

Utilization of Traditional Medicine in Oaxaca, Mexico



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Learner Objectives

Upon completion of this presentation the learners will be able to:

1. Relate demographic characteristics of selected interviewed people of Oaxaca, Mexico.
2. Discuss and relate specific traditional health practices of selected populations of people of Oaxaca.
3. Compare and contrast the traditional health practices with modern Western practices prescribed by the Centro de Salud de Oaxaca (Oaxaca Health Department).
4. Relate the issues of nondisclosure of traditional health practices when receiving Western style medicine as well.

Background

Location and People
of Oaxaca



The People of Oaxaca

- The state population is about 3.5 million, with women outnumbering men by 150,000 and about 60% of the population under the age of 30.
- It is ranked tenth in population in the country.
- Fifty three percent of the population lives in rural areas.
- The majority of the people are Catholic.
- Oaxaca is the second poorest state in Mexico.

Indigenous People of Oaxaca

- The state is best known for its indigenous people and cultures.
- The most numerous and best known cultures are the Zapotecs and the Mixtecs, but there are sixteen that are officially recognized.
- Most live in the Central Valleys region, which is the region of the capital city of Oaxaca.

Indigenous People of Oaxaca (continued)

- Pre-Hispanic cultures have remained intact with distinct language, dress, music, and health beliefs, practices and customs.
- It is estimated that at least a third of the state's population are speakers of indigenous languages (with 50% not able to speak Spanish).

Research Purpose

- To describe the utilization of traditional medicine and/or the integration with Western Medicine for prevention and treatment of illness or health conditions in Oaxaca, Mexico.

Research Methodology

- Qualitative Study
- Utilized face-to-face interviews with 22 people (Indigenous and non-Indigenous people living in rural and urban areas of the State of Oaxaca, Mexico.
- Each interview was conducted by a Spanish speaking nurse educator and was audio-taped.
- Transcripts were translated from Spanish into English by a fluent Spanish speaking interpreter.

Research Methodology (continued)

- Additionally, field notes and demographic data were collected at each interview.
- Transcripts and participant characteristics formed the study data.
- The qualitative transcript data was analyzed by the constant comparative method of joint coding and analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).
- Analysis results were completed independently by two researchers and then verified by a third researcher not involved in the study.

Study Results

Socio-demographics of Participants

- 1. Ages: 21-86
 - median age: 53.9 years
- 2. Marital status: majority were married,
 - divorced 2nd common, and single third
 - common
- 3. Weekly income in pesos:
 - range: 0-6800 pesos
 - median income- 1760 pesos = \$121.37 USD

- **Number of children:**
0-9, with 4.5 average
- **Education:**
0-4 years of college, with average of 3 years
of grade school

Themes

1. *Faster access to health care (using traditional medicine)*

Pueblos located anywhere from 1 -14 hours to a major hospital.

“It would take me four hours to get to a health department doctor to be treated for my problems. That’s way too far and would cost too much!”

2. Belief that traditional medicine is *superior*

- “ I think that traditional medicine is much safer, cheaper, and better treats most illnesses.”
- “I’ve taken antibiotics for bronchitis and believe that hot herbal teas and vapors are a much better treatment.”

3. Treatment of special medical problems (mal ojo, susto, empacho, and hot and cold diseases).

- “ My child had empacho and only a traditional healer could help her get better!”
- “ People at the Health Department (Western medicine practitioners) would only discourage me to use a cuarandera (traditional healer) because they don’t believe in them.”

4. Non-disclosure

“I go first to a cuarandera to be treated for most illnesses. If the illness is severe such as trauma from a car accident, then I would go to a Western style hospital. If they don't ask, I wouldn't tell them about my use of traditional medicine.”

“ I do not tell the medical doctors and nurses about my use of traditional medicine. Many would laugh and make fun of me if I did.”

“I only go to a Western clinic (Health Department) to get vaccinations for my family and we don't discuss anything else about health care.”

5. Health Department Clinics/Hospitals (Western Style Medicine)

- “ I had to go to the Hospital Civil because my baby was sideways and I couldn't delivery her naturally. I needed to have a C-section.”
- “ A massage therapist or a partera can do an external message to put the baby in the correct position for a delivery. If not, the mother needs to go to the hospital or mother and baby could both die during childbirth.”
- “ I would go the Hospital Civil (main Western style city hospital) if I had a serious car wreck with injuries or a terrible infection that would not go away after treatment with traditional medicine.”

6. Generational knowledge (Passing of knowledge from mother to daughter)

“ All the women in my family are curanderas. I learned from my mother and grandmother and I taught my daughter all my skills to treat people.”

“ My daughter learned from me how to use the correct herbs that we either grow next to the house or buy from a local market.”

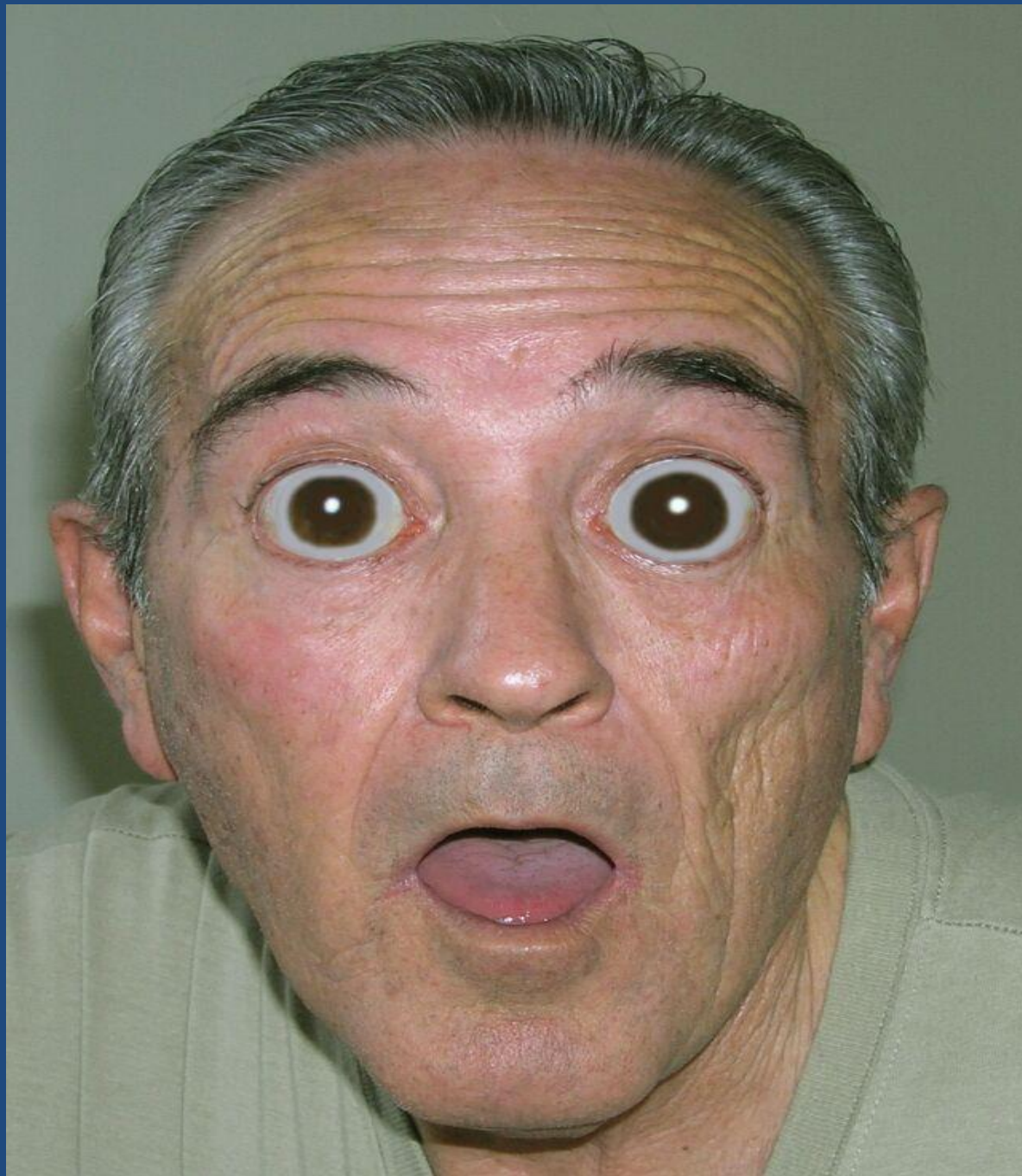
7. Use only Traditional Medicine

“ I would never use anything but traditional medicine and never used the health department or any hospitals.”

- Diseases Not Found in Western Medicine
(as noted in theme #3)

Susto

- Fear; a folk illness with strong psychological overtones defined as a "fright sickness" and (literally) a loss of soul from the body.
- Occasionally children suffer susto as well. The cause is a sudden frightening experience such as an accident, a fall, witnessing a relative's sudden death, or any other potentially dangerous event.
- Symptoms include nervousness, anorexia, insomnia, listlessness, despondency, involuntary muscle tics, and diarrhea.



Mal Ojo (Mal de Ojo)

- **Mal de ojo**" or "evil eye," is a folk illness primarily affecting children, with infants being particularly vulnerable.
- The admiring look or a stare can weaken the child, leading to bad luck, sickness and even death.



Empacho

- The perception is that a bolus of undigested food has become "stuck" somewhere in the digestive tract.
- The imagined causes of empacho are :
 - eating too much of a certain food
 - poorly prepared food
 - spoiled food
 - being forced to eat
 - eating particular foods at the wrong time
 - swallowing a lot of saliva



Hot and Cold Theory and Their Diseases

- For health maintenance, avoidance of exposure to extreme temperatures is important.
- Examples of "hot" diseases or states are pregnancy, hypertension, diabetes, acid indigestion, susto, and mal ojo.
- Some "cold" disease examples are menstrual cramps, pneumonia, empacho, and colic.
- The goal of treatment is to restore harmony and balance. Thus, "hot" diseases are treated with "cold" remedies, and "cold" diseases are treated with "hot" remedies.

Types of Traditional Healers

- **Yerbero** –herbalist
- **Sobador**-massage therapist
- **Partera(o)** -midwife, who also treats problems with young children
- **Curandara(o)** - If the above specialists cannot handle the problem then the patient is referred to a **curandero total** (the lay healer who may use multiple modalities).
- These people are highly respected in the local community and they may come from either a family with a tradition of **curanderisimo** or receive the gift of healing (**el dón**) later in life.

Examples of Traditional Medicine Healing Foods

Garlic – with olive oil for burns; clove in ear for earaches; in brandy for asthma; with brown sugar for coughs; with honey for dandruff; reduces cholesterol.

Onion – treats anemia, bronchial problems and asthma; cooked in oil prevents scarlet fever and diphtheria and as tea for coughs and sore throats; when hot, applied to boils

Western Style Medicine- Hospital Civil in Oaxaca



A Curandera Healer for a Sick Child



The Temazcal is a purifying ritual originally performed by the Zapotecs, Aztecs, Mixtecs, and other indigenous groups to purify and restore the body and spirit..



A Partera (Lay Midwife)



Conclusion

- Residents of Oaxaca, Mexico often use traditional medical practices for health maintenance and prevention of illness while others integrate traditional health practices with Western style medical practices.
- Such participants often do not reveal their use of their traditional practices to their Western style medical health care providers.
- The potential for interaction of traditional remedies with Western medicine, such as antibiotics, can potentially cause dangerous reactions that may result in increased morbidity and mortality. Interventions and their appropriate evaluations are needed to ensure that providers are aware of other treatments being used.