

Ethnomedicine of the Kui

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Introduction

The Kui (Austro-Asiatic: Mon-Khmer) are the original inhabitants of the southern part of Northeast Thailand. Today, over 300,000 Kui people continue to reside here. A local form of a traditional health care system exists within Kui communities, and some of this knowledge is concentrated among experts of traditional medical knowledge or healers.

Objectives

To identify the natural materials used by Kui healers to treat health conditions and determine the methods used to prepare these remedies.

Methods

Thirty healers were selected and in-depth study was conducted among thirty Kui healers to explore their concepts of health care and role as a local health care provider, the types and range of health conditions that they treated and the methods they used to treat the health conditions. The healers included herbalists, blowing doctors, and spirit healers (spirit mediums and diviners) from Surin, SriSaket and Ubon Ratchathani provinces. Interviews, health conditions logs, free-listing techniques, and plant specimen collection were used to collect data.

Results

Healers treated 91 health conditions of 15 different disease categories. There were 363 species/ types of plants, animals and minerals recorded for use by the healers to treat the health conditions. Materia medica could be used both physically (e.g. topical, consumed) or spiritually (e.g. divination, ceremonies). Healers provide diagnosis, advice and recommendations, remedies, and check-ups for their patients. They may also encourage patients to seek out other healers and modes of treatment, such as hospitals.

Conclusion

Traditional healers retain a broad base of knowledge for treating illness among the Kui communities. As a local health care provider and expert, healers play a strong and important role in the community healthcare system.

Keywords: Kui, ethnomedicine

Selected references

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