Original Research

TRADITIONAL RITUAL TO CURE MENTAL ILLNESS ACCORDING TO MANGGARAI CULTURE IN EAST NUSA TENGGARA

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Mental illness treatment using traditional methods is still carried out in various regions in Indonesia, including in the Manggarai regency, East Nusa Tenggara. The aim of this study is to describe the types of traditional rituals performed to cure mental illness in Manggarai culture.
Methods: This study uses an ethnographic approach which is supported by a qualitative descriptive approach. Data were collected by conducting in-depth interviews with 10 cultural leaders.
Results: This study identified 4 types of rituals in treating mental illness namely *peler* rituals to cure mental illness due to being possessed by evil spirits, *keti manuk neni* rituals to cure mental illness due to heredity, *Teing hang* ritual heals mental illness due to ungratefulness to ancestors, and the *oke dara ta'a* ritual to heals mental illness due to having black magic.
Conclusion: The results of the study indicate that there are still many people who practice traditional healing practices for people with mental illnesses and neglect medical treatment, resulting in relapses that lead to pasung or physical restraint and confinement of people with mental illnesses. Therefore, in providing education and promoting mental health in the community, it is necessary to emphasize the effectiveness of medical treatment

Keyword: mental illness; mental illness traditional treatment; traditional healing; traditional ritual

1. INTRODUCTION

Culture has an important role to develop a person's character, including in terms of health. Various studies suggest that a person's health can be influenced by one's culture (thirthalli et al., 2016). Culture also affects the concept of health and illness. Mental health and culture also have a close relationship with each other. Every culture in the world has its own view of the causes of mental illness. In a study conducted in India, it was revealed that a person can experience mental illness as a result of a previous life crime (john, 2017; sax, 2014; Schoonover et al., 2014). Another study conducted in Uganda revealed that a person can suffer from mental illness due to demonic possession or black magic

(abbo, 2011). This belief is still trusted by people who have limited access to information on mental health and have strong beliefs in cultures such as Indonesia.

Indonesia is a multicultural nation with so many cultures. Various cultures in Indonesia also have their own understanding of the reasons for mental illness. Research conducted in west java revealed that there are still many people who believe that mental illness is caused by demonic possession, committing sins, and *ngilmu or* witchcraft which their souls cannot face the witchcraft effect (Laila et al., 2018)research conducted in Aceh revealed that many people still believe that mental illness is caused by supernatural force such as ghosts, black magic, possession of evil spirits, or witchcraft (Marthoenis et al., 2016; Puteh et al., 2011). The traditional beliefs about the causes

of mental illness make many people still practice the traditional treatment.

Traditional healing practices for mental illness are widely found in Indonesia. Research reveals that there are still many families of people with mental illness in Indonesia who treat mental illness to traditional healers, religious leaders, psychics and Chinese traditional medicine (arsyad subu, 2015; caesaria & yulianti, 2018). The reasons for practice traditional healing are limited mental health services, finances, and lack of knowledge (arsyad subu, 2015; sarwono, 2013).. Traditional healing is also considered more accessible than medical healing, especially in areas with limited resources (Abbo, 2011; Kirmayer et al., 2003; Lemelson, 2004; Thirthalli et al., 2016)however, traditional healing cannot cure mental illness, instead it increases the relapse process in people with mental illness. Research has also revealed that the failure of traditional healing makes families do confinement to people with mental illness (eka et al., 2022)

The aim of this study is to explore about traditional healing practices carried out in Manggarai, East Nusa Tenggara. Manggarai is a tribe and also a district located in the western part of Flores, East Nusa Tenggara. Manggarai culture is still very strongly embraced by the community, especially in health and illness issues. There are still many people with mental illness in Manggarai who are treated in the traditional way. Data from the Manggarai district health office claimed that there are 521 people with mental illness in the district that have been recorded and many more that have not been recorded. Thus, this study aims to determine the traditional healing practice to cure mental illness. The results of this study are expected to be the basis for preventing and promoting mental health, especially for health staff like nurse in providing education about the advantages and disadvantages of healing mental illness traditionally and emphasize on medical treatment.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Design
This study used qualitative research with phenomenological approach aiming to examine the perspective of traditional leader about traditional ritual to cure mental illness
2.2 Population and sampling
This study was conducted in 10 villages in Manggarai District in Province starting from January 2016 to June 2016. 10 participants were selected by using purposive sampling technique with the criteria: (1) Informal leader (2) Understand about Manggarai Culture (3) Experience dealing with People with mental illness.
2.4 Instrument
The most used instruments in qualitative research are the observation, the survey and the interview. This research used interview to collect data. Data was collected by means of in-depth interviews.

2.5 Procedure
Participant who met inclusion criteria were interviewed face to face. The interviewed were transcript verbatim. After that the interview transcript given back to the participant for member check. Member check is a method to validation used in qualitative approach by give back the interview to the participant for clarifications (Mekarisce, 2020). After the member check, all the data analysis used thematic data analysis.
2.6 Analysis
The results of the interviews were analyzed using thematic data analysis to see the types of traditional rituals to cure mental illness. Thematic analysis is a method for analyzing qualitative data that entails searching across a data set to identify, analyze, and report repeated patterns (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Thematic analyzed consist of 6 steps namely; Familiarizing Yourself with the Data, Generating Initial Codes, Searching for Themes, Reviewing Themes, Defining and Naming Themes, and produce the manuscript (Kiger & Varpio, 2020).
2.7 Ethical Clearance
The study were reviewed and approved by the Faculty of Nursing Universitas Indonesia, Depok, Indonesia, license number: No.50/UN2.F12.D/HKP.02.04/2019.

3. RESULTS

The results of the study revealed 4 types of traditional rituals to overcome mental illness, namely *peler, keti manuk neni. Teing hang,* and *oke dara ta'a.*

Peler

The *peler* ritual is carried out on people with mental illness who are believed to be mentally ill due to being possessed by an evil spirit that awaits the forest. Participants said that the forests in Manggarai have guards called *empo*. If we do negative things such as cutting down trees or destroying the forest, the forest guards will be angry and make the person experience mental illnesss. The *peler* ritual is carried out by bringing *telur ayam kampung* or Cornish fowl' eggs that have been prayed for by the *ata mbeko* or shaman to the place where the people with mentally illness was doing negative things. The egg is placed there while the shaman expresses an apology. This is as revealed in the following participant's words.

"In Manggarai there are many forests and every forest always has inhabitants called "empo" there is a belief that a person can become wedol or crazy for doing bad things in the forest such as cutting sacred wood, destroying the forest where this empo lived. Usually, the one who knows the cause is the ata mbeko. Later the ata mbeko will ask the family of mentally ill people to bring 3 Cornish fowl eggs. The ata mbeko would pray for the egg and then took the family and the sick person to the place where he destroyed the forest and put the egg there. Usually after this ritual, the mentally ill

people can recover if the cause of his illness is due to destroying the forest earlier" (P1)

"For example, if the crazy people get sick because he cuts a log in a haunted place, there will be a ritual called peler. So, take this egg to the haunted place earlier and a kind of apologize. Like that" (p2)

"It could be that when the sick person was young, he could have cut wood that was hundreds of years old in the forest. Later the shaman will ask the family to provide eggs and pray for the eggs and then the eggs are lowered into the wood he cut. The shaman will say prayers so that the sick person will recover" (p4)

Teing hang

The *teing hang* ritual literally means to feed the ancestors as a thank you. This ritual is carried out if people with mental illness experience mental illness because they do not respect their ancestors. This ritual consists of 4 stages. In the first stage, families and people with mental illness gather in one place and a traditional elder holds a white chicken. Two pillows are also provided as a symbol of where the ancestors are fed. In the second stage, the traditional elders say a prayer and gratitude called a *kepok*, then slaughter the white chicken, take the liver and gizzard for roasting. In the third stage, the family puts the liver and gizzard that have been roasted in a plate and served on the ancestral seat with water. The fourth stage is that families and people with mental illness eat gizzard hearts that have been given to their ancestors as a symbol of blessings from their ancestors. This is in accordance with the participant's words:

"There is a kind of traditional event that the family does to ask for help from their ancestors, the name is teing hang because maybe this madman's illness was due to disrespect for his ancestors. The Manggarai people really respect their ancestors and it is obligatory for them to respect their ancestors. If you don't respect the ancestors who have died, then one of the consequences is this madness." (p5)

Keti manuk neni

The *keti manuk neni* ritual is defined as the ritual of cutting the black chicken. This ritual is done by cutting a black chicken and aims to cut ties with offspring with mental illness. Manggarai culture believes mental illness are caused by heredity. This ritual is performed for two purposes. First, if someone has a mental illness because their parents or family who have died also experience the same thing, with the aim of having people with mental illness, the relationship between people with mental illness and their offspring is decided, including the diseases they pass on. Second, if a person with mental illness dies, with the aim that the disease of a person with mental illness will no longer be passed on to his family who

are still alive. This is revealed in the following participant statements.

"When keti manuk neni is carried out when people with mental illness are sick because their descendants who have died are also sick. Later the family will take the black chicken and then slaughter the black chicken. Later there will be a shaman who will say a prayer to cut off the relationship between the sick person and his sick ancestor. If it's broken, it means that the disease is also cut off and people with mental illness can recover. If a person with mental illness dies earlier, the family also usually does it again when the manuk neni is done, the goal is so that the disease is not passed on to their children and grandchildren who are still alive" (p6)

"Keti Manuk Neni was also carried out when a person with mental illness died earlier. Take the chicken and slaughter it, then read the traditional prayer and throw it into the river so that all the diseases from this madman do not pass down to their children and grandchildren. In addition, during the shackles, there is a kind of traditional event that the family does to ask for help from their ancestors, the name is teing hang because maybe this madman's illness was due to disrespect for his ancestors" (p10)

Oke dara ta'a

Oke dara ta'a is a ritual that is carried out if the cause of mental disorders is because people with mental illness have black magic. The Manggarai culture believes that the knowledge of the shaman can make a person suffer from a mental disorder. This ritual is carried out by slaughtering chickens, reading prayers and throwing chicken blood into the river, as a symbol of the disposal of his shaman knowledge. This was revealed in the participant's statement:

"For example, if it was because he had the mbeko, there is a way his name is oke dara taa. The nuisance person was bathed in the river and then put a small chicken on his head. Later there will be a ritual of throwing it away, that's why there is the term "okay one wae awon, leson salen" meaning to throw out the bad thing in the river." (p9)

4. DISCUSSION

This study reveals 4 types of traditional rituals performed to cure mental illness, namely *peler, keti manuk neni. Teing hang,* and *okay dara ta'a*. The *peler* ritual is carried out when people with mental illness experience mental disorders because they are possessed by the spirit of the guardian of the sacred place which is damaged by the person with mental illness. The belief that mental disorders are caused by being possessed by evil spirits also exists in other countries. In Uganda, for example, there is a belief that mental disorders are caused by being possessed by demons or genie (asher et al., 2017). The same belief is also held by Indians that mental disorders occur

because someone is possessed by a jinn or demon (schoonover et al., 2014). The same thing is also found in Indonesia, namely in West Java and Aceh (laila et al., 2018; puteh et al., 2011). However, there is no specific ritual to cure mental disorders to overcome this problem. In this study it is explained that to overcome mental disorders due to spirit/jinn possession by using peler. This result is the first research in Indonesia that reveals a special ritual to cure mental disorders due to evil possession.

The next traditional ritual is *teing hang*. The *teing hang* ritual is a traditional ritual to feed forgotten ancestors, this ritual is believed to cure mental disorders due to people with mental illness and families forget to acknowledge their ancestors. Manggarai culture highly values ancestors, including parents. Previous research has revealed that mental disorders can be caused by people with mental illness committing disobedient acts to their parents (Sax, 2014) but there are still few studies that reveal about ancestors. This research is the first research in Indonesia that reveals a special ritual to cure mental disorders due to not respecting ancestors.

The *keti manuk neni* ritual is a traditional ritual to cut ties with descendants, this ritual is believed to cure mental disorders due to heredity. This Manggarai cultural belief is in line with research that reveals mental disorders are caused by heredity. The belief that people with mental illness are caused by heredity is also believed in China (guan et al., 2015), India (sax, 2014), dan Uganda (abbo, 2011). However, for traditional healing practice there is no specific ritual, only using the help of a shaman. This research is the first research in Indonesia that reveals a special ritual to cure mental disorders due to heredity.

The *oke dara taa* ritual is a ritual to get rid of bad luck inside, this ritual is believed to be able to heal mental disorders due to being used by people or when people with mental illness have black magic. The belief that mental disorders occur due to witchcraft or black magic is also found elsewhere in Indonesia. Research in West Java reveals that mental disorders can occur if a person has knowledge or knowledge in the forest and the body and soul are not able to receive that knowledge (laila et al., 2018, 2019. In addition, another study in Aceh revealed that mental disorders are still believed to be caused by witchcraft (Puteh et al., 2011)

The traditional ritual is still carried out, especially in Manggarai areas which are located in remote and difficult places to access mental health services. Previous research has revealed that traditional ways of curing mental disorders start from taking herbal medicine, being treated by a tanqway (shaman), animal sacrifice rituals, to debrata, a priest who is believed to have witchcraft sihir (asher et al., 2017; musyimi et al., 2017). In addition to research in Indonesia, it also revealed that families prefer traditional treatment because the treatment is more, compared to having to be taken to a psychiatrist who

is only asked questions (caesaria & yulianti, 2018). Healing mental disorders traditionally is more trusted, especially in people who are thick with culture and are not exposed to modernization.

Traditional treatment with traditional rituals does not solve the problem of mental disorders, in fact it makes the recurrence rate increase (Nortje et al., 2016)Previous research has revealed that the failure of traditional medicine can make families despair until they are confined to people with mental illness (Eka et al., 2022)Lack of knowledge and stigma on mental disorders are the main reasons for families to use traditional medicine. Therefore, it is important to conduct education about mental health, especially treatment by prioritizing cultural factors. In addition, the attention of the central and local governments is also needed to provide affordable and inexpensive mental health services.

5. CONCLUSSION

The results of the study indicate that there are still many people who practice traditional healing practices for people with mental disorders and ignore medical treatment, resulting in relapses that lead to pasung. Therefore, in providing education and promotion of mental health in the community, it is necessary to emphasize the effectiveness of medical treatment

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