

A STUDY OF THE PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES
REGARDING MENTAL ILLNESS BY THE FAMILIES

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The objective of this study was to test the hypothesis that the traditional perception of mental illness and the healing practices are on the wane. The hypothesis was based on the clinical impressions in psychiatric practice.

25 consecutive admissions to Peradeniya Psychiatry Unit were studied. The medical author studied the clinical features of the patients while the non-medical author interviewed at least 2 family members using a semi-structured questionnaire regarding their perceptions of the illness and treatment methods received so far.

Using the Research Diagnostic criteria by Spitzer et al the patients had the following disorders.

Schizophrenia (5), manic disorder (5), major depressive disorder (2), minor depressive disorder (1), Panic disorder (2), Labile personality (1), phobic disorder (1), other psychiatric disorder (8). 15 patients suffered from serious mental disorders.

64% of these patients had received Ayurvedic treatment and none of the families thought it helped. 96% patients had received rituals as a form of therapy. 50% believed that bad planetary alignment was the cause of illness. Families had incurred a mean expense of 4320 RS. 20% of the families planned to continue with rituals and only 24% planned to continue with Western treatment. 52% were non-committal.

Results show that mental disorders are perceived in an entirely traditional way by the public. The first line of treatment is nearly always with the traditional healers. Even after Western methods of treatment families seem reluctant to continue with such treatment.

References

- Spitzer, R.L., Endicott, Jean and Robins, Eli.
Research Diagnostic Criteria for a Selected Group
of Functional Disorders. 3rd edition

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