Abstract

The objective of this study was to compare perceptions and practices in relation to human and livestock illness among the Luo in Western Kenya. Qualitative methods of data collection such as key informant interviews, open-ended, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, narratives, and participant- and direct observations were applied. The study showed that there were significant parallels between human and livestock illnesses regarding terminology, perceptions of pathogenesis and treatment seeking practices. Even practitioners and their medications were often the same. The rationale behind pathogenesis in both cases was usually that illnesses resulted from some form of inhibition of flow through blockage or clogging of the various ‘channels’ in the body. Treatment aimed at decongesting or unblocking these channels so as to create openness that would guarantee normal flows and restore health. The study concludes that the domain of animal illness be taken more into account in human medical anthropological studies and vice versa. It further argues the case for considering these similarities when planning and implementing health care services.