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Traditional Healers and Their Status in Society: An Anthropological Study in the Dawun Area

المعالجون الشعبيون ومكانتهم في المجتمع: دراسة أنثروبولوجية في منطقة داون

Nedjema BOUSSOUAR* nedjema.boussouar@univ-mosta.dz	Philosophy Human Sciences Research Unit for Philosophical, Social and Humanistic Studies (URSH) University of Oran 2	Abdelhamid Ben Badis University Mostaganem/ALGERIA
Goma omar farag g.mohamad@azu.edu.ly	Anthropology	University Of Azzaytuna, LIBYA

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Abstract:

The research aims to understand folk healers and their status in society. It relies on the anthropological method, with research tools consisting of a field work guide and interviews, applied to a group of practitioners and folk healers in the Al-Dawun area of Tarhuna in Libyan society. The results confirm that some folk healers acquire their therapeutic experiences and knowledge through inheritance from parents, mothers, or other relatives, or through apprenticeship under non-relatives. Folk healers derive their vision of health and illness from the society's cultural framework, where these visions are shaped by the specific disease the healer specializes in, providing therapeutic prescriptions aligned with that cultural vision. The research recommends the need to establish specialized scientific centers

* Corresponding author: nedjema.boussouar@univ-mosta.dz

for teaching folk medicine according to health and social standards and controls, aiming to graduate a generation of scientifically and practically qualified folk healers.

Keywords: Traditional medicine; Folk healers; Culture and health; Cultural vision of disease; Medical anthropology.

ملخص:

يهدف البحث عن معرفة المعالجون الشعبيون ومكانتهم في المجتمع، واعتمد البحث علي المنهج الانثربولوجي، وتمثلت أدوات البحث في دليل العمل الميداني والمقابلة وتم تطبيقها على مجموعة من الممارسين والمعالجين بالطب الشعبي بمنطقة الداوون بترهونة بالمجتمع الليبي، وجاءت نتائج البحث مؤكدة على أن بعض المعالجين الشعبين يكتسبون خبراتهم ومعارفهم العلاجية عن طريق التوارث من الأباء والأمهات أو الأقارب الآخرين أو عن طريق التلمذة على يد معالجين من غير الأقارب، وتستمد رؤية المعالجين الشعبيين للصحة والمرض من النسق الثقافي للمجتمع، حيث تتخذ تلك الرؤى من خلال المرض الذي يتخصص فيه المعالج ويقدم الوصفات العلاجية بما يتواءم من تلك الرؤية الثقافية، وأوصى البحث بضرورة الاهتمام بالعمل على إنشاء مراكز علمية متخصصة في تدريس الطب الشعبي طبقا للمعايير والضوابط الصحية والاجتماعية بهدف تخريج جيل من المعالجين الشعبيين المؤهلين علميا وعمليا

الكلمات المفتاحية: الطب التقليدي ؛ المعالجون الشعبويون ؛ الثقافة والصحة ؛ الرؤية الثقافية للمرض؛ الأنثروبولوجيا الطبية.

Introduction:

Folk healers vary across cultures and societies, each practicing different healing methods based on their local beliefs and traditions. They are known by various names depending on the culture and social context, such as attars, herbalists, hijams, jurists, or experienced individuals skilled in identifying folk medical prescriptions and practices (1).

In the Al-Dawun area of Tarhuna, folk healers play a crucial role in healthcare. They provide both preventive care, such as offering therapeutic and religious advice, and therapeutic care through various rituals and methods. These healers treat all types of diseases, even chronic and difficult conditions for which modern medicine has failed to offer effective treatments.

Folk healers often share the cultural values of their communities, which shapes their understanding of the causes of illness, the ways to treat it, and its

significance. Many view disease as being linked to cultural beliefs, such as the influence of the "evil eye," envy, or supernatural causes like spirits, magic, and sorcery. In their treatments, folk healers emphasize the importance of the patient's life and environment, taking into account the cultural beliefs and practices that influence the patient's worldview.

The therapist's personality plays a significant role in the recovery process, as patients' trust in the healer is often pivotal to their healing. This trust arises from the patient's psychological state and the experiences of others who have been treated by the healer. Healers instill confidence and hope in their patients by sharing success stories, even if they are aware that the disease is serious. While they may not fully understand the disease, folk healers focus on treating the symptoms the patient experiences and alleviating the emotional distress caused by illness.

In Al-Dawun, folk healers are not considered specialists in the modern sense. Instead, they are individuals who have acquired expertise through repeated practice and experience, which allows them to adapt to the local ecological, social, and cultural environment. Traditionally, it is the elderly who pass down knowledge of folk healing methods. However, a new generation of educated healers has emerged, many of whom have developed their skills through studying folk medicine, particularly in the practice of hijama (cupping therapy), which is common in many societies. These new healers often consult with professionals in official medicine. This research focuses on documenting the role of folk healers in Al-Dawun, Tarhuna, and preserving this aspect of Libyan folk culture.

Research Objectives:

1. To identify the patterns of folk healers.

2. To understand the folk healers' views on disease and treatment.
3. To examine the status of folk healers in the study community.
4. To explore the reasons why people turn to folk healers.

The Importance of the Research:

The theoretical importance of this study lies in its focus on a social phenomenon prevalent in Libyan society and, more specifically, in the research community. It clarifies the various aspects of folk healing, identifying its visible and hidden functions. The research analyzes the reasons for its existence and persistence in society, looking at the cultural, social, and economic factors that influence this practice. These factors include customs, traditions, and beliefs, which are key to understanding individual behavior and the role of folk healers in society.

The practical importance of this research is that it provides insights into the causes behind the widespread use of folk healers. By understanding these causes, it can help change the attitudes of individuals toward folk healing practices. Additionally, it contributes to the planning of social development processes, particularly in the health sector, in a way that aligns with the cultural context of society. The research also aims to help integrate the experience of folk healers with modern health practices and guide the training of new folk healers based on updated scientific and medical foundations.

Research Questions:

1. Do folk healers have social respect and prestige in the community?
2. How do folk healers perceive health and disease?
3. What are the reasons that lead some members of the community to seek the help of folk healers?

Research Methodology:

This research employs an anthropological approach, which is well-suited for studying the role of folk healers in the Al-Dawun area. The anthropological method is grounded in the understanding that society is a social system composed of interdependent parts that support and function together (2). The approach relies on field studies to derive specific generalizations about the phenomenon under investigation.

A key strength of the anthropological approach is its flexibility, allowing researchers to study societies in a variety of ways. It provides the freedom to select research models, tools, and sources. However, this flexibility requires deep insight, scientific integrity, and extensive experience to ensure objectivity and neutrality. The ability to assess the social dimensions of problems and effectively communicate findings is crucial for conducting successful research (3).

Data Collection Tools:

A. Field Guide: The field guide is designed to break down each cultural element into smaller components, prompting a series of structured questions. These questions serve as reminders for the researcher, ensuring all key aspects are covered during data collection. The guide is developed based on prior research and experiences related to the subject. In this study, the researcher used the field guide personally to collect data from key informants.

B. Interviews: Interviews, both structured and unstructured, are among the most effective methods for gathering information. They provide insight into the historical and social contexts of folk healers. Interviews may be open-ended, allowing for free discussion, or closed-ended, focusing on specific topics.

Data Analysis:

The collected data was analyzed qualitatively using the field guide as a reference. The qualitative approach aims to uncover the deeper meanings behind the phenomenon under study. In this process, the researcher fully engages with the study unit, seeking an in-depth understanding and realistic interpretation of the practices and beliefs of folk healers. This analysis helps reveal the intricate internal patterns that shape their healing methods and worldview.

Research Area :

1. **Spatial Scope**:The study focuses on the Al-Dawun area in Tarhuna, which lies along the road between Maslatah and Tarhuna. It is bordered by Maslatah to the east, Al-Khadra to the west, Suq Al-Jumaa and Al-Sha'afin to the north, and Bani Walid and South Zlitan to the south.
2. **Time Range**:The research was conducted from June 1, 2019, to October 20, 2019.
3. **Human Field**:The study includes practitioners and healers involved in folk medicine within the research community.

Research Theory:

This study is based on the **worldview theory**, which integrates multiple interrelated concepts, axioms, and perspectives. These elements form a unified way of thinking, rooted in the lived experiences of individuals. The theory encompasses various societal systems, including values, customs, beliefs, ethics, political experiences, and the interactions among them (4).

Worldviews serve as a structured set of concepts and theories that shape how individuals perceive the world. They provide a framework through which experiences are interpreted, acting as a symbolic system that integrates all aspects of reality within a given culture (5).

According to **Dilthey**, studies on worldviews rely on historical and descriptive methodologies. This approach examines individuals by analyzing their behaviors and underlying motivations. By going beyond observable actions, researchers seek to uncover deeper emotions, desires, and thought processes. These insights help explain individuals' perceptions, values, and the intentions that drive their actions (6).

Similarly, **Redfield** describes worldviews as an essential part of a society's cultural heritage. He defines them as a combination of "perceptions of what should be and what is." Worldviews influence how people process experiences and develop ways of thinking. They also encompass cognitive and emotional responses to the world, shaping perspectives on life (7).

Redfield further explains that worldviews reflect an internal cultural perspective. To understand them, researchers must observe individuals' behaviors and language, even when people are unaware of their own worldview structures. He outlines the key elements of worldview, emphasizing **the self** as the central point through which people interpret the world. This self-concept includes both human and non-human entities, such as nature, space, and time, shaping an individual's perception of reality (8).

Goldman defines worldviews as a **social-historical concept** that shapes the direction of a social group in understanding and structuring its lived reality. This vision aligns with the group's values, customs, traditions, and behaviors, distinguishing it from other groups. It encompasses shared aspirations, emotions, and ideas that unite members of a society (9).

He emphasizes that a worldview can reflect the entirety of the reality in which it emerges. However, no matter how comprehensive its perspective, its significance remains bound by the broader **civilizational and cultural**

framework of the society from which it originates. As a result, worldviews are inherently relative (10). They serve as a collective understanding within a group, helping individuals develop **class consciousness** to varying degrees. Since individuals rarely possess a fully formed awareness of their own aspirations, emotions, and actions, their understanding remains partial. However, as members of a group achieve greater cohesion—whether at the moral or conceptual level—their worldview becomes clearer. Philosophers and writers play a key role in articulating these views, and their contributions become more significant as they approach a **cohesive expression** of their group's perspective. This stage represents the peak of possible awareness within a society (11).

Ahmed Abu Zeid identifies key characteristics of **worldview studies**, including their research methods, theoretical aspects, and guiding principles (12):

1. The concept of worldviews is one of the most complex and debated topics in anthropology, despite the extensive literature on it. It is sometimes referred to as "primitive statements," "life forms," "epistemological maps," or "final cosmological perceptions." These terms represent different ways of understanding how societies perceive the world.
2. The term "worldview" is primarily used in **anthropological literature**, making it a distinct concept within the field. It is closely linked to contemporary anthropological discussions.
3. Studying worldviews requires examining the **ideas individuals hold about their world**. This includes how people define themselves in relation to the universe and everything it encompasses. Essentially, worldviews shape how individuals perceive existence.

This research adopts **the worldview theory** to analyze folk healers in the study community. It aims to explore their **attitudes and behaviors** toward illness, its

causes, and treatment. Understanding how local culture interprets disease and healing within the framework of worldviews provides deeper insights into **cultural perceptions of health**. Worldviews shape how people understand the universe, life, and human existence. They establish logical consistency in **thought patterns, assumptions, customs, and behaviors**. Traditional healing practices can be observed, but their true meaning can only be understood through the lens of a **holistic worldview**.

Patterns of Folk Healers:

1. Therapists in the Holy Quran

Therapists specializing in Quranic healing typically belong to **Sufi or Sunni Salafi** groups. Their treatment methods involve **reciting Quranic verses** aloud for the patient to hear or over a quantity of water, which the patient consumes in prescribed doses over several days. Some healers may also **wipe the patient's body, particularly over areas of pain**, or instruct the patient to bathe—this is especially common in **Sufi healing practices**.

Quranic therapy is **a learned skill** acquired through **training** under experienced sheikhs, by studying religious healing texts, or through stories of righteous predecessors. The **duration of training** under experts significantly influences a healer's competence, as they are initially required to practice under the supervision of a sheikh before treating patients independently.

A Quranic therapist is expected to embody **high moral and religious standards**, serving as an exemplary figure in **ethics, piety, and religious jurisprudence**. They should:

- Maintain **prayer, worship, and remembrance of God**, avoiding sins and heresies.
- Have **pure intentions** in treatment, relying on faith in God for healing.

• Be well-versed in **Islamic teachings and Da'wah (preaching)** since treatment is inherently a form of religious guidance.

• Gain **experience** through hands-on practice alongside seasoned therapists.

• Be knowledgeable about **jinn and demons**, as well as **basic medical, psychological, and social sciences**.

• Collaborate with **medical doctors and psychologists**, fostering a connection between spiritual healing and modern medicine.

Most Quranic healers **reject** practices such as:

• Writing Quranic verses directly on the **patient's body**.

• Using **talismans, amulets, or veils** for healing.

• Employing **fire-based treatments**.

• Writing Quranic verses on cloth and **burning them in front of the patient's nose**.

They consider these acts **forbidden**, equating them with magic or sorcery.

Treatment Environment

There is no fixed location for Quranic healing. The **patient may visit the therapist**, or the therapist may **travel to the patient's home**. In some cases, the healer prepares **written prayers and amulets**, which are delivered by a family member with instructions for use.

The treatment space must be **free from distractions**, including:

• **Entertainment, music, or inappropriate imagery**.

• **Statues, amulets, or veils** that may contradict Islamic teachings.

• **Uncleanliness or unpleasant odors**—the space should be **clean and fragrant**.

Remuneration for Treatment:

Most Quranic therapists **do not demand a fixed fee** for their services, leaving the payment to the discretion of the patient. The client typically places the

money **in the healer's pocket or under their sitting area**. However, the general **expectation of remuneration** is often communicated informally through **word of mouth** within the community.

2. Witch Therapists

Magic therapy is performed by an individual known as the jurist. This person treats diseases using methods that involve invoking polytheistic words, praising and harnessing the devil, or creating a hijab—a small amulet made from paper scraps. These scraps are written in ink or purlin made of sheep's wool, using a feather or a pointed reed. Quranic verses are inscribed without points and sometimes inverted. In certain cases, verses are written in blood, as appeasing the jinn requires the therapist to engage in unclean acts. These may include ablution with urine or writing with blood, including menstrual blood. The patient or their relatives are then instructed to dissolve the writing in water and drink it, burn it and inhale the smoke, or sew it into fabric to be worn as a hijab.

Magic therapy is learned through practice and yellow books. Before beginning treatment, the witch therapist asks for the patient's name and that of their mother or father. This information is believed to help identify the patient through demons. The therapist also requests personal items such as hair, clothing, a photograph, or a used napkin. In some cases, they ask for a specific animal to be slaughtered without mentioning God's name. The animal's blood may be applied to the affected area or the carcass discarded in a ruined place.

During treatment, the therapist utters incomprehensible words while using incense, salt, alum, and amber. They recite torments and talismans and perform calculations using the patient's name and their mother's name. These numbers are added together with the numerical value of the current day and then divided by seven, nine, or twelve. The final number is believed to reveal the

nature of the illness and the method of treatment.

Payment is typically high, depending on the patient's condition. Additionally, therapists accept gifts. Treatment usually takes place at the witch therapist's home, and they rarely visit the patient's residence. They perform their rituals alone with the patient or a close relative, refusing to work in front of a group.

The witch therapist holds a position of prestige and fear in society. People refer to him as a sheikh or jurist out of respect, but they secretly disdain his practices. Behind his back, they call him a sorcerer or juggler. Despite this, many turn to him when conventional medicine fails, especially for issues attributed to magic, such as a groom's inability to consummate his marriage on the wedding night or cases of insanity caused by possession by a malicious spirit.

3.Fracture Therapists (Splinting)

Splinting involves treating bone fractures by realigning the bones and addressing joint sprains, such as those in the foot or arm. The therapist manually returns the bones to their natural position, often with the assistance of others familiar with the process.

This profession is traditionally passed down through generations, either from father to son or by apprenticing under an experienced fracture therapist. Most practitioners in the study community are elderly and illiterate. Their numbers have declined due to the increasing reliance on modern medicine, particularly radiology, which helps identify fractures with precision. As a result, their role is now mostly limited to providing preventive advice to individuals with fractures. However, they still play a crucial role in treating joint sprains and dislocated jaws.

Fracture therapists use a specific technique to realign injured limbs. This involves applying strong pressure while massaging the affected area with oil, hot water, and salt. They are also skilled in treating jaw dislocations and sprains

by using hammering and tattooing techniques. They believe that when a joint is twisted or dislocated, internal bleeding occurs due to torn tissues. To alleviate this pain, they use a needle to extract blood, which is thought to reduce discomfort. Additionally, they believe that tattooing the affected area helps numb severe pain that other treatments fail to relieve.

Despite advancements in modern medicine, fracture therapists continue to be sought after for their expertise in treating sprains and joint dislocations. Their traditional methods remain valued in certain communities, particularly where access to formal medical care is limited.

4. Pediatric Therapists

Most pediatric therapists are elderly women who cannot read or write. They treat various illnesses, including rickets, tonsillitis, abdominal pain, tuberculosis, eye diseases, and envy.

The knowledge of treatment is often passed down through generations. A therapist typically learns from her mother or mother-in-law if they practiced healing. Alternatively, she may acquire these skills by observing treatments performed on children in folk medicine settings.

Children are usually treated at the therapist's home. There, the therapist prepares herbal mixtures combined with honey and olive oil to address different ailments. The mother of the sick child offers gifts or money as compensation for the treatment. Fees typically range from 5 to 10 Libyan dinars. Additionally, the therapist may sell herbal mixtures specific to the treated illness.

Some therapists believe that certain diseases cannot be effectively treated in hospitals. For example, rickets, known as "Abu Salem" disease, and tuberculosis are considered better managed through traditional remedies.

5. Infertility Therapists

Infertility therapists include both men and women who use different methods to address infertility. They are categorized into two main groups: those who practice magic-based divination and those who rely on herbal treatments and physical therapy.

Therapists using divination attribute female infertility to supernatural causes such as magical spells, bad luck, or envy. Treatment involves performing rituals and instructing the infertile woman to visit a saint's shrine. She may also be required to offer a sacrificial animal with specific characteristics as part of the healing process.

Conversely, herbal and physical therapy practitioners believe that infertility results from uterine blockages or other physiological issues. Their treatments include herbal steam therapy and abdominal wrapping, which are thought to alleviate these conditions.

Male infertility therapists often belong to religious groups, including Sufi orders and Sunni Salafi scholars. Sufi healers provide amulets and charms to both husband and wife. They also encourage visits to "Hazrat" ceremonies, where rituals are performed to remove magical influences and evil spirits believed to cause infertility. Sunni Salafi healers, however, reject such practices. Instead, they prescribe religious healing by reciting prayers over water, which the patient must drink, and recommend daily consumption of natural honey until recovery.

Several well-known spiritual figures specialize in infertility treatment. One of the most famous is "Sidi Muammar," located south of the village of Al-Dawun. This site has been renowned for infertility treatments for many years. Visitors, especially on Mondays and Thursdays, perform rituals such as offering sacrifices and circling the shrine seven times while praying for a child. Some

dervishes conduct Al-Hadra and Al-Jazeeb ceremonies, intended to expel evil spirits responsible for infertility.

Infertility therapists attract people from all social backgrounds, including the wealthy, the poor, the educated, and the uneducated. Couples often turn to these practitioners after prolonged unsuccessful medical treatments. The desperation to conceive leads them to explore both formal and traditional healing methods.

6- Ophthalmic Treatments:

Ophthalmic treatment involves procedures known as "ocular" treatments. These include the removal of foreign objects from the eye and therapeutic methods that rely on touch and sensation.

One of the primary conditions treated is the removal of objects that have entered the eye and are difficult to extract. Practitioners use their tongues to carefully remove these objects without causing the patient any pain. They also extract small worms from the eye using either their tongues or a specially designed thin rod. This method is referred to as "worm or purity," meaning the purification of the eye from worms. Additionally, some practitioners treat eye redness using wool threads. This procedure is called "dishwasher," which means cleansing the eye of scabs. After treatment, they often apply natural honey as an ointment to improve vision.

Treatment takes place at the practitioner's home. Most healers do not travel to patients; instead, patients visit them, regardless of their health condition. This practice is influenced by societal customs and traditions, which discourage women from traveling alone or allowing male healers to visit them at home. However, male practitioners can visit patients if accompanied by a relative. If a healer needs to travel to a patient's home, the patient's family is responsible for

providing transportation, either by using their own vehicle or renting one. Women healers, however, do not typically travel for treatment.

The cost of ophthalmic treatment is not fixed. Instead, it is left to the discretion of the patient and their family, who contribute according to their financial situation and their belief in the treatment's effectiveness.

7- Cupping Therapists:

Cupping therapists are among the most well-known and widely sought-after healers in the community. Many practitioners, both men and women, offer this service. Cupping therapy is popular for both treatment and disease prevention, attracting individuals from different social backgrounds. Patients seek treatment either at the therapist's home or at their own residence. Some practitioners also set up treatment spaces near mosques for cupping procedures. Female therapists primarily treat patients in their homes.

Cupping is typically performed on the 17th, 19th, and 21st days of the lunar month. Many therapists remind their patients of their appointments via mobile phone. The procedure involves the use of masks, plastic gloves, paper napkins, wound disinfectants, razor blades, and disposable cups. After treatment, practitioners dispose of these materials safely. Payment for cupping therapy is customary rather than required. Most practitioners receive at least five Libyan dinars, which patients discreetly place in their pockets while they are treating others. Visitors often say, "May God have mercy on your children," to which the therapist responds, "May God bless you and grant you healing, God willing."

In addition to cupping, some therapists practice moxibustion, which involves burning specific points on the body. Women and children receive this treatment differently. For children, practitioners make small incisions on targeted areas based on the illness, sometimes combining cupping with moxibustion. They use thin sticks made from olive branches, carob, or other wild trees, heating the

tip until it glows before applying it to designated areas on the child's body. For women, practitioners use iron skewers, nails, or thick olive branches, applying them to joints, the back of the head, and the forehead.

Cupping is used to treat various conditions, including high blood pressure, excessive sweating in women, colds, toothaches, headaches, and back pain. The frequency of treatment varies depending on the condition. For high blood pressure, cupping is recommended monthly. Excessive sweating in women requires treatment for three consecutive weeks. Toothaches usually need only one session, while back pain may require multiple treatments based on severity. Rickets in children is treated weekly over several weeks. Some cupping therapists also use tattooing as a method for both treatment and disease prevention.

8. Herbalists

Herbal therapy is a widely practiced traditional healing method in the study community. Many folk healers, especially women, possess knowledge of medicinal plants and their therapeutic and preventive properties. Nearly every large family or clan has at least one member skilled in herbal healing. This expertise is often passed down through generations or learned from other healers. Herbalists play a crucial role by advising patients or their families on the appropriate medicinal herbs, preparation methods, and proper consumption times. They offer these services without seeking financial compensation.

Recently, more male herbalists have emerged, combining herbal remedies with religious healing practices. They gain knowledge from books on medicinal plants, particularly those focused on Libyan flora, to understand their various health benefits. These herbalists believe that medicinal herbs are free from the

side effects commonly associated with modern chemical drugs. Additionally, herbs are inexpensive and can be gathered from the wilderness, purchased at low prices from perfumers, or provided freely by the healer. They argue that folk medicine does not conflict with modern medicine but rather complements it in many ways.

9. Bite Therapists

The study community is home to numerous venomous creatures, including scorpions, snakes, and poisonous spiders. As a result, many individuals suffer from bites and stings, creating a demand for specialized bite therapists. Some healers provide immediate first aid before directing the injured person to a hospital or health center. Others rely on herbs known for their healing properties, such as bite herb, olive leaf, and coconut. Some therapists use cauterization to neutralize the venom, while others apply techniques involving oaths, veins, and diaphragms. Among them, scorpion and snake bite healers are particularly well-known. These therapists believe their treatments eliminate the need for hospital visits.

Many of these healers are members of Sufi groups, particularly those following the Isaacic method. They adhere to spiritual practices, including daily recitations and commitments prescribed by their sheikh. The ability to heal bites is considered a divine gift, bestowed upon them through a sacred oath. They believe that those outside their spiritual lineage cannot successfully treat bites, even if they recite the same words.

According to these healers, the origins of this treatment trace back to Sheikh Muhammad bin Issa, a Sufi leader who lived in Morocco. His followers, while traveling to pilgrimage sites across deserts and wilderness, frequently encountered scorpion and snake bites. To protect them, Sheikh Muhammad bin Issa provided them with a sacred paper containing healing words, which

they believed cured stings and safeguarded them from further harm.

Bite therapy does not take place in a specific location. Some patients visit the healer's home, while others summon the healer to their location. Although these therapists accept compensation for their services, they do not set fixed fees. They consider healing a divine gift and believe it should not be exploited for profit or withheld from those in need.

Folk Healers' Perspective on Disease and Treatment:

The understanding of health, illness, prevention, and treatment is shaped by the prevailing popular culture. Folk beliefs about the human body influence perceptions of its relationship with the natural world, which people can observe, and the supernatural world, which remains beyond human perception (13).

Popular practitioners view life as a combination of the body, senses, spirit, and soul. They define health as a strong connection between physical, social, psychological, and moral well-being, with an emphasis on the psychological and spiritual dimensions. This perspective creates a new standard for the healthcare system, one that promotes overall well-being (14).

Their cultural understanding of disease differs significantly from that of modern medicine, which is shaped by the education and training of medical professionals. In many communities, certain illnesses are understood through local cultural beliefs, and official medicine may not recognize these conditions or offer cures. As a result, folk healers are often seen as more effective in treating these conditions, even though their methods may sometimes cause harm due to a lack of knowledge or mistakes.

Folk healers' views on disease and health are deeply influenced by the cultural patterns of their society, particularly folk beliefs. Their approach to treatment is

shaped by the specific diseases they treat, along with the cultural context in which they operate. For example, some folk healers believe that many illnesses are caused by envy, the "evil eye," or divine punishment for sins. They often encourage their patients to engage in religious acts such as prayers, charitable deeds, and atonement rituals, hoping that these actions will alleviate their suffering. Healers may also associate chronic diseases like diabetes, high blood pressure, strokes, and cancer with individuals who have gained wealth unjustly. Meanwhile, healers specializing in magic, sorcery, and charms believe that disease is caused by supernatural beings, such as demons. They think that by disturbing these beings—such as by pouring hot water on them or disturbing their dwelling places—they can cause illness in others. The treatment involves rituals designed to appease these beings, which may include burning incense or slaughtering animals with specific characteristics. Healers may also claim to ask these beings to leave the patient's body.

For cupping and cauterization therapists, diseases are thought to be caused by stagnant or "rotten" blood, or by fluid buildup in certain body areas. They use cupping to remove this blood, and each illness is thought to require cupping at a specific location on the body. Cauterization is also used, and if it results in the release of pus over several days, the treatment is considered successful. If not, it is believed that the treatment was not performed correctly, and it must be repeated. These therapists often link fluid accumulation in the body to exposure to excessive cold, which they believe can cause congestion in the nose or chest, leading to further illness.

Some healers argue that environmental factors play a role in disease and believe that herbs and animal parts can be effective treatments. A folk healer's role is to identify the cause of illness and offer an appropriate remedy. Some also critique modern medicine, claiming that chemical drugs often cause harm

to the body through side effects, which may sometimes be as harmful as the disease itself.

Despite these differences, many folk healers view their methods as complementary to modern medicine. They believe that folk treatments can support and enhance the healing process without contradicting medical practices, often helping patients recover physically and psychologically.

The Role and Social Status of Folk Healers in the Study Community:

In the research community, folk healers hold a significant social and religious position that extends beyond their therapeutic practices. They derive their esteemed status from cultural traditions and beliefs. Their involvement in maintaining and perpetuating traditional healing methods is evident. This role becomes more prominent when their treatments offer tangible benefits to society, whether material or moral. Although many folk healers do not receive direct monetary compensation, their practices often enhance their social standing, earning them elements of social strength (15).

Most folk healers are elderly individuals from well-known families, which garners them respect and admiration within the community. They are characterized by religiosity, good conduct, kindness, wisdom, humility, and a lack of superiority over others. They surround patients with compassion and tenderness, fostering trust in their methods. Clerics among them attend social events, especially funerals, deliver religious lessons and speeches, and offer compensation to individuals. They also reconcile opponents, redress grievances, and support the oppressed. They play a key role in the process of reform and social control.

Spiritual healers have an effective role through their religious influence, which gives them a distinct social status that enables them to participate effectively in

resolving conflicts, establishing peace, achieving security, eliminating social differences that occur between members of society at the family and tribal levels, and solving problems of all kinds. They also end rivalries between clans and tribes through reconciliation efforts and taking the oath. Individuals submit to their endeavors in reconciliation because of their renowned piety, responsive advocacy, and their advice and guidance, which constitute an informal law that is accepted by most members of society. The values of the rural and Bedouin community that sanctify the saints, alive or dead, have an impact on the behavior of individuals to satisfy these saints and fear their punishment. The folk healer is considered by members of society to be a person of natural and religious strength or holds a certain blessing in the eyes of those who resort to him.

Some therapists demonstrate their role in achieving the process of social control by seeing that the disease is caused by non-benevolent actions carried out by the patient, such as fraud, embezzlement, and eating people's money by mistake. The therapist assures him that the disease is a divine punishment for these actions, which leads the patient to admit the mistake and do some work to cleanse himself, such as providing alms and preparing a feast for the attendants that enters the patient into a state of harmony and psychological comfort. Acknowledging the mistake strengthens the position of individuals by adhering to good values and avoiding deviations that lead to the disease.

Reasons for Seeking Folk Healers:

There are several reasons why patients or their relatives turn to folk remedies and folk healers for treatment:

1. **Personal Connection**: The direct social relationship with the patient is predominantly sympathetic and friendly, differing from the formal relationship

in modern official medicine, which requires appointments, waiting in queues, and adherence to the doctor's working hours in official health institutions.

2. **Community Reputation**: Stories and anecdotes shared by community members about the healer's success in treating various medical conditions.

3. **Affordability**: Folk healers typically do not charge high fees for their treatments. Instead, they accept a symbolic amount recognized among their clients.

4. **Cultural Relevance**: Modern medicine may not acknowledge certain diseases rooted in cultural beliefs, such as those caused by the "evil eye," envy, or magic. Folk healers provide remedies for these culturally recognized ailments.

5. **Cultural Beliefs**: Community members believe that certain illnesses affecting successful individuals, such as a top student, a prosperous young man, or a handsome child, are due to external factors. They think that treatment for these cases requires seeking help from renowned religious figures or folk healers.

6. **Cultural Understanding**: Folk healers speak the local dialect, understand the local names for diseases, consider the patient's psychological state, reassure them about their health, and share personal experiences of treating similar conditions.

Traditional healers often work in a familial and communal atmosphere, which alleviates patient tension, creates harmony, and addresses concerns. They are frequently connected to the patient through kinship, friendship, residence, or membership in a religious group, such as Sufi or Sunni communities. This informal relationship allows healers to perform their therapeutic work within social contexts at various times.

7. **Quick Relief**: Folk healers are known for providing rapid relief for certain conditions, such as alleviating the pain of bites or enhancing sexual ability for husbands unable to consummate their marriage on the wedding night.
8. **Perceived Safety**: Many hesitant individuals believe that trying folk treatments is harmless and may even benefit them, especially if they have previously experienced unsuccessful treatments with modern medicine.
9. **Cultural Alignment**: Folk healers understand the patient's problems within their cultural and social context and share a unified worldview that explains disease and health. This contrasts with modern medicine, which may differ from the patient's perspective on illness and well-being.
10. **Dissatisfaction with Official Health Services**: The decline of official health services in the research community, coupled with widespread belief in diagnostic errors and inappropriate treatments, has led many to seek alternative remedies. Stories of medical errors in surgical operations resulting in death or permanent disability, along with high treatment costs in private medical institutions, have prompted those who can afford it to seek treatment abroad, especially in countries like Egypt and Tunisia. However, those unable to afford such options have no choice but to turn to various types of folk healers.

Results:

Folk healers acquire their therapeutic knowledge and skills through family inheritance or by apprenticing with other healers. Their understanding of health and illness is shaped by the cultural norms of their society. This perspective aligns with the specific ailments they treat and guides their therapeutic practices.

Beyond their healing roles, folk healers hold significant social and religious positions. Their status is deeply rooted in their cultural backgrounds, which influence their societal roles.

The remedies used by folk healers are consistent with the cultural values of individuals and harmonize with the environment. These practices are deeply connected to their religious and spiritual beliefs.

Many folk healers view the relationship between traditional and official medicine as complementary. They see themselves as partners in healing, aiming to alleviate anxiety and fear in patients. They emphasize the importance of their therapeutic methods in combating illness and promoting recovery.

Recommendations :

1. Establish scientific centers dedicated to teaching folk medicine, adhering to health and social standards. This initiative would train a new generation of folk healers who are both scientifically and practically qualified.
2. Provide training for traditional healers who treat patients within the Libyan community, especially in the study area. Organize their practice under the supervision of specialized bodies that monitor their work. Ensure they follow health safety procedures and refer cases requiring official treatment to health units, thereby reducing treatment risks.
3. Explore the findings of modern science in alternative medicine. Learn from societies and scientific bodies with valuable contributions aimed at enhancing folk medicine and minimizing its risks.

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