

# Patient's Perceptions Around Traditional Treatment For Spinal Cord Injury

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## Abstract

To explore patient's perception around traditional treatment for spinal cord injury in Bangladesh, so that psychosocial component of a patient could be understood to provide quality health care.

Center for the Rehabilitation of the Paralyzed (CRP) and Gonok bari sub-center of CRP. It was a qualitative study. 7 participants were selected using convenient sampling. Data were collected using face-to-face semi-structured interview. Question analysis was used to analyze the data. Among the seven participants six participants things traditional treatments are not effective for spinal cord injury. Everyone things SCI as Allah's will still some think that there are some places and time which brings bad things. Among the participant five think physiotherapy is helpful for spinal cord injury. One participant thinks it is not effective and one does not understand as she did not yet received physiotherapy service. Traditional treatment in patient's perspective is not an effective treatment for spinal cord injury. Traditional healers are being successful in Bangladesh by taking the advantage of belief system of the patients. So physiotherapists as well as other health professionals should consider patient's belief systems and culture to provide quality health service.

**Key words:** SCI, Traditional treatment, Physiotherapy, patient's precipitin.

## Introduction

"Health seeking behavior includes visits to traditional healers in all parts of the globe. In most developing countries of the world there is a lack of trained medical personnel in the rural areas and the majority of people living in these areas often seek out the traditional healer for relief from disease." (Makanjuola and Jaieola 1987 cited in Kelly 1995). According to Wahed (1994) traditional medicine is widely accepted in the Bangladeshi community although there have been great advances in government sponsored biomedical science, This non-physician treatment still prevails in Bangladeshi society with its supernatural and spiritualistic background. Poor rural people confronted with shortage of financial resources and lacking appropriate health facilities often directed by superstition go to the traditional healer to meet their health needs. There are about 6000 traditional healers in Bangladesh (Rahman 2002). Disabled people including the spinal cord injured are included in this trend of going to the traditional healer. According to Karbi, Caspari and Talos (1998) the effect of spinal trauma can be lessened or worsened by first aid and subsequent medical and surgical management provided. Proper medical management can prevent secondary

complications. Improper handling causes upto 25% of all neurological damage that occurs following trauma. Even if finally the patient gets to the rehab center they may have to stay longer in the hospital due to complications. Even they cannot get maximum benefit from rehabilitation because of the grip of superstition according to Fitzpatrick (1997 cited in Whybrow and Wara 2002). Patients who are dissatisfied are unlikely to follow through with treatment, re-attend for service at a later date or comply with treatment regimes. There has been no research to focus on this issue. According to the Social Welfare Department of CRP, most of the patients go to the traditional healer after returning home from rehabilitation center. But still no research has been done to identify the extent of problem and solve it. It is an important area to study and can help the process of spinal cord injured rehabilitation by opening up patient's perceptions.

## Broad objective of the study

The objective of the study is to explore patient's perception around traditional treatment for spinal cord injury.

## Specific objectives of the study

1. To explore what do people do in a rural area after spinal cord injury?
2. To explore the concept of spinal cord injury in a Bangladeshi community
3. To explore what patients perceive about cause of spinal cord injury
4. To explore why patients go to a traditional healer after spinal cord injury
5. To explore whether traditional treatment is really effective.
6. To explore patient's perception about physiotherapy compared to traditional treatment.

## What is Spinal cord Injury ?

Hughes (1994, cited in Bromely I.1991) defined spinal cord Injury as "severe injury to the vertebral column can occur from any direction and result in dislocation, fracture, or dislocation with or without resultant displacement. As a result extensive trauma can occur as it is compressed, crushed or stretches within the spinal canal. Spinal cord injury usually results from an accident that breaks or severely damages the central nerve cord in the neck or back. When the cord is damaged, feeling and movement in the body below the level of injury are lost or reduced.

## Methodology

The aim of the study is to explore patient's perception around traditional treatment for spinal cord injury. As the research is exploratory in nature and no work has been done in this field

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before, qualitative research design is selected as described by Bogdan and Biklen (1998 cited in Hammel 2000) qualitative methods are appropriate when the research questions pertain to understanding or describing a phenomenon about which little is known; When seeking to understand the point of view of the study participants. Further more qualitative research is a means by which the researcher can gain insights into another person's views, opinions, feelings and beliefs in their own natural settings (Hieks 2000).

## Participants

Participants for the research were selected using purposive sampling because they illustrate some features that are relevant to the research interest. Bowling (1997, p 167-8 cited in Islam 2001) The sample was selected from Center for the Rehabilitation of the Paralyzed (CRP) hospital and Gonok bari sub-center of CRP, where some discharged patients of CRP are involved in some income generating activities. All of the participants were spinal cord injured people. There were 7 patients, among them 5 were in-patient of CRP and 2 of the participants were from Gonok bari sub center of CRP. There were four female among them one was child who could not tell us about her treatments.. So her mother was interviewed. All of the participants were Muslim and from lower socio economical class. Only one female participant was educated up to S.S.C level. Age range was from 10-40.

## Data collection

**Procedures:** The data of this research was gathered using semi-structured face to face interviews. As a researcher it was straightforward to guide the interview without using a fixed ordering of questions. The researcher himself made the questions in Bengali.

Prior to setting up the interviews participants were asked to come for an interview at a time suitable to them and place of their choice.

The notes were taken with pen and papers. The researcher took the notes during the interviews in short, then immediately after the interview the details note were made. After the interview the researcher read out the notes to the patients to check whether the notes were taken accurately. All the interview lasted between 20-40 minutes, except one interview took about four hour. Filled notes were made to transcript first in Bengali and later in English. As the researcher's first language was Bengali. It was suitable to make a better transcript in Bengali first to make the data analysis more accurate. Then all the translation was checked twice by the researcher himself and by a person who teaches English. The notes were then kept in a safe place where only the researcher had an access.

## Data Analysis

The data analysis was through, "Question analysis". According to Morse and Field (1995)

"Question analysis is similar to content analysis, but the initial part of analysis is by item number". So all the same number of question were pasted into a code book one by one, so

that the researcher can see the results easily by seeing the answer of the same question given by all of the participant together. All of the answers were read thoroughly to find out broad discussion point. Ten broad discussion points were found. Then codes were developed from the answers of the questions. If any code seems to be same than these were made into same code. The codes were defined clearly. All the codes listed were placed under those broad discussion points.

Finally the codes were tabulated under broad discussion points. The tables were formatted as all the participants were in a row and the codes were in a column. Then it was ticked under the participant's column according to their comments. The benefit of tabulation was that this would allow the researcher to see the results at a glance.

## Result

The findings of this study are presented below-

Most participants did not believe that spinal cord injury was just an accident but they saw it slightly differently. Most of them believed that it was Allah's will and nothing happens without his will.

Every body except one had the view that they will not go again to the traditional healer in future. One patient was so determined that he says, "No, I swear, I will not go to the traditional healer even if I die". One participant believed that the traditional healer could cure but only if a spirit causes the problem. So here we can see most of patients say now that they will not go to the traditional healer, as they have experienced that the traditional healer cannot help people with spinal cord injury.

Rehabilitation in a medical center was the final treatment that the patients in this research received. They have also received traditional treatment, which is totally different from the medical rehabilitation. All of the participants had traditional treatment prior to rehabilitation in CRP. patients were asked whether, going to the traditional healer had any effect on the medical rehabilitation in CRP. Two participants could not answer and said, " I don't know". Some participant thought that going to the traditional healer had effected the medical rehabilitation in CRP badly. Some even said, " If I had come earlier, I would have regain my full mobility". The patients realized that as they were late in coming to CRP, they had developed problems like pressure sores and contractures.

The participants were asked about there perception about physiotherapy. The participant understood easily what physiotherapy was. Except one patient all of them recommended that physiotherapy was helpful. Only one patient found that he had no improvement in terms of joining his broken back. He says, " The broken bone has not yet joined. If it had recovered I would have gone home". One of the participants mother said, " I don't understand what you are saying, What I understand is my daughter is not getting well". This patient has just come to CRP 2 days before the Interview was taken. One of the participants said, "physiotherapy is good. The joints of my legs were very hard and after receiving physio-



therapy the joints were movable again." Another said, "Physiotherapy is very good. The physiotherapists know about what is good for the spinal cord injured patients. They give helpful suggestions and explain everything to the patient."

This expression suggests that physiotherapy was considered helpful by the patients in this study.

## Discussion

The study aimed to explore patient's perception about traditional treatments for spinal cord injury. Physiotherapy being an integral part of modern medical science was begun in Bangladesh immediately after the liberation war. As a result there is a clash between the traditional and modern medicine systems and physiotherapy have to face the challenge posed by traditional healers if it is to be established in Bangladesh. To accept the challenges posed by traditional healers there is no alternative but to have deep insight into the traditional belief system. Otherwise professional development of physiotherapy will be hampered. Being a physiotherapy student the researcher was interested to try to concentrate on the big issue of traditional treatment. Attention must be paid to this very important issue, which can be a great challenge to professional development of physiotherapy. As part of the multidisciplinary team the physiotherapist contributes to the rehabilitation of spinal cord injured people. To do that role effectively physiotherapist needs to work with the patient setting common goals. He has to know how the patient thinks. This can only be known from assessing the patient as a whole including their views and belief systems, values and reasoning. "Treatment expectations appeared to play a key role in the pattern of outcome". (Williams Welkin (1997). So if physiotherapist wants to work with efficacy they need to know about patient's belief system, This is why this research paper aims to focus on what are the patient's view about traditional healers and traditional medicine.

This view has a big impact on Rehabilitation programmes. If a patient's belief remains unchanged after coming to Rehabilitation programmes they may not show interest in active rehabilitation. This will definitely affect the treatment outcome, as good outcome needs co-operation from patients in active exercises. This type of spiritual or supernatural belief can also reduce self-esteem and confidence as patients think they are victims and if it depends on Allah's will or on supernatural objects for the condition to get better or worse then it may have nothing to do with their own effort. So physiotherapists being responsible for active rehabilitation need to be aware of patients belief system otherwise their interventions will be less effective and the outcome will not be optimum.

When somebody is unwell in Bangladeshi community people believe that he cannot do anything. In case of spinal cord injury the patients are severely injured and may even become unconscious. So obviously people around, mostly family members make the decision.

So, here we can see traditional healers gain their strength through community beliefs and sharing the same culture as the patients. As physiotherapists we must consider patient

beliefs, culture and other psychosocial components. To do so we also should have a good understanding of the existing traditional belief systems. Traditional treatment has been used in Bangladesh for a long time. In cases of spinal cord injury there is of no exception. Little research has been done on its effectiveness as defined by patients.

The participants who found no benefit from traditional treatment were strong in their beliefs as they had terrible experience, which gave them nothing but waste of time money, and gave them pressure sore and psychological torture. The traditional healer had used some interventions, which were confusing to them so that when it did not work the cause was unclear. As a result they thought, "They are cheaters and cannot do any good."

The finding in this research shows traditional treatment was ineffective for spinal cord injured patients interviewed any way but still a lot of patient go to the traditional healer even after taking treatment in CRP. No research has yet been done to find out why patients are going to traditional healer after taking treatment from CRP. Further study should be done to investigate this.

The word physiotherapy is an imported word but all the participants except mother of one participant in the research could understand what physiotherapy meant as physiotherapists treated them. To the question of how important they think physiotherapy was almost every patient considered physiotherapy as necessary. Some patients could give a reason for their opinion like one patient said the physiotherapist are good because they give helpful advise they explain what you should do and what you should not do. So we can see giving explanations to patients and education to them is an important part of treatment and can help patient to improve their quality of daily living. One patient could explain that if physiotherapist did not mobilize body parts they will not have good circulation and the legs will become stiff. It is very good that the patients have this information about what's happening to them. This helps patients think and justify whether they are getting the right treatment or not. This express the idea that physiotherapists can do a lot by giving patients education and it is of good value. It is the right of the patient to know about his disease and treatment but in Bangladesh this is not always the reality. The patients don't always know what's going to happen to them this may be one of the reasons why patients go to the traditional healer even after discharge. The patients in the study had the experience of getting a traditional treatment and physiotherapy. So it was an opportunity to find out very from their views on physiotherapy compared to traditional treatment. The result showed they are satisfied with physiotherapy and right to say that traditional treatment may have bad effect on their present treatment in CRP. So this indicates that the participant think physiotherapy as necessary and they can realize that they have made a mistake by going to a traditional healer as one patient said.

"If I would have come to CRP earlier, I would have become well"

The view of patient about physiotherapy compared to traditional treatment is very important and helpful for both spinal cord injured patients and physiotherapists. This views if



shared will help patients to know what is the right treatment and guide physiotherapists in their professional development, helping them to understand patients more and incorporate patient's belief system into their treatment.

## Conclusion and Recommendation

The study showed that the perception about traditional treatment was related to the belief system of the communities in which the patient lived in. The community beliefs about Spinal Cord Injury played a big part in the acceptance of traditional treatment. The traditional healers are taking the advantage of beliefs and values of the Bangladeshi community and being successful amongst the population of Spinal Cord Injured people. But when a patient comes under the umbrella of modern medicine their old perceptions are challenged. This is why it is very important to know what are the beliefs and values of the patient in order to get the maximum benefit from service. Physiotherapist's being responsible for active rehabilitation should have a well understanding of patient's psychosocial components. So physiotherapists should be recommended to focus on these factors while assessing the patients.

The study found that according to patient's perspectives traditional treatments were not helpful to them but rather were harmful. So attention should be paid to this issue if health care for spinal cord Injured people is to be improved.

More focused study needs to be done in this field as little research has yet been done in Bangladesh. More study is needed to stop people from going to traditional healer after taking treatment from a rehabilitation center.

## Limitations and Barrier

- (1) It was the first attempt of the researcher doing a research.
- (2) The issue of traditional treatment has not been well focused in Bangladesh and hardly any research has been done. So there were shortages of literature regarding Bangladesh.
- (3) The researcher paper is written in English but the researcher and the participant's mother language was Bengali, so it was difficult to express some of the points accurately in English.

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