

Traditional Beliefs and Practices relating to Chest Symptoms among Shan people in a Rural Area of Pyin Oo Lwin Township

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Abstract

This study was performed with the objectives of identifying traditional beliefs on chest symptoms and to elicit traditional practices relating to these symptoms among Shan ethnic group in Inn-gyi village, Pyin Oo Lwin Township. An exploratory study using focus group discussion (FGD) was done on 2nd June, 2009 at Inn-gyi village which is situated on a mountain, about fifteen kilometers away from south of Mandalay-Lashio highway and is inhabited by Shan people. A total of four FGD sessions comprising of two male and two female sessions were conducted with over 40-year-old native Shan people. In FGD session, majority said that there has been no serious health problem relating to chest symptoms in their community. Some participants identified sneezing, sore throat, dry cough with difficulty in breathing as common chest symptoms. The interviewees said that chest symptoms occur due to sudden changes between "heat" and "cold". This was referred to as Apu shurt meaning the heat passing over the body. One interesting information elicited was that chest symptoms appear due to Warnkyawlwae, meaning displacement of some abdominal muscles. Some female interviewees also expressed their beliefs that it is due to eating some fruits which they recognized as "cold-diet". The interviewees said chest symptoms are more likely to occur among very young infants and older people over 40 years because of their age-related weaknesses. In contrast, some female interviewees said that chest symptoms are mainly caused by sudden weather changes therefore working age group (12-50 years) are more likely to suffer from chest symptoms. Regarding gender, they considered both male and female can get chest symptoms more or less equally. Common chest symptoms are usually treated with traditional remedies. They also try with western medicines, which could be bought from local shops, for relieving chest symptoms. If the symptoms persist, they take treatment from a monk, a traditional healer, a quack or the midwife assigned at their village. A traditional practice called shot-pann-in-tat in Shan language is still a common practice to relieve chest symptoms. This is a preliminary report of the findings of our pre-test. A study will be performed in additional Shan villages in near future. In this FGD sessions will also be reinforced with other qualitative data collection methods like key informant-interviews and in-depth-interviews.