

FAITH HEALING OPTIONS AMONG CHILDREN HAVING ILLNESS

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ABSTRACT

Background: Faith healing among parents having children with illness still continues. **Objective:** To determine the frequency of different faith based modes of treatment of childhood diseases. **Methodology:** Study Design: Cross sectional study. Setting: Pediatrics Department, Nawaz Sharif Medical College and Doctors Hospital, Gujrat, Pakistan. 480 children admitted in pediatric ward were included from 1st April 2014 to 31st March 2016. Variables included in study were age, sex, current illness, any faith healing opted like, manat, visit to shrine and animal sacrifice. The data was entered and analyzed by SPSS version 16. **Results:** A total of 480 children were included with 310 (64.58%) were female whereas 170 (35.42%) were male. 360 children (75%) were from rural areas of Gujrat whereas 120 (25%) were from urban area. Different modes of treatment were availed. **Conclusion:** Our study showed that faith healing among children with illness was high and most of the parents “Visited Shrine” and “Manat” to heal the disease. Health education to increase the awareness may help in early diagnosis and treatment.

Keywords: Faith healing, Children, Illness

INTRODUCTION

The technological advances of the past century tended to change the focus of medicine from a curing, service oriented model to a technological, cure oriented model. Technology has led to advances in medicine and has given us the ability to decrease the morbidity and improve the outcome.¹ However, traditional belief based option of treatment do exist. Faith healing involves prayer, a visit to a religious shrine, or simply a strong belief in a supreme being.^{2,3}

There have been claims that faith can cure blindness, deafness, cancer, AIDS, developmental disorders, anemia, arthritis, defective speech, multiple sclerosis, skin rashes, paralysis and various injuries.⁴ Whereas available scientific evidence does not support claims that faith healing can actually cure physical ailments.⁴ Death, disability, and other unwanted outcomes have occurred when faith healing was elected instead of medical care for serious illnesses or injuries.^{4,5,6,7,8}

Unlike faith healing, advocates of spiritual healing makes no attempt to seek divine intervention, instead believing in divine energy.^{9,10} The increased interest in alternative medicine at the end of the twentieth century has given rise to a parallel interest among sociologists in relationship of religion to health.^{11,12}

In Pakistan, health care providers, observe number of the patients being adapting only, one or other form of faith healing techniques like Dam & Darood, visit to a shrine, taaweez, wearing of a holy necklace/rope etc, for cure of their ailments.¹³ It has been observed that this practice is a one of

major factor of late presentation of patients especially of various malignancies leading to increased morbidity and mortality.¹

This study was conducted to determine the the frequency of different faith based modes of treatment options availed.

METHODOLOGY

This cross sectional study was carried out on 480 children from 1st April 2014 to 30th March 2016 in Pediatrics department of Nawaz Sharif Medical College and Doctors Hospital, Gujrat, Pakistan.

Children 1 to 12 years of age with childhood diseases who had disease at least 05 days at home and treated with different modes of faith were included in the study. All children were excluded from the study whose parents were not cooperative. Children included in the study were admitted in Pediatrics.

Informed consent from the parents or attendants was taken. The basic demographic information including age, gender and address was recorded. History of present illness was inquired with regard to symptoms Outcome and duration and treatment options availed, like; manat, visit to Shirine, fait healer and animal sacrifice.

Required investigations were done like CBC, serum studies, blood culture, X-ray abdomen and ultrasound abdomen. Daily report was taken, and investigations and treatment was done as required. After diagnosis medical treatment was decided. All the treatment was given in ward or on outdoor basis. Percentages were calculated for residence, age, gender and area of child. Data was entered and analyzed by using SPSS version 16.

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RESULTS

A total of 480 children were included in this study, with 310 (64.58%) were females whereas 170 (35.42%) were male. 360 children (75%) were from rural areas whereas 120 (25%) were from urban area. Out of total 480 children, parents of 372 (77.5%) children were illiterate. Different modes of faith based treatment were observed. Highest proportion was of visit to shrine 102 (21.25%).(Table I) Many parents adopted multiple modes of faith that is 139 (28.95%). Overall outcome was good, and no death was observed during the study and all the patients recovered without long term complications.

Table No I: Frequency of different demographic factors and faith based treatment options. (n=480)

Variables		No. of cases	Percentage
Age	1-5 years	295	61.4
	5-10 years	114	23.75
	10-12 years	71	14.79
Gender	Males	170	35.42
	Females	310	64.58
Literacy Level	Illiterate	372	77.5
	Educated	108	22.5
Residence	Rural	360	75
	Urban	120	25
Faith based treatment options	Mannat	78	16.25
	Visit to shrine	102	21.25
	Faith healer & taveez	66	13.75
	Dam and darood	54	11.25
	Self prayer	24	5
	Animal sacrifice	17	3.54
	Multiple	139	28.95

DISCUSSION

This study was conducted to assess health seeking behavior among sick children. In children there are many diseases which are self-limiting and usually no treatment is required like flue in children. If someone has been treated with faith then we should think that can we find any evidence that faith has treated? A study showed that children living in a home with educated care giver are less likely to get home care.⁷

Patients with functional ailments who visit "faith

healers" may feel better because the experience causes them to relax or because of placebo effect. The people who are not relieved may conclude that they are "unworthy" and become depressed as a result. Money spent for a fruitless experience with a healer is another negative factor.^{8,14} Evidence showed that 79% believed that spiritual faith can help people recover from disease. This idea is also popular among physicians.³ Although many studies have found associations between various measures of religiosity and health, no well –designed study has demonstrated that religious belief or prayer actually benefit health.² A study showed that children living in a family having more children has more chances of getting no care or home care.⁷

In fact, one well-designed study found just the opposite. The study involved patients whose progress was followed for nine months after discharge from a British hospital. They evaluated the outpatient records and the responses of 189 patients to questionnaires. The researchers concluded that the health status of patients with stronger spiritual beliefs were more than twice as likely to be unimproved or worse.¹³ Although some studies have found that churchgoers tend to be healthier and to live longer than non-churchgoers, church attendance itself is unlikely to be responsible for the difference.¹⁴

Available scientific evidence does not support claims that faith healing can actually cure physical ailments. One review published in 1998 looked at 172 cases of death among children treated by faith healing instead of conventional methods. They estimated that if conventional treatment had been given, the survival rate for most of these children would have been more than 90 percent, with the remainder of the children also having a good chance of survival.¹⁴ The American Medical Association consider that prayer as therapy should not be medically reimbursable or deductible expense.¹¹

CONCLUSION

Our study showed that faith healing among children with illness was high and most of the parents "Visited Shrine" and "Manat" to heal the disease. Health education to increase the awareness may help in early diagnosis and treatment.

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