

Thesis Title The Comparative Study of Traditional and Cosmopolitan
Medical Systems among the "So" Ethnic Group in
Northeastern Thailand: A Study of Diarrheal Disease in
Children 0-5 Years

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ABSTRACT

The research objective is to study behavior and attitudes toward diarrheal disease in children under the age of five in the traditional medical system among the "So" ethnic group in Northeastern Thailand and to compare this with the believes involved with the modern medical system. Three groups were selected for analysis. The first group was mothers, or the primary care-taker with children under the age of five who had suffered from diarrhea. The second and third groups were So traditional doctors and the doctors in the community hospital respectively. The study was conducted in a "So" community in Kusumarn District, Sakhonnakorn Province. Three months (from March to May 1993), was spent in the collection of data through a survey, participant observation and in-depth interviews.

The study reveals that nine children in the village suffered from diarrhea which was 20.93 percent of children of that age. Mothers believe that diarrhea occurred because of one or more of the following: from dirty food; from children physical system being changed from taking inappropriate food; and from children's developmental change.

These beliefs have had important impacts on treatments, which can be divided into three methods: treatment only by herbs; by herbs and general medicine; and by seeking help at the local hospital.

In comparing medical systems in the study a clear difference in approach is seen. When herbs are used or when drugs are bought from the drugstores, the mothers make diagnosis from children's symptoms. Only if the patient continues to suffer does the mother take them to hospital. They also hold a mistake belief about diarrhea that Oral Rehydration Salt (ORS) is a form of medicine. If the person remains sick after taking a few packets, the parents believe that the medicine is not working and therefore they need to shift to another form of treatment.

In the principle method of treating diarrhea, the doctor would provide ORS to the patient so that they would regain fluid. This method of treatment can be made more acceptable to the Thai So by linking application with local methods. For example, by using sticky rice made circle-thin, covered by salt and grilled after which patients will be asked to drink. A recommendation of this study is that at the local level it is necessary to take methods for preventing transmission of a disease and adapt these methods to local form of treatment.

Moreover, research in medical anthropology is necessary and more study is required to obtain a full understanding. This applied research can be used to obtain knowledge on how to combine the modern medical systems with methods of treating health problems at the local level.