

Reconstruction of Health Care System in Africa: Exploring the Medical Pluralism Approach in the Prevention and Treatment of Clinical Illnesses in Zambia

An Abstract of the Thesis by

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The nature of this study was basically to establish the extent to which traditional medicines sometimes referred to as alternative or complimentary medicines, complement the biomedical medicines in the modern world, taking Zambia as a unit of study. The main objective was to establish how best Medical Pluralism could be effectively implemented using the conventional and African traditional medical systems with the view of improving the healthcare system in Zambia. The focus on examining how best Medical Pluralism could be implemented yielded explicit suggestions for understanding the challenges involved in the application of traditional medicines side by side with biomedicine.

In an attempt to explore the medical pluralism approach in the prevention and treatment of clinical illnesses in Zambia, the researcher employed an exploratory design which is a feature of qualitative research method. A target sample of 18 participants was selected purposively and data was collected through in – depth interviews and document review. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews were conducted via cell phones, skype, and zoom applications.

The findings revealed that medical pluralism in Zambia is very weak due to the fact that traditional medical healthcare system has not been fully tested to complement the biomedical healthcare system except in the area of HIV and AIDS treatment. This is due to the perception that traditional healthcare system has been regarded as unsafe since its medicines have not been subjected to scientific clinical trials and the traditional healers have not undergone a formal education like the biomedical doctors. Therefore, traditional medicine cannot be considered to be effective in the treatment of clinical diseases.

The study has further revealed that, despite approval of the use of traditional medicines by WHO, the government of the Republic of Zambia, through its Ministry of Health, has not put in place a clear policy to enforce the use of traditional medicines side by side with conventional

medicine. The study has further revealed that Traditional Health Practitioners' Association of Zambia (THPAZ) has relentlessly engaged government through dialogue, to incorporate the traditional healers in the health system of the country.

The study has also revealed that social workers in Zambia have not played any role in the sensitisation of the local people on the merits and demerits of the holistic approach to healthcare system. This is due to the fact that the Social Welfare Department falls under the Ministry of Community Development and Child Health instead of the Ministry of Health and there is no collaboration when it comes to the implementation of healthcare programs in the community. Erratic funding by Government for such programs would also be a challenge since government has been greatly relying on donor funding for such projects.

Finally, the study has revealed that despite the inertia in implementing Medical Pluralism, the Government of the Republic of Zambia has shown the political will to implement Medical Pluralism as noticed by the opening of an office for the coordinator from THPAZ at the Ministry of Health Headquarters, by incorporating the traditional healers in the homecare of the HIV patients, and by their inclusion in the training on COVID-19 management organised by the WHO for biomedical practitioners.

The researcher recommended that government should protect the rights of patients by putting in place a policy that would officially allow the traditional healers to operate side by side with biomedical practitioners and organise formal trainings for traditional practitioners to raise them on a par with biomedical doctors. Government should also realign social workers from the Ministry of Community Development and Child Health to the Ministry of Health so as to enhance their participation in the sensitisation of the community on health issues. Finally, government, THPAZ, Social workers and Human Rights activists' organisations are encouraged to step up the campaign to implement Medical Pluralism healthcare system in Zambia.