causation of mental illness and also the presentation of mental illness.

For example, an Asian may have delusions of black magic where as a European may harbour delusions related to aliens.

In Asian countries, most of the treatment decision of the patient are taken by the family members.

Hence understanding the family member's beliefs is crucial in the management of mental illness.

Mental illness is said to be a non-medical disease and caused invisible and abstract factors in many cultures.

In a Nigerian study attribution of mental illness was seen in 50% cases (Ilechekwu 1988).⁶

Apart from Schizophrenia, bipolar disorders, trance or possession attack is commonly attributed to the supernatural factors (Kurihara et al 2006)⁵

In an Israeli study, all subjects attributed their symptoms to supernatural factors (Al Krenawi 1999).⁷

Some western studies also accept the possibility of supernatural factors (Landkrine and Klonoff 1994)⁸

Studies from turkey also endorse high belief about supernatural beliefs and their influence in three schizophrenia patients (Ozturk and Volcan 1971).⁹

But overall one can say that in the western cultures biomedical theories are more accepted whereas in the eastern world the supernatural theories of causation of mental illness is more accepted.

A world health report states that the beliefs and faith held by a community will affect the various facts of mental health care.

One can say that there is massive need for mental literacy campaigns in Asian countries including India.

Adequate medical treatment of schizophrenia is important in reducing the financial costs incurred by the care givers. Mental illness like Schizophrenia could be devastating at times.

In many studies it was found that educated people too to endorse magico-religious beliefs.

A collaboration with faith healers has also been suggested by many of the studies to overcome the hindrance to mental health care.

Promoting mental health care by adequate campaigns is also essential.

Having accessibility to quality health care is another vital component is fighting the problem of faith healers and delayed medical treatment.

METHODS

A descriptive study design was carried out among fifty consecutive patients attending the outpatient department of our Institute of mental health are enrolled in the study.

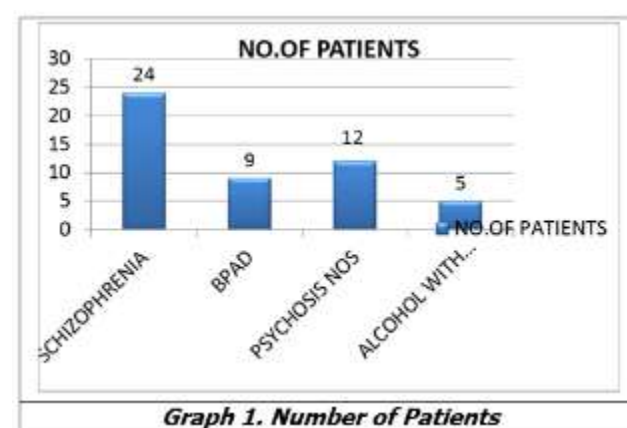
Participant were selected through a simple random sampling method. Data were collected through face to face interview using a structured Questionnaire. Informed consent obtained. The process was explained to all.

Sample size was arrived using sampling formulae

Data was analysed and interpreted using descriptive and inferential statistics.

Supernatural Attitude Questionnaire, an instrument which was developed about a decade ago by P. Kulhara. Various items of the questionnaire were based on commonly prevalent magico-religious beliefs in our society. The questionnaire has been used in a number of similar studies as quoted in the reference.

RESULTS



Diagnosis

24 patients had schizophrenia, 9 patients had bipolar affective disorder, 12 patients had psychosis NOS, 5 patients had alcohol with psychosis.

Age Distribution of Patients

30 patients were in the 20-30 years age group. 16 patients were in the 30-40 years category. 4 patients were in the 40-50 age group category.

Gender

24 were male and 26 were female.

Religious Distribution Among Patients

43 were Hindu, 5 Christians, 2 Muslims
Supernatural questionnaire was given to care givers.

Sociodemographic Profile of Care Givers

Total Sample=50

Male=32, female=18.

Age Group of Care Givers

20-30: 12

30-40: 18

40-50: 12

50-60: 5
60 plus: 3

Rural/Urban

Rural: 22
Urban: 28

Relation:

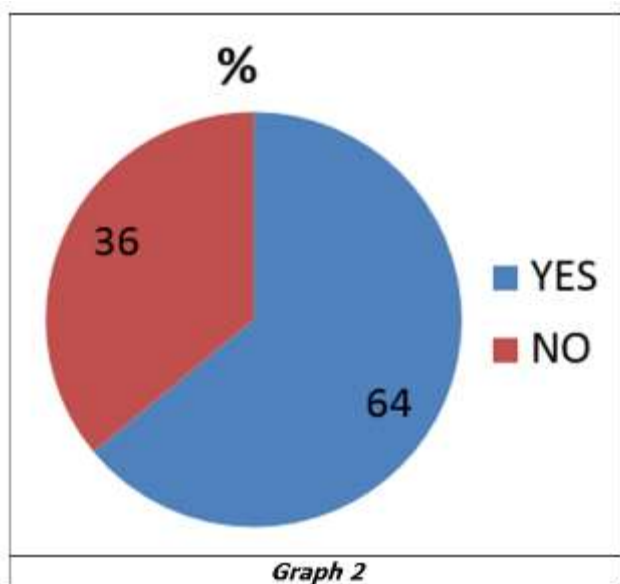
First degree: Mother, father, brother, sister: 30
Second degree: Aunts and uncles, cousins, nephews: 15
Distant: Friends, neighbours: 5

Educational Status:

Illiterate: 8
Primary school: 7
Elementary School: 7
High school: 18
Higher secondary school: 5
Graduates: 5

Questions and Answers

Do you believe in black magic?



64% said yes. 36% said no.

Do you believe in ghosts?

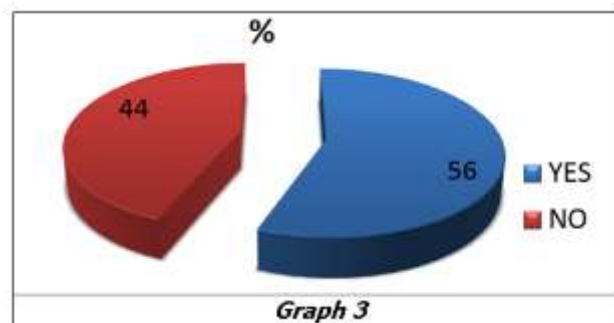
16 percent said yes. 84 percent said no.

Do you believe that any soul can take control and reside in your body?

16% said yes, 84% said no.

Do you believe that black magic can lead to mental illness?

56% said yes. 44% said no.



Do you believe that when any god /goddess become angry with a person, it can lead to mental illness?

56% said yes. 44% said no.

Do you believe that improper position of stars (astrology) can lead to mental illness?

60% said yes. 40% said no

Do you believe that mental illness is due to bad deed done during previous birth?

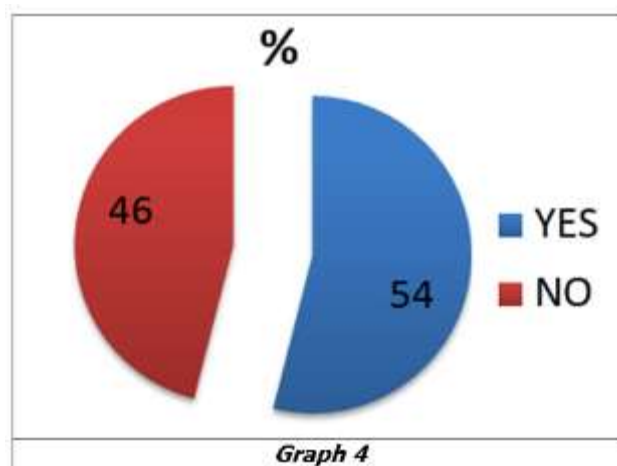
54% said yes, 46% said no.

Do you believe that coming in contact with ghost can lead to mental illness?

18% said yes. 82% said no.

Do you believe that the strange experience of the patient is due to black magic done on him?

54% said yes 46% said no.



Do you believe that strange experiences of your patient are because of angry god/goddess?

56% said yes. 44% said no.

Do you believe that strange experiences of your patient are because of some bad /unhappy/unsatisfied soul?

12% said yes. 88% said no.

Do you believe that the regular prayer can improve or cure mental illness?

54% said yes. 46% said no.

During this episode of mental illness have you or any one from your family went to see any baba or tantric for cure?

62% said yes. 38% said no.

During this episode of mental illness did you perform any special prayer as suggested by baba/tantric for purpose of treatment?

54% said yes. 46% said no.

Does your patient talk about or believe in black magic?

56% said yes. 44% said no.

Does your patient talk about or believe in astrology?

52% said yes. 48% said no.

Does your patient talk about or believe in ghost?

16% said yes. 84% said no.

Does your patient talk about or believe in soul taking control over the body?

12% said yes, 88% said no.

Does your patient talk about or believe in supernatural power of god/goddess?

20% said yes, 80% said no.

Before the beginning of this mental illness did your patient, believe in above mentioned stuff?

26% said yes. 74% said no.

During the period of mental illness is he or you taking him to any baba/tantric?

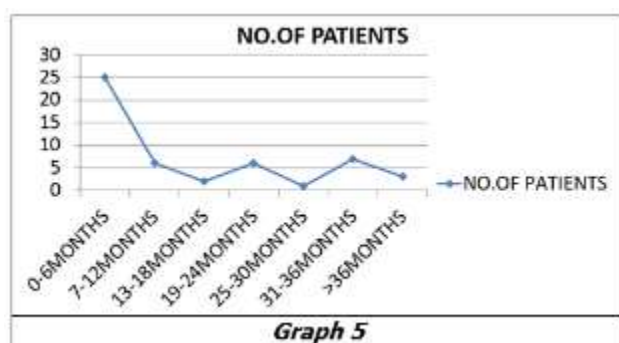
66% said yes. 34% said no.

Does your relatives /neighbourhood believe in black magic?

64% said yes. 36% said no.

Duration of Untreated Psychosis Among Patients

A majority (50%) of patients had 6 months duration of untreated psychosis. The duration of untreated psychosis can adversely affect the outcome. The religious beliefs and the faith healing practices result in increased duration of untreated psychosis.



DISCUSSION

People have belief to such an extent that they spent huge amount (more than lakhs) for this belief.

They spent lot of time and travel long distance (>150 kms) to seek the Traditional healer.

More than 60% of the people went to supernatural belief before coming to psychiatric treatment.

Types of magico-religious Practices

1. Violent Practice

- Beating person with broomstick, whiplash, forced to walk on nailed shoes, throwing stone
- Lightening camphor on bare hands, swallowing it
- Restrain them in temples/isolated place.

2. Non-Violent Practice

- Tonsure of head.
- Sacred thread.
- Prophecy by indigenous healer, applying kajal over betel leaf to predict future.
- Rituals wearing neem leaves bunch as dress to worship god.
- Rubbing the lemon on head directly in order to bringdown pita.
- Sprinkling/spraying Holy water during prayer.
- Dipping tantric plate in to water.
- Pooja rituals in graveyard.

Community beliefs

A majority(64%) of caregivers believed that the relatives /neighbourhood believed in black magic. This intern affects their health seeking practices. This raises the importance of improving awareness about mental health in the community.

Belief in Black Magic

64% said they believed in black magic. The belief in black magic is central to the problem of people seeking faith healers. The high prevalence of this faith can be a potential hindrance to delivering appropriate scientific mental health services.

Attribution of Mental Illness to Black Magic

A majority (56%) attributed mental illness to black magic. They felt black magic caused mental illness. This believe in turn modifies health seeking behaviours. Hence these myths and misconceptions regarding mental illness have to address using media and other programs.

Belief in God's Wrath

A majority (56%) believed in God's anger causing mental illness. These kinds of beliefs also promote seeking faith healers as primary source of contact.

Astrology Causing Mental Illness

A majority (60%) of caregivers believed that mental illness is due to improper position of stars This results in people seeking astrologers remedy and many times they refer patients to faith healers and temples. This again increases the duration of untreated psychosis.

Bad Deeds Done in Past Birth Causing Mental Illness

A majority (54%) believed that bad deeds done past life (bad karma) can cause mental illness. Hence, they may start seeking religious remedies for bad karma. This again delays medical help seeking and increases the duration of untreated psychosis and worsens the outcome.

People Seek Faith Healers

A majority (62%) of care givers have taken their patients to faith healers (baba or tantric). So this shows the belief in black magic is not restricted to ideas and concepts but alters actual behaviour seeking help of faith healers.

Religious Rituals

A majority (52%) have done religious practices prescribed by the faith healers. The practices usually are expensive. This results in the patient becoming bankrupt by the time he reaches the psychiatrist. Financial resources could have been used more efficiently if they had accessed medical care earlier.

Patients' Beliefs

A majority of patients (52%) believe in black magic and similar majority (56%) believe in astrology. Hence, they cooperate with religious treatments better.

The same patients may not be so cooperative for medical and psychiatric treatment considering the stigma around psychiatric treatment. Hence steps have to be taken to clear the stigma around mental illness.

CONCLUSIONS

Supernatural beliefs are common in caregivers and patients with psychiatric illness. Many of them attribute the symptoms of mental illnesses to these beliefs. So, this will increase the duration of untreated psychosis and delays seeking treatment in psychiatric hospitals. Thus, there is a need to change the attitude of the general population

towards people with mental illness through awareness campaign.

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