

Review of: "“Healing is having faith in Allah, the healer, and the medicine”: An exploratory qualitative study of Islamic-based healing practices in Northern Ghana"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Topic: **Healing is having faith in Allah, the healer, and the medicine”: An exploratory qualitative study of Islamic-based healing practices in Northern Ghana**

Introduction

Strengths

- The introduction effectively draws the reader into the paper by providing a captivating anecdote about the healing ritual conducted by Imam Afa in Northern Ghana.
- Thought-provoking questions about faith, prescribed behavioural codes, and the significance of symbolic rituals generate curiosity and set the stage for the study.
- The narrative flow in the introduction is well-constructed, creating a clear pathway for understanding the context and importance of exploring Islamic-based healing practices in the region.

Areas for improvement

- The transition from the introduction to the literature review could be more seamless to maintain the reader's engagement and interest.
- While the introduction introduces Imam Afa and the healing ritual, providing a brief background on the broader context of Islamic healing practices could enhance the reader's understanding before delving into the literature review.

Literature Review

- The literature review effectively contextualizes the study within the broader framework of faith healing practices in Ghana, showcasing a comprehensive understanding of the existing research landscape.
- Relevant studies are cited to emphasize the coexistence of Islamic and Pentecostal charismatic healing methods in Ghana, contributing to the paper's foundation.
- The review highlights the significance of belief systems and socio-religious factors in shaping faith healing, creating a strong theoretical backdrop for the subsequent exploration of Islamic-based healing practices.

Areas for Improvement

- While the literature review provides a solid foundation, it would benefit from more explicit connections between existing research and the specific focus of the current study on Islamic-based healing in Northern Ghana.
- Consider incorporating a brief section at the end of the literature review that explicitly outlines how existing gaps in knowledge lead to the study's research questions, setting the stage for the subsequent sections of the paper.
- Ensure a smooth transition to the methodology section by briefly summarizing the literature review's key findings and gaps in the existing research.

Methods and Study Design

Strengths

- The research design, a descriptive exploratory qualitative approach, is well-suited to the study's objective of exploring Islamic-based healing practices in Northern Ghana. The rationale for adopting this design is clearly justified.
- Purposive sampling is appropriate for the study's exploratory nature, allowing the researchers to engage with Islamic-based healers in the Yendi region. The selection criteria are well-defined, contributing to the study's focus.

The Authors can improve this part

- The transition from the study's introduction to the methods section could be smoother, providing a more seamless connection between the narrative about Imam Afa and the research design.

Participants and Sampling

Strengths

- Purposive sampling is adequately described, and the inclusion criteria for Islamic-based healers are clearly outlined.
- The rationale for excluding one healer who used both Islamic and Dagbon traditional healing modalities is reasonable and explained, maintaining the study's focus.

Areas for improvement

- While the inclusion criteria are well-defined, additional information on participants' demographic characteristics (beyond being Sunni Muslims) could enhance the reader's understanding of the sample.

Data Collection

- The detailed description of fieldwork, including in-depth interviews, ethnographic observations, and participant observations, provides a comprehensive understanding of the data collection process.
- Ethical considerations, such as obtaining consent and following cultural protocols, are well-documented, demonstrating the researchers' commitment to ethical standards.

Improvement

- While the authors mention that AK conducted the interviews and BM took notes, additional clarification on the division

of roles and responsibilities during data collection could provide transparency.

Data Analysis

- The iterative and reflexive approach to data collection and analysis is a methodological strength, contributing to data trustworthiness.
- The use of thematic and narrative analytic approaches is appropriate for identifying salient themes and patterns in the qualitative data.

However, this area could improve the quality of the paper

- The section could benefit from a clearer explanation of the reflexive feedback received from participants during the iterative process, providing more insights into the data analysis approach.

Overall evaluation of the methods

The methods section is generally well-structured and provides a detailed account of the research design, sampling, data collection, and analysis. Clear strengths include the rationale for the chosen research design, the detailed description of participant selection, and the ethical considerations. Areas for improvement include the need for smoother transitions between sections and additional information on participants' demographics. Clarification on roles during data collection and a more explicit discussion of reflexive feedback would further enhance the overall quality of the methods section.

Results

- The presentation and interpretation of themes are clear and organized, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the study findings.
- Demographic information about the participants is provided, enhancing the reader's awareness of the healers' backgrounds.
- The thematic analysis covers a wide range of aspects, including the basis of healing in Islam, becoming an Islamic-based healer, forms of medicine, ritual practices, gendered medical practices, and medical pluralism.

Areas of improvement

- The discussion of the basis of healing in Islam is extensive, but a brief summary or synthesis could be included after presenting each subtheme to enhance clarity and reinforce key points.
- The section on becoming an Islamic-based healer has a detailed breakdown of subthemes, but a more concise presentation might improve readability without sacrificing depth.

Participants' demographics

- Provides relevant demographic information about the participants, including average age, marital status, education, occupation, and religious affiliation.
- Specific geographic details about the participants' locations or communities could contribute to a richer understanding

of their backgrounds.

Basis of healing in Islam

- Thoroughly explores the two subthemes: believing and having faith in Allah, and healing is trust.
- Direct quotes from the healers, supported by Quranic verses, enhance the credibility of the findings.

Improvement

- After presenting each subtheme, a brief summary or synthesis could be included to reinforce key points and aid in comprehension.

Islamic-based healer

- Articulates three subthemes: acquiring Islamic healing knowledge, being an Islamic-based healer, and diagnosing illnesses.
- In-depth narratives from the healers provide insights into their diverse paths to becoming Islamic-based healers.

An area that needs consideration

- The detailed breakdown of subthemes might be condensed for improved readability, without compromising the depth of information.

Forms of Medicine

- Clearly delineates two significant forms of medicine: herbal medicines and Islamic-based medicines.
- Provides examples of how prayers, Ruqyah, and other materials are used as forms of medicine.
- A concise summary at the end of the section could enhance clarity and reinforce key findings.

Ritual practices and sacrifices

- Details the rituals and sacrifices involved in Islamic-based healing practices.
- Acknowledges the potential conflicts among healers with different modalities.

Areas for improvement

- The section could benefit from a brief synthesis or summary after presenting each aspect.

Gendered Medical Practices and Beliefs

- Highlights the gender-specific treatment approaches in Islamic-based healing.
- Recognizes the influence of Dagbon culture and Islamic norms on the lack of female Islamic-based healers.
- A brief summary or synthesis after each healer's perspective could enhance clarity.

Medical Pluralism

- Discusses how patients navigate and combine multiple medical systems, introducing the concept of 'health shopping.'
- Acknowledges the healers' perspectives on the suitability of different medical systems for specific illnesses.
- A concise summary at the end of the section could reinforce key findings and improve clarity.

Overall Evaluation of Results

The results section is comprehensive, providing a detailed exploration of the themes derived from the study. Strengths include clear organization, thorough exploration of themes, and the use of direct quotes to support findings. Areas for improvement involve the inclusion of brief summaries or syntheses after presenting each subtheme to enhance clarity and reinforce key points. The demographic information could also be expanded to include specific geographic details about the participants' locations or communities.

Discussions

General Observations/Comments

1. Enhance cultural analysis

- While the discussion highlights the alignment of healing practices with Islamic ontological perspectives, consider providing more nuanced insights into specific cultural elements. Delve deeper into how Islamic healing practices interact with and are influenced by unique aspects of Dagbon culture. This will provide a more comprehensive understanding.

2. Patient Experiences

- Integrate the perspectives and experiences of patients undergoing Islamic healing. This inclusion would add depth to the study by capturing the effectiveness and acceptability of these practices within the community. Consider conducting interviews or surveys with patients to gain valuable insights into their motivations, challenges, and overall satisfaction.

3. Comparative Analysis

- Explicitly compare Islamic healing practices with other healing systems in the community. A comparative analysis will elucidate points of convergence or divergence, contributing to a more nuanced interpretation of medical pluralism within the Dagbon community.

Ritual Practices and Innovation

- Elaborate further on the significance of ritual practices, especially those influenced by Dagbon culture. Additionally, discuss how the healers' innovative practices align with or challenge traditional Islamic healing norms. This will contribute to a deeper understanding of the evolving nature of Islamic healing practices.
- **Integration of theoretical framework**

- Explicitly connect the findings with the theoretical framework. Discuss how the results contribute to or challenge existing theories in medical anthropology or the anthropology of religion. Providing a theoretical context will enhance the scholarly contribution of the research.

Explore gender dynamics further

- Given the focus on male Islamic-based healers, consider exploring gender dynamics within Islamic healing practices. Additional research focusing on female Islamic-based healers could uncover unique perspectives, practices, and challenges.

Conclusion Reflection

- In the conclusion, reflect on how the study's findings contribute to the broader field of Islamic-based healing research. Discuss potential implications for healthcare service provision in Ghana, especially in the context of the ongoing integrative healthcare system.

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