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ORIGINAL RESEARCH

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BALINESE TRADITIONAL TREATMENT (*BALIAN*) IN PATIENTS WITH MENTAL DISORDERS

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Abstract

Background: Balinese believe that mental disorders are caused after being possessed and cursed by one's ancestors, so Balinese choose traditional Balinese treatment (*balian*/shaman) in handling patients with mental disorders.

Objective: The purpose of this research was to explore deeply about the use of *balian* in treating patients with mental disorder.

Methods: A qualitative method with an interpretive phenomenological approach was used. In-depth interview technique with semi-structured interview guidelines was used for data collection. Data were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach.

Results: Five themes emerged, including 1) ancestors' curse, 2) possessed by a spirit, 3) believe that *balian* has healing power, 4) *balian* becomes the first choice prior to the hospital, and 5) the use of traditional and medical treatment at once.

Conclusion: *Balian* became the first choice in treating patients with mental disorders. It is because Balinese still believes that mental disorders caused by the ancestors' curse and possessed by the spirit.

Keywords: mental disorders; traditional Balinese medicine; shaman

INTRODUCTION

Mental disorders in various countries have increased significantly each year. Mental disorder is a syndrome or behavioral pattern that is clinically related to suffering or distress and may cause interference with one or more functions of human life ([Keliat, 2012](#)). Every person can experience mental disorders, regardless of age, race, religion, or socio-economic status. The society still believes the wrong myths about mental disorders, caused by possessed demons, spirits, or jinns, while some others believe that mental disorders are caused by the sins of the sufferer himself or the sins of his family ([Subu, 2015](#)).

The Balinese treat mental disorders traditionally, which in Balinese conception, mental disorder is believed to be caused by being possessed by evil spirits (or in Balinese language called *bebai*), anger of the ancestral spirits (*kepongor*), and a curse. In determining the cause of mental disorders, Balinese usually seeks for help from a shaman or often called a *balian*. The role of *balian* in treating patients with mental disorder in Bali is still very large and still trusted by the people in Bali ([Kumbara, 2007](#)).

Traditional treatment (*balian*) becomes the first and main choice for society or Balinese families rather than the hospital treatment. Balinese tend to seek out *balian* in early treatment. About 76% of them will continue treatment to a psychiatrist, but after being treated by a psychiatrist, 80% will return to the *balian*/shaman for further treatment ([Lesmana, Suryani, & Tiliopoulos, 2015](#)).

Traditional treatment is a combination of skills and knowledge practice based on theories of belief and experience of different cultures. These beliefs and experiences can be used in the health care, prevention, diagnosis, repair, or treatment of physical and mental illness ([WHO, 2014](#)). Traditional treatment becomes a phenomenon which commonly found in society ([Fanani & Dewi, 2014](#)). Various types of treatment methods are performed, either from those who use plants as a medicine or supernatural things like prayer and mantra modern ([Ardiyasa, 2012](#)).

Data from Basic Health Study in 2013 showed that 30.4% households in Indonesia utilize traditional health services in the past years to maintain their health. The proportion of households utilizing traditional health services in the past years was 32.2% of the urban population and 28.7% of the population in rural areas. Based on the data from Bali Provincial Health Office in 2014, it is showed that 25.6% of Balinese living in urban areas and 24.2% in rural areas used traditional health services.

Cultural and historical factors have caused people to choose traditional treatments, as found in Singapore and the Republic of Korea. The conventional health care system in those countries are well established, but 76% of Singaporeans and 86% of Republicans of Korea still use traditional medicine ([WHO, 2014](#)). In low and middle-income countries most people with mental disorders prefer to use traditional medicine ([Gureje et al., 2015](#)).

Recovery or treatment process in mental disorders patients can be influenced by culture and beliefs from society. In Sudan, the most

common sufferers who seek traditional medicine are patients with psychotic disorders. They have never visited psychiatric services before and they express their strong beliefs about the role of shaman in the treatment and management of mental disorder ([Sorketti, Zuraida, & Habil, 2012](#)). Therefore, the study about Balinese traditional medicine (*balian*) in mental disorders patients needs to be done to explore deeper about Balinese opinions on the use of Balinese traditional medicine (*balian*) in treating patients with mental disorders.

METHODS

Study design

This study used a qualitative research design with interpretative phenomenology approach. This approach is based on philosophy from Heidegger which emphasizes that the phenomena experienced by individuals is not only described but also interpreted and the researchers are able to understand the phenomenon ([Polit & Beck, 2012](#)).

Sample

Characteristics are determined in the selection of participants according to the research objectives ([Polit & Beck, 2012](#)). Purposive sampling was used to select and classify sample. The inclusion criteria of sample were: having a family member with mental disorder, caring and decision making for family members, having experience using Balinese traditional treatment (*balian*) for at least three months, and willing to be a participant. The exclusion criterion was a family member who treats patients other than mental disorders patients. The respondents consisted of nine participants. The age range of most participants was 36-45 years old. Most participants were Elementary School (SD) and Senior High School (SLTA) graduates, but there was one participant who was not attending school. Most of them were married, only one of them was not. All of the participants were holding Hindu religion. All of the participants already used traditional treatment for more than one year and seek for more than three *baliangs* (shamans).

Data collection

The data were collected using in-depth interview technique with semi-structured interview guidelines. The steps of data collection included (1) we fostered a relationship of trust with participants, (2) we explained the research objectives, benefits, and process to the participants, (3) After the participants agreed, they signed the informed consent and made an appointment for the interview, (4) we prepared instruments for interview such as field notes and voice recorders, (5) we conducted the interview with open questions in accordance with the guidelines, and (6) during the interview, we noted the participants' non-verbal and emotional responses.

Ethical considerations

This research has been approved by Research Ethics Committee of Udayana University, Medical Faculty/Central General Hospital Sanglah Denpasar with approval number: 119/UN.14.2/KEP/2018. We highly value the dignity of the participants by maintaining the confidentiality of their identity, confidentiality of data, respecting privacy and dignity, and respecting the autonomy of the participants. We also paid attention to the welfare of participants by taking into the benefits (beneficence) and minimizes the risk (non-maleficence) of the research process by paying attention to freedom from danger (free from harm), exploitation (free from exploitation), and discomfort (free from discomfort). In this research, we kept the principle of justice for all participants. We received informed consents from all participants after we gave an explanation of the purpose of the research, procedure, the time of the participant's involvement, the participant's rights and form in the research process.

Data analysis

We transcribed word by word from the interviews that were recorded and coded manually. After data encoding, we conducted data analysis using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) ([Jeong & Othman, 2016](#)). In the first step, we re-read the transcript results until we found the

information that had not been recorded in the initial reading. We used different fonts or underlining to identify information related to the research on each text. In the second step, we identified which theme appeared by referring to the three types of comments that had been made in the first step. In the third step, we looked for connection from the various themes that had been found and created a chart, so that the relationship to the theme was obvious. In the fourth step, we did a repetition from step one to step four for the next participant. In the last step, we searched the patterns and relationships between cases and themes.

Trustworthiness

We conducted peer-checking to preserve high credibility, which could be done with panel discussions with experts to re-analyze obtained data from this study ([Afiyanti, 2008](#)).

RESULTS

From nine participants, we found five themes correlated with the use of traditional treatment for mental disorders patients including:

Theme 1: Ancestor's curse

Balinese believes that one of the causes of mental disorders is ancestor's curse. According to one of the participants, ancestor's curse happened because the person chosen in the world was unreal and those who got special duty from the ancestors did not carry out his/her duties so that he/she got the curse of the ancestors that caused him/her to experience mental disorders.

"Yes, he seemed to experience *kepingit* (the person who was chosen in a *niskala* way/unrealized world), but the temptation is too big and he did not follow the task that he got. The symptoms were that he became berserk; the problem was, he had a problem but never told other persons" (P1)

Theme 2: Possessed by a spirit

The mental disorders caused by the possession of evil spirits is a major common factor believed by the Balinese until today. According to a participant, there is a change of

behavior on his family member because of an evil spirit entered the body.

“Indeed, talking alone means his brain already damaged; it means he got possessed by the evil spirit. So, I took him there (*balian*/shaman)”(P6)

Theme 3: Believe that *balian* has healing power

The role of *balian*/shaman in treating patients with mental disorders in Bali is still very large and still trusted by Balinese. According to some participants, *balian*/shaman is believed to have the ability and can provide healing.

“To heal them; The condition didn’t improve in *Batu bulan*, I have a family from *Celuk*, and so I try it. Who knows? maybe he’ll get better.” (P8)

“It is common among Balinese, if there is a mental disorder, they’ll see doctor, but then they see Balinese shamans if no results” (P7).

Theme 4: *Balian* becomes the first choice prior to the hospital

Balian becomes the first and main choice for Balinese rather than the treatment in hospital. According to some participants, the first action to take was to bring the patient to *balian*/shaman. The case of mental disorder experienced by family members is caused by possession.

“First, I took him to *balian*/shaman because he seemed possessed, there is also no improvement” (P3).

“Well, I admit, the first treatment that I got was a non-medical treatment (*balian*/shaman) in *Batu bulan*” (P8).

Theme 5: The use of traditional and medical treatment at once

The use of traditional treatment (*balian*) and the treatment in hospital (doctors) by Balinese at the same time is a very common phenomenon in Bali. Some participants use traditional and medical treatment at once because with the medical treatment the patient tends to be calm, while the traditional treatment (*balian*) has become a belief in the family.

“We used both, so not only we went to the hospital we also went to the *balian*” (P5).

“Well, together, I believe medical drugs, because it is more proven. The drug was given as a sedative and we went to *balian* because it is believed here” (P7).

DISCUSSION

Findings of this study indicated that the Balinese still treat mental disorders traditionally, which they believe that mental disorders are caused by possession and ancestors’ curse, which was in line with a previous study ([Kumbara, 2007](#)). Ancestors’ curse happened because the person did not do her/his duties in glorifying or honoring their ancestors. Besides, it happened because there are people who do not like or jealous to someone, so they send a demon that cause damages or changes in behavior, such as talking to himself and going berserk. However, the belief of mental disorders caused by possessive spirits, demons, or evil jinn also believed by some of cultures in Indonesia ([Subu, 2015](#)). The western countries may not support the idea of supranatural as a cause of mental disorders, but for non-western cultures, such as Nigeria with the majority of caregivers (72.0%), stated that the cause of mental disorders is supranatural such as possessed by spirits and curses ([Igberase & Okogbenin, 2017](#)).

The treatment process of mental disorders patients can be affected by culture and society’s belief. In Africa, belief in the spirits becomes the main determinant in the selection of treatment ([Asare & Danquah, 2017](#)). Balinese’s belief on the cause of mental disorders between naturalistic and personality becomes a major significant factor on the use of traditional treatment (*balian*) ([Kumbara, 2010](#)). The result of our study showed that Balinese believes that *balian*/shaman can provide healing ([Kumbara, 2007](#)).

Traditional treatment is widely used in most of the countries ([WHO, 2014](#)). It is similar with the traditional treatment for people with

mental disorders in Sudan. Most patients who come to traditional treatment in Sudan commonly have psychotic disorders and they have never visited psychiatric services before. This is largely due to their strong beliefs about the role of shamans in the treatment and management of mental illness ([Sorketti et al., 2012](#))

Traditional and alternative treatment in Indonesia has an important role in health to meet the needs of mental health treatment. The traditional treatment becomes the first choice of mental disorders patients and family. It is similar with the situation in India, the belief is a strong tool in health care. The belief of supernatural power such as possessed by spirits, magic, and breaking religious rules are the cause of mental disorders. Those beliefs makes them to use traditional treatment and becomes the first choice by family member who has mental disorders ([Biswal, Subudhi, & Acharya, 2017](#))

The phenomenon of the use of traditional and medical treatment at the same time is also commonly done by the Balinese, according to this study. It is in line with people in Gujarat, people still highly appreciate the contribution of medical treatment. Preferences for doctors or shamans depend on the outcome of the care the patients receive. Those who receive traditional treatment but have no improvement will tend to hate traditional treatment. There are also people who love medical care, still retain their spiritual outlook, but it is only temporary and will disappear along with the loss of confidence in traditional strengths to cure mental illness ([Schoonover et al., 2014](#)).

The society's view of traditional treatment is different with western practitioners. The western practitioners tend to have a negative view of traditional medicine because they consider this traditional method of treatment is harmful to mental disorders of patients. In a previous study, the western practitioners also conducted an evaluation of 30 patients who were using a traditional treatment. The result was that eight patients claimed that the traditional medicine gave very large negative

results for the patients ([James & Peltzer, 2012](#)). Most of mental disorders patients prefer traditional treatment when first experiencing a mental disorder that will delay the patient's treatment to a psychiatrist, thus negatively impacting the prognosis of bipolar affective disorder (BAD) ([Assad et al., 2015](#))

CONCLUSION

The result of this study indicated that Balinese still treat mental disorders traditionally. It is due to they believed that the mental disorders were caused by possessions and the curse of the ancestors. The role of *balian*/shaman in treating patients with mental disorder and traditional treatment (*balian*/shaman) still becomes the first choice of Balinese before choosing the hospital for the treatment. However, they also use both traditional and medical treatment at the same time. Finding of this study served as a basis in providing mental care with cultural approach. Further study is needed to analyze the dominant factors associated with the selection or use of traditional treatments in treating patients with mental disorder, and to explore the perceptions of health workers and government agencies associated with traditional treatment in treating patients with mental disorders.

Declaration of Conflicting Interest

None declared.

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Author Contribution

All authors contributed equally in this study.

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