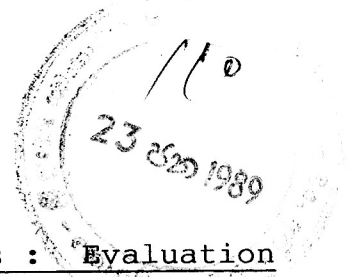


ABSTRACT



Traditional Therapists : Evaluation
of their present role and potential
usefulness

There is an enormous shortfall of psychiatrists in Sri Lanka. Given the necessity for seeking alternatives, this study was aimed at assessing the possible role of "traditional" therapists in this field in providing systematic care.

An initial survey was carried among the public and families attending various treatment facilities in order to determine which practices to study. It was found that about 85% of those interviewed said they preferred "Western" treatment for obvious mental illnesses or psychoses. For problems corresponding to minor psychiatric illness or neuroses, Western treatment was the first choice for less than 10% of the sample.

Eight treatment centres were selected for detailed study, on the basis of popularity shown in the survey. A group of 200 patients from these different centres were assessed and followed by a mail questionnaire. We found that over two thirds of subjects reported improvement in the short term. Follow up visits at the subjects' homes are planned, on an extension of this study, in order to minimise bias due to selective drop-outs.

Contrary to expectation, Ayurvedic treatment was found to cause relief in psychoses - which are generally amenable to pharmacological

treatments. The models used by Ayurvedic practitioners do not include a recognition of the possibility of physical symptoms being purely the presentation of social or psychological distress. This is unfortunate as Western Medicine too deals with this group of patients ineffectively.