FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE UTILIZATION OF TRADITIONAL AND MODERN MEDICINE AMONG THE SAMIA OF FUNYULA DIVISION, BUSIA DISTRICT

BY

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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to investigate the influence of cultural and economic factors on health seeking behaviour of the Samia. Fieldwork was conducted in Funyula Division in Busia District, Western Kenya between December 1997 and February 1998. The study sought to find out those factors that are significantly related to orientation towards health seeking for various ailments in a two-way medical delivery system (i.e. modern and traditional African medicine). Thus the effects of occupation, formal education level and beliefs on the causation and etiology of particular disease in the area were sought.

The study was based on a sample of 160 households and 12 key informants. The methods used in obtaining data information for this study were survey interviews based on a questionnaire, library reading that provided information which aided in the formulation of research problem and literature review of the subject and in-depth studies with key informants. The data were analyzed both quantitatively and information presented in the form of tables and cross-tabulations, and qualitatively in which direct quotations and local taxonomies were used.

The findings reveal that since health has multiple determinants there are various pathways through which a household could maintain the same level of health; that is to say, households find different mechanisms for adapting to the same circumstances where some are more successful than the others. However, the mechanism to be chosen is contingent upon the perception and the etiology of the disease as seen by the affected household.
The selection of a therapeutic system does not always follow cause and effect model rather the domain of this two resort systems overlap. When the first model from the etiological concept fails to provide satisfactory results, another one is tried. People do not actually stick to the distinction but move freely from one medical system to the other even on the same type of illness. Health seeking behaviour of the Abasamia in Funyula Division is affected by a number of factors. Occupation and actual beliefs of the people were found to have influence on peoples health seeking behaviour while educational level had no significant influence on therapy seeking.

It is, therefore, recommended that since traditional medicine is being used widely for various types of ailments in rural areas and even in some parts of urban settlements, the Kenya government should recognize traditional healers by way of legislation, and to set out to develop their potential and create an enabling environment for them to practice medicine, as it is clear from the findings of this study that they remain a major source of health care for many of the rural dwellers.