

### Cultural Anthropology - II. WHAT IS ETHNO MEDICINE?

Since the early days of anthropology, the topic of ethno medicine, or the study of cross-cultural health systems, has been a major focus.

A health system encompasses many areas:

- perceptions and classifications of health problems,
- prevention measures,
- diagnosis,
- healing (magical, religious, scientific, healing substances),
- and healers.

#### A. Culture - an anthropological point of view

Culture, as conceived by anthropology, also serves as an instrumental concept for health professionals conducting research or health intervention among rural or indigenous populations, as well as in urban contexts characterized by patients belonging to different social classes, religions, regions or ethnic groups. (Esther Jean LangdonI; Flávio Braune WiikII).

- The shared system of beliefs and feelings that guides people's customary behaviour as members of society and that gives each society its unity and unique identity.
- The concepts of ideal and culture
- The role of feelings such as ethnocentrism in perpetuating people's allegiance to their way of life while inhibiting understanding of other cultures.
- The concept: *culture and personality* examine the interaction between psychological aspects of the individual and the overreaching culture. Culture and personality are too divided to really be considered a "school of thought."

Culture is **learned**, **shared**, and **patterned**. As social actors, we learn and replicate the principles that guide ideal patterns of valued and qualified types of action, those of behavior, dress, or eating habits, as well as techniques for diagnosis and treatment of illness. The socialization of individuals is responsible for the transmission of meanings about why to do it.

#### B. Culture and health

Concerns with illness and health are universal in human life and present in all societies. Each group organizes itself collectively - through material means, thought and cultural elements - to comprehend and develop techniques in response to experiences or episodes of illness and misfortune, whether individual or collective.

**Ethno medicine** has expanded its focus to include topics such as perceptions of the body, culture and disability, and change in indigenous or “traditional” healing systems, especially as resulting from globalization.

#### SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Monaghan, J., Just, P., *Social & Cultural Anthropology – A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 2000

2. Erickson Th., Nielson, F., *A history of Anthropology*, 2001, Pluto Press

4. Havilland, W., *Cultural Anthropology*, University of Vermont, 2002

3. Gabriela-Mariana Luca (coord.), *Water and Body Fluids. Anthology of Essays*, Eurobit, 2016

\*\*\*What is Medical Anthropology? [www.medanthro.net/about/about-medical-anthropology/](http://www.medanthro.net/about/about-medical-anthropology/) online, 2020

\*\*\* Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine, <https://ethnobiomed.biomedcentral.com/> online, 2020