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Exploring the Barriers and Facilitators Influencing the Decision to Seek Non-Conventional Treatments for Tuberculosis - A Qualitative Study with People Affected By Tuberculosis in Pakistan

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Background: Tuberculosis (TB) is a significant public health problem and the thirteenth leading cause of death worldwide despite being preventable and curable. Non-adherence to conventional TB treatment underpins this statistic.

In Pakistan, there is poor uptake of, and adherence to, conventional TB treatment. Non-conventional treatments are also favored generally, with more than 50% of the Pakistani population using non-conventional treatments for various medical conditions. However, reporting on the use and success of non-conventional treatments for TB is lacking, resulting in a knowledge gap as the impacts and outcomes of opting for non-conventional treatments are largely unknown.

This study aimed to address this gap by interviewing people who are affected by TB on their views on, experiences with, and motivations for, the use of non-conventional treatments for TB.

Design/methods: This was an exploratory qualitative study, where participants were recruited through purposive sampling from a TB center in Karachi, Pakistan. Data was generated through semi-structured interviews from 12 participants, and was analyzed using inductive thematic analysis.

Results: In this study, non-conventional treatment use for TB was limited to spiritual healing, which was used concomitantly with conventional treatment.

Furthermore, people who visited non-conventional healers, like naturopaths and Unani medicine practitioners, for their TB symptoms before the TB diagnosis, reported receiving a misdiagnosis and subsequently an inappropriate treatment from these non-conventional healers.

Conclusion: Considering the findings of this study, the concurrent use of non-conventional treatment for TB did not seem to have a negative impact on adherence to conventional treatment. However, prior misdiagnosis by non-conventional healers for TB symptoms indicates a need to form referral linkages with these healers for timely diagnosis and correct treatment of TB.

Biography

Saman Ahmed, is a Social Sciences graduate working at 'Interactive Research and Development', a global health research and delivery organization, since 2015. She is currently working in the endTB project: a multi-country, multi-partner project aimed at finding shorter, less toxic treatments for multidrug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB). She has worked as Study Coordinator for five countries in the endTB Observational study, and is currently the Quality Assurance Manager for endTB Clinical Trials in Pakistan.

She has just completed Masters in Public Health from the University of Edinburgh through the Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarship, where her dissertation focuses on adherence to TB treatment.