ETHNOPHARMACOLOGY: THE MEDICAL MODERNITIES OF THE IFUGAO TRIBE IN THE PHILIPPINES

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Abstract- The Ifugao tribe, located in the Cordillera Region of the Philippines, faced the dilemma of utilizing modern medical technology provided by hospitals, utilizing local herbs or other traditional remedial practices or a combination of both. There is a cultural dilemma in choosing health remedies between modern allopathic medicine or naturopathic herbal medicine in the Ifugao region as herbal remedies have been around in the region for more than a millennia. Religious beliefs are another possible contributing factor in this slow acceptance because some members of the Ifugao tribe believe that praying is at times considered as a medical treatment. This paper looks at the different ethno pharmacological remedies that the Ifugao tribe uses and potential shifts that may be occurring with the acceptance of modern medical technology. The paper will also highlight how the indigenous community of the Ifugao tribe shifted due to the western influence of modern medical technology.

I. INTRODUCTION

Medical practices are fundamental to the cultural and traditional context of many indigenous communities. Some particular local indigenous medical practices are deeply intertwined with their own religious beliefs and other maintain certain practices that have been in existence within the tribe for numerous generations. Thus, it is simply a practice that has been continued on and has been ingrained into the community of some indigenous communities. The study of analysing the influence of western medical technology and healthcare on the Ifugao community is able to demonstrate a change in the fundamental culture of this tribe. The enlightenment of potentially more efficient remedial practices for injuries or diseases may diminish old practices that prove to be inefficient in comparison to modern remedial practices. This leads to a definite change of phase from strong cultural ties to a more modernized context of an indigenous tribe. The Ifugao tribe is especially crucial to understanding whether there can exist a change in the traditions of a tribe as the community is located nearby hospitals and small clinics. This allows for an efficient analysis of the accessibility to modern healthcare for this particular tribe. The Ifugao tribe also has a very clear and structured process of remedial practices through using a wide selection of studied herbs in nearby areas that have been going on for thousands of years. It is very possible that there is indeed a shift in the renewal or cumulative change of the indigenous Ifugao tribe. The question, however, is to what extent the change has taken place. This extent is really important to understand because it will be able to demonstrate whether greater changes will take place in the future or changes that will cease to exist. Likewise, it is important to understand if the change in the community is due to the urbanization taking place in the surrounding communities or due to a change simply within the community. These ideas can be determined through analyzing a published index of medical practices/herbs and their uses, analyzing health conditions consulted by local medical providers in nearby hospitals, and comparing them to the medical practices of other tribes. Different remedies in order to treat illnesses, extent of consultation on various health conditions to health care clinics and potential ethnic/communal restrictions will be measurement factors that lead this analysis.

Practices

Medical practices are fundamental to the cultural and traditional context of many indigenous communities. But because there lies an undeniable indigenous belief toward the traditional medical practice regarding the new and more foreign allopathic medicine with skepticism is inevitable. Because the traditional practice has been available for members of the tribe for many generations, it makes it that much harder to actually provide scientifically and strongly based allopathic medicine in treating patients of indigenous descent. The study of analysing the influence of western medical technology and healthcare on the Ifugao community is able to demonstrate a change in the fundamental culture of this tribe. The enlightenment of potentially more efficient remedial practices for injuries or diseases may diminish old practices that prove to be inefficient in comparison to modern remedial practices. Thus, there can exist a change of phase from strong cultural ties to a more modernized context of an indigenous tribe. The Ifugao tribe is especially crucial to understanding whether there can exist a change in the traditions of a tribe as the community is located nearby hospitals and small clinics. Likewise, it is important to understand if the change in the community is due to the urbanization taking place in the surrounding communities or due to a change simply within the community. These ideas can be determined through analyzing a published index of
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Ethnopharmacological remedies in the community of the Ifugao tribe as the detailed list of over 200 herbal remedies demonstrates that the local medicine has been studied extensively. The Ifugao currently uses herbs and local medical practices that have been tested by the Philippine Department of Health, 10 practices of which have been endorsed by the Health Department towards the citizens of the Philippines. Thus, the inefficiency and the lack of competency of the medical knowledge of the Ifugao tribe is out of the question. The information regarding the effective list of practices on ecletic diseases or illnesses demonstrates that the Ifugao tribe are potentially capable of living without any western medical intervention (depending on the severity of the disease or illness). The glossary is shown to have some aspects to which focus more on the spiritual or ritual aspect of the tribe in terms of remedial processes. For example, a prayer is said to heal or treat a person with headaches amongst tribes in the Cordillera region.

There exists a number of members of the tribe who are consulted by doctors regarding various medical conditions. The University of Cordilleras used a 15 point scale that averaged the extent of consultation regarding various medical conditions (1 being rarely and 5 being a lot). The Ifugao tribe is shown to rarely consult doctors as they had an average of 2.60 out of 5 for the extent of consultation on diseases such as circumcision, pregnancy, childbirth and etc towards doctors. However, the tribe is shown to visit doctors or modern medical professionals for symptoms like painful urination, as it had a score of 3.09 out of 5.00. Illnesses such as painful urination is shown to not be indicated in the index of treatments by herbal remedy in the glossary of herbal treatments. Unlike other tribes indicated in the study by herbal remedies. There exists a number of members of the tribe who are consulted by doctors regarding various medical conditions. The University of Cordilleras used a 15 point scale that averaged the extent of consultation regarding various medical conditions (1 being rarely and 5 being a lot). The Ifugao tribe is shown to rarely consult doctors as they had an average of 2.60 out of 5 for the extent of consultation on diseases such as circumcision, pregnancy, childbirth and etc towards doctors. However, the tribe is shown to visit doctors or modern medical professionals for symptoms like painful urination, as it had a score of 3.09 out of 5.00. Illnesses such as painful urination is shown to not be indicated in the index of treatments by herbal remedy in the glossary of herbal treatments. Unlike other tribes indicated in the study by herbal remedies. According to the University of the Cordilleras, the Ifugao tribe is shown to be in the middle ground between consulting doctors or using other means of curing illnesses like herbal remedies as the numbers 2.60 and 3.09 mentioned previously are not polar in significance. The study also showed that an average of 2.43 out of 5.00 consult community healers and 3.00 out of 5.00 consult the Barangay health worker or nurse. Based on the low value of 2.60 for professional consultation, it is shown that the Ifugao are not too keen on visiting doctors. However, the Ifugao tribe is shown to seek modern professional help (as demonstrated by the value 3.09) for symptoms that have not been listed in the index of medicinal herb practices. Other neighboring tribes of the Ifugao do not seem to stray off from the values of the Ifugao tribe. The Kankanay tribe has an average of 2.11 out of 5.00 and the Kalinga tribe has an average of 2.97 out of 5.00 for the extent of consultation towards doctors for basic health practices. The Kalinga tribe is shown to consult health officials more than the Ifugao and the Kankanay. Considering that the tribes are located within the same region (Cordillera) of the Philippines, they share similar agricultural geography. All of the tribes farm rice as a staple of economic resources. The tribes are significantly different culture wise and have variations in religious beliefs. However, all of the tribes have similar ethnopharmacological practices, with glossaries for herbs being very similar to each other (2). Due to the fact that the tribes are similar in their extent of consultation towards health
professionals and indices for ethnopharmacological practices, it is important to analyze these tribes with each other as the reasons underlying consultation towards western medicine may be similar. Before the intervention of western medical practices, generally in tribes, illnesses were believed to be caused by the world of spirits. The majority of the tribes believed that illnesses were caused by supernatural beings or evil spirits. These illnesses were healed by local healers or a local priest called *tanoc* depending on the region and tribe treating influenza (muscle pain, fatigue, dizziness, vomiting) with eating fried ants or eating ripe fruits.

This fact would explain why many of the communities and tribes in the Cordillera region share similar ethnopharmacological practices, as they are culturally tied with to their respective societies. However, based on the values of 2.11, 2.97 and 2.60 for the three tribes in the Cordillera region, we see that there is indeed a mix or combination between herbal remedies and modern medical technologies. This vaguely resembles how there has been a small shift from incorporating modern medicine or western beliefs into the indigenous society. This also demonstrates a small shift in cultural practices and identities as the indigenous tribes are starting to consult doctors instead of sticking to traditional herbal practices considering the fact that herbal practices are generally closely tied to cultural beliefs. Many of the residents of the tribes in the Cordillera region surprisingly have religions that manage to coexist with their culture of being part of a tribe. 41 respondents towards an interview in a study regarding an ethnopharmacology study by the University of the Philippines are said to be catholic. This fact already illustrates the coexistence of different cultures within the Ifugao tribe and other tribes located in the Cordillera region, and how western influence has taken place. However, the extent to which the western influence or the religious affiliation to Catholicism on the ethnopharmacological remedies is not clearly imminent. The situation in the Ifugao tribe is very perplexing due to the fact that most of the herbal remedies do not come with a ritual practice like a prayer. Many of the practices in the Cordillera region are shown to be tied with the world of spirits, but the application towards the actual healing process is shown to be very logical and systematic. For example, the Ifugao people treat symptoms for malnutrition by eating ants.

According to choosmyplate.gov, it is demonstrated in the food nutrition index that fruits are high in moisture content while according to another source ants have 13.9 grams of protein. The water content from the fruits would be effective in hydrating the person from all the lost body fluid due to vomiting while the ants would provide effective sustenance due to such high levels of protein.

There are variations amongst tribes but the study by the University of the Philippines suggests that many of the tribes share similar medical practices possibly due to the fact that they are in close proximity with each other. The Ifugao tribe according to the same study are shown to demonstrate strong spiritual tribes in their agricultural practices. Although rice is the greatest staple of economic source for the economic tribe, the tribe only farms rice and plants rice once a year thinking that overusing the rice terraces would upset the gods. The farming comes with rituals as well, such as butchering a pig on the first day for the chiloh (a practice of bathing the pig in blood) in order to protect the rice from evil or bad spirits. During the rice harvesting period, the tribe is prohibited from eating fruits, fish and green vegetables because there is a belief that they will attain diseases from the spirits. As shown by the ritual practices, the Ifugao tribe is strictly bonded to its culture and it’s beliefs. The idea of spirits and their omnipotence towards the people illustrates a more convoluted idea of how culture and tradition is ingrained in the medical practices. The Ifugao tribe does, however, believe that most of the common diseases are acquired through unbalanced/unhealthy diet and a dirty environment.

**CONCLUSION**

This indicates that the Ifugao mainly consults medical help from hospitals and doctors when the symptoms are beyond the medical knowledge of the Ifugao tribe. The value of 3.00 out of 5.00 for the consultation of local nurses compared to 3.09 out of 5.00 for the consultation of doctors indicates that there may be an issue with economic reasons. Local nurses or barangay health officials are communal workers, thus the fee regarding consultation would be significantly lower towards non profit hospitals. The value of 2.43 for consultation of community healers indicates that the religious or traditional beliefs involved with medical practices is significantly low. This value illustrates the deeply rooted religious believes of the Ifugao and how much they are restricted by its values and traditions. The belief of spirits and gods are able to coexist with the scientific or modern sense of medical practices as hospitals are not completely shunned. The tribe showed sign that focused more on objective practices towards tribal practices. The medical practices of the Ifugao tribe entails a small aspect of the culture of the Ifugao tribe to be scientific in the modern sense, using a balance of locally tested herbal remedies and medical consultations from nurses. The fact that the Ifugao tribe consult the medical officials indicates a shift from insular knowledge to a more cosmopolitan knowledge on medical practices. The community is, however, shown to be potentially restricted by economic demands considering that there is an extent of consultation towards nurses than professionals.

The survey given by the Cordilleras Research Journal demonstrates how the residents of the Ifugao and
neighboring tribes want doctors the most regarding healthcare practices. The interviews suggest that the tribes want someone they can consult to immediately take care of the medical situations that they can not handle or for emergency purposes. This coincides with the data provided by the research journal that 53% of the woman in the tribes do not know where to go in case of emergency healthcare. Although this data has significantly changed considering that there are now seven local hospitals in the Ifugao region of the Philippines the tribe may be restricted by economic issues or simply do not know where to go despite the close vicinity of the hospitals in the community. The Ifugao tribe is, thus, shown to have changed from an insular community with beliefs in spirits being the cause of diseases towards an accepting community with modern medical practices ingrained to some extent after the intervention of western ideas.

REFERENCES


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