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# **The Concept of Health and Illness and the Treatment-seeking Behavior from the Cultural Perspective of Assotipo Tribes in Assotipo District, Jayawijaya Regency, Papua Province**

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## **Abstract**

**Background:** Health is a human right that is fundamental. The World Health Organization defines it as "a state of complete physical, psychological and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." According to the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) data, the health service infrastructure of the Assotipo tribe must create healthy social conditions. The tribe must be involved in the success of national health development, which aims to increase awareness, willingness and ability to live healthy lives. There is, however, a sociological imbalance. **Research Objectives:** Exploring the concept of health and illness and the behavior of seeking treatment from the cultural perspective of the Assotipo tribe in the Assotipo District, Jayawijaya Regency, Papua Province. **Research method:** The research method used in this study was qualitative research using a phenomenological method that seeks to understand reality as it is. This study was conducted in February-March 2020 in Assotipo District, Jayawijaya Regency, Papua Province. A total of 20 (twenty) informants were taken using a method of purposive sampling. The main methods of data collection are in-depth interviews and participatory observation.

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**Results:** Communities of the Assotipo tribe assume that health and illness are part of their personal interests. Health and illness were linked to the balance of natural forces and human strength. Cultural attachment drives people away from their priorities to take care of their health. In general, patients with mild complaints come to the public health centre, but still use cultural methods under certain conditions. Community medicine by means of cultural methods used to be known as customary worship, which is now called confession. Resolving the problems of health care needs to have a deep understanding of their concepts and interpretations of health, illness and the various traditional treatments that are well expressed in their culture.

**Keywords:** Health and Illness; Concept; Confession; Assotipo tribe.

## **1. Introduction**

Healthy living for everyone is a human right and this has been done by all countries, including Indonesia. In 1948, the United Nations (UN) declared the Right to Healthy Life as a part of Human Rights (HAM) as part of article 25(1) that “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control” [1]. The right to a healthy life as a human right has also been recognized in the 1945 Constitution (UUD 45), which includes Article 28H and Article 34[2], and is re-regulated in Law No. 23/1992, which was later replaced by Health Law No. 36/2009, that everyone has the same right to have access to safe, quality and affordable health resources, but, on the other hand, everyone is obliged to do so. Article 1 of Law No. 36/2009 provides that health is a state of health, physical, mental, spiritual and social, which enables everyone to live productively, socially and economically [3]. Health is an important part that every individual must have in order to carry out his or her activities. Health can have an impact on the performance of a person in activities in order to provide maximum results. With regard to health, human resources will have physical, mental and social quality and optimum productivity. Awareness of the importance of health needs to be instilled from an early age, starting with the home and the nearest family [4]. Good quality of life can only be achieved with a good and harmonious environmental quality. On the contrary, quality of life determines the quality of the environment, because the pattern of life is reflected in the way and behavior of the environment is exploited. On the basis of the above, it can be said that with a good environment, people can develop and achieve a good life and a high quality home environment can guarantee a high health value. Efforts to improve the quality of the home environment must therefore be improved through the implementation of healthy living behaviors, so that the quality of the home environment has a high value in community life [5]. Insalubrious living conditions are mainly caused by a very low level of education and knowledge with a less healthy lifestyle compared to other population groups, so that they are unable to improve their lives, including the maintenance of their own settlements. The provision of facilities that promote the quality of the health of the home environment is very important for the community [5]. The reality of health in Indonesia cannot be said to have been successful. This can be seen from health indicators such as maternal and infant mortality. Most of the health financing system is still out-of-pocket based, aka pay yourself. Based on the WHO 2013 statistical data, the doctor-population ratio in Indonesia is only 2/10,000. This figure is still much smaller than the neighboring countries, such as Malaysia and Singapore, which have 18 and 19.2 doctors per

10,000 populations, respectively [6]. Problems that have arisen so far include a shortage of general practitioners, specialist physicians, medical doctors, public health centers (Puskesmas) which are far from the residents of Papuans. In addition, there are no nurses and no medicines in Puskesmas. Besides, the cost of transport to Puskesmas is quite expensive. The isolation of the villages inhabited by the Papuans and the low awareness of the Papuans in the village about a healthy life, especially their dirty living environment, etc. add to the complexity of this problem. The Assotipo tribe is part of the Dani tribe, which is inhabited by the Assotipo district of the Baliem Valley in Jayawijaya Regency. The distance from the town of Jayawijaya district to the district of Assotipo is approximately 40.4 km with a distance of approximately 1 hour and 20 minutes. The tribe of the Assotipo has two (2) sub-ethnic groups. The tribe of Asso and the tribe of Wetipo. According to data from the Jayawijaya District Health Office in 2016, there are a number of health facilities in the Asotipo District, including 1 Puskesmas and 7 Posyandu with 1 medical staff, 4 nurses and 2 midwives. The Assotipo Puskesmas was inaugurated in 2016 [7]. The number of health human resources in the Assotipo District with a health service infrastructure should have resulted in healthy social conditions, but in reality there is a sociological imbalance where the perspective of the community on the concept of health and treatment efforts is not in line with the vision and mission of the National Health System. The fundamental problem related to this is that, in the middle of the Assotipo District community, there is confusion about the meaning of the word "healthy" in the daily life of the Assotipo tribe as evidenced by the phenomenon of the "Adat" activity or culture that is now called "forgiveness" when someone is seriously ill but not taken to hospital, but left in honai while waiting for the family and the community to come together, and the sick person apologized, because there was a belief that the illness he had suffered might have been caused by someone's curse as if he had made mistakes. There are also people who seek treatment in health centers, but there are also people who seek treatment from smart people, priests and clerics, where they believe that spiritual healing is more guaranteed to cure illnesses than medical treatment in general, a phenomenon that often occurs in the Assotipo tribe. Based on the description of the background problem above, the author took the research title "The concept of health and illness as well as treatment seeking behavior from the perspective of the Assotipo tribe in Jayawijaya Regency."

## **2. Materials and Methods**

### ***2.1. Type of Research***

The research method used in this study was a qualitative research with the phenomenological method that seeks to understand reality as it is. This study was conducted in February-March 2020 at Assotipo District, Jayawijaya Regency, Papua Province. A total of 20 (twenty) informants were taken using a purposive sampling technique.

### ***2.2. Ethical Research and Data Collection***

The main data collection methods are in-depth interviews and participatory observation. The interview guide is semi-structured, open, and probing. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. All participants gave written consent. Confidentiality and anonymity are ensured. Data were analyzed qualitatively using triangulation and reduction techniques.

### 3. Result and Discussion

#### 3.1. The Characteristics of Informants

An overview of the characteristics of informants in this study can be found in Table 1: Table 1 shows the initial of the informants, sex, education, occupation, and their roles in the community. Most of the informants were farmer who has social health problems.

**Table 1:** The characteristics of informants

No	Initial Informant	Sex	Education	Occupation	Position
1.	HRM A	Male	Senior High School (SMA)	Civil Servant	The village government acts as a coordinator and is responsible for public policy and is considered to understand the social problems of the area.
2	BDM A	Male	Junior High School (SMP)	Farmer	Chieftains who are considered to understand local customs and culture.
3	SLH A	Male	Bachelor Degree (S1)	Teacher	Chieftains who are considered to understand local customs and culture.
4	HRS	Male	Bachelor Degree (S1)	Farmer	Religious leaders as role models for the local community.
5	HSN	Male	Senior High School (SMA)	Farmer	Religious leaders as role models for the local community.
6	JFR	Male	Bachelor Degree (S1)	Farmer	Religious leaders as role models for the local community.
7	BYN	Male	Bachelor Degree (S1)	Farmer	Religious leaders as role models for the local community.
8	DNI	Male	Senior High School (SMA)	Farmer	Religious leaders as role models for the local community.
9	RTMI	Female	Bachelor Degree (S1)	Civil Servant	The Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) officers who are considered to understand the complete availability of public facilities and services
10	IWK	Female	None	Farmer	Community members who have social health problems.
11	IDL	Male	Senior High School (SMA)	Farmer	Community members who have social health problems.
12	MRLN	Female	Primary School (SD)	Farmer	Community members who have social health problems.
13	APF	Male	Primary School (SD)	Farmer	Community members who have social health problems.
14	HH	Female	Junior High School (SMP)	Farmer	Community members who have social health problems.
15	SIP	Female	Primary School (SD)	Farmer	Community members who have social health problems.
16	YL	Female	Junior High School (SMP)	Farmer	Community members who have social health problems.
17	LA	Female	Senior High School	Farmer	Community members who have social health problems.

(SMA)						
18	VKR	Male	Senior School (SMA)	High	Farmer	Community members who have social health problems.
19	SLM	Male	Senior School (SMA)	High	Farmer	Community members who have social health problems.
20	MNA	Female	Senior School (SMA)	High	Farmer	Community members who have social health problems.

(Source: Primary Data, 2020)

### 3.2. The concept of health and illness for the Assotipo tribe

Table 2 shows the results of data reduction from the results of interviews with informants from the Assotipo ethnic community.

**Table 2:** The perspective of health and illness for the community of Assotipo tribe.

Informan	Perspective
HRM A	Healthy, if we can work, we can go to the garden and the body has no complaints of fever, headache, stomach ache.
BDM, and SLH	Healthy is when there is a balance between the forces of nature and human strength, so that there is no disturbance by evil spirits. And that is because no customary rules are violated.
HSN, HRS, JFR, BYR, and DNI	Healthy is a physical condition in which all functions are in good health. Being healed after being sick is the best gift from God to mankind.
IWK, IDL, MRLN, APF, HH, SIP, YL, LA, VKR, SLM, and MNA	According to the people of the Assotipo tribe, being healthy is where the body is not sick, which is indicated by the individual being able to walk long distances, can work, can garden and all activities are not disturbed. Health is important and therefore must be maintained.

(Source: Primary Data, 2020)

The results of the study show that there are several different perspectives. The perspective of the bureaucracy is *"Healthy, if we can work, we can go to gardening and the body does not have complaints of fever, headache, stomach aches like that"*, whereas from a cultural perspective *"Healthy is when there is a balance between natural forces and human strength, so that there is no interference by evil spirits, or no customary rules are violated."* The balance between natural and human forces is a point of understanding for the Assotipo tribe's custom. Meanwhile, the perspective of the religious figure *"Healthy is a physical condition in which all functions are in good health. Being healed after illness is the best gift from Allah (God) to mankind."* The focus of understanding religious leaders is that health is a gift from God. The perspective of society in general, it can be concluded that the people of the Assotipo tribe understand the meaning of health, which is where the

conditions between natural forces and human strength are balanced, where the condition of the body is not sick, marked by individuals who can walk far, can work, can garden and all activities are not disturbed. Health is important and therefore must be maintained.

### 3.3. The Treatment-seeking behavior in the Assotipo tribe

**Table 3:** The Treatment-seeking behavior when sick for the community of Assotipo tribe.

Informan	Perspective
HRM A	In the past, when we were sick, we went to our elders or traditional healers. Now, when we are sick, we go to the Public Health Center asking for medicine.
BDM, and SLH	We must always avoid disturbance from human evil spirits, we must stay away from places where these spirits exist (sacred places, graves, forbidden forests, etc.) and also we must not violate customary rules so that the balance between nature and humans is balanced. If someone is sick, he has to confess his sins first, after that we look for a solution, usually after that we pray together asking for healing.
HSN, HRS, JFR, BYR, and DNI	We must maintain health by keeping the environment clean and carrying out God's commands and bathing regularly. If we are sick, go to the Public Health Center or the doctor.
IWK, IDL, MRLN, APF, HH, SIP, YL, LA, VKR, SLM, and MNA	Actually, quite a lot of people go to the Community Health Center for treatment, but people who seek treatment only with complaints of coughs, flu, itching and some minor complaints that people believe are caused by fatigue. If they complain of a disturbance or a rather severe illness such as fever, shortness of breath that takes a long time to heal or other unusual pain, then they practice the custom of worshiping (confession) and pray for healing, if they are not healed, then they will be taken to the Puskesmas or Hospital.

(Source: Primary Data, 2020)

Table 3 explains the results of interviews with informants, namely the Assotipo Tribe Society in the Assotipo District, that there are differences of opinion, some consider health caregivers to be an alternative in healing when they are sick, but there are still many who consider health care providers not as the main alternative in curing disease. Results of interviews with informants (Bureaucracy) *"In the past, when we were sick, we went to our parents or traditional healers. Now, when we are sick, we are going to the nurse to ask for medicine"*. According to him, there is a change in the habit of seeking treatment, which is because there were no health care providers in the area when they were ill, they went to a smart person or to a traditional healer, which means that they went to a traditional medicine place, but now there are health workers, and then they went to the Public Health Center (Puskesmas). Religious leaders also argue that if you are ill, you will seek treatment from a health care worker. Meanwhile, the perspective of people who still play the role of tribal chiefs explains that "people must always avoid disturbances from human evil spirits, they must stay away from places where these spirits exist (sacred places, tombs, forbidden forests, etc.) and that is how we should not violate customary rules, so

that the balance between nature and man is balanced." The customary rules described by the chief of this tribe are the norm for the majority of indigenous people who believe that illness is caused by the imbalance between human power and natural forces, and by the disturbance of human evil spirits caused by violations of customary rules. Traditional medicine is still practiced by the people of the Assotipo tribe, for example, the people of the Assotipo tribe use itchy leaves for the body when they are sick or tired. The trick is to rub itchy leaves on the affected part, and they'll drink banana stem sap to treat heartburn. Treatment measures by injuring the skin of the affected part of the body to remove dirty blood from the affected part are also carried out by the community, but not all parts of the body can be done. Community efforts to maintain health also apply a number of methods, such as washing hands before eating, maintaining environmental hygiene, and eating food from their own natural gardens or without the use of chemical fertilizers. It was concluded that the community generally went to Puskesmas for treatment, but only with minor complaints, such as cough, flu, itching, and excess fatigue. If they complain of a disorder or rather serious illness such as fever, shortness of breath that lasts longer or other unusual pain, they will go to the tribal chief who they think understand the usual rules to find out whether there is a violation of the usual rules or a spiritual disturbance. After that, we pray for healing in our respective religious beliefs, and if he is not healed, he will be taken to the medical doctor or nurse.

#### **4. Discussion**

##### ***4.1. The concept of health and illness of the Assotipo tribe***

The result of the study found from the perspective of the Assotipo tribe that health is where the body is not sick, which is indicated by a person who can walk long distances, can work, can garden, and all activities are not disturbed. In the meantime, illness is caused because it violates the customary rules and disturbances of evil human spirits. If there is a community that is sick (considered to be in violation of customary law), then the family will hold a traditional prayer ceremony that is now called the confession of sins. The results obtained are consistent with the research conducted by Kadek Sukiada [8] on the Dayak Hindu Kaharingan tribe, which states that the Dayak Hindu Kaharingan tribe believes that healthy and sick conditions are due to natural factors, humans and spirits. Healthy and productive people or communities are the long-term objectives of the National Health System. The definition of healthy is formulated in Law no. 36/2009 concerning health as *"a physical, mental, spiritual and social condition that enables everyone to live productively, socially, and economically"*. The objectives stated in Law no. 36/2009 *"increase awareness, willingness and ability to live a healthy life for everyone so that the highest degree of public health can be realized, as an investment for the development of socially and economically productive human resources."*[3] The reality that happened to the people of the Assotipo tribe did not understand what was meant by the objectives set out in Law No. 36/2009. The results of the community interviews explained that health is where the conditions between natural forces and human strength are balanced and where the condition of the body is not sick, which is indicated by the individual who can walk long distances, can work, can garden and all activities are not disturbed. Health is important and must therefore be maintained. This perspective only interprets the meaning of healthy as an individual interest. In the meantime, Law No. 36/2009 seeks to increase awareness, willingness and ability to live a healthy life for all, so that the highest level of public health can be achieved. Paul B. Horton and Chaster L Hunt [9] describe human beings as social beings who are interrelated and influence each other to become social groups. A social group is

a collection of people who are aware of participation, participate in activities and interact with their own social groups. This has not been implemented in the current understanding of society in the health sector, as the current perspective is individual. The social process should be communal, in which the relationships that are built up between people in a community should have the same interests and vision. Blum reinforces the opinion of Paul B. Horton and Chester L. Hunt, namely that human health consists of three elements: somatic health (health comes from oneself), psychological health (health comes from one's soul) and social health (health comes from social health) [10]. These three elements form the basis on which society defines the origin of the disease in different ways. The study of health anthropology focuses on discussing the impact of cultural elements on people's appreciation of illness and health. Related to the cultural belief of society, that illness is when there is no balance between natural forces and human strength, and also because of interference by human evil spirits, which causes a person to feel sick, that person's family will carry out confession activities. Blum reinforces this condition that environmental factors influence paradigms, beliefs and the way of life of people who believe in and implement them. In fact, statements like this are not wrong as long as cultural norms are meant to have positive norm values. However, this is a problem with the standardization of sound interpretations referred to in Law No. 36/2009, where, in this belief, the community believes that, if these activities are not carried out, people who are ill will not recover. But indirectly, this perspective slows down the treatment process.

#### ***4.2. Treatment-seeking behavior of the Assotipo tribe***

The result of the study shows that if there is a community that is sick (considered to be in violation of customary law), then the family will hold a customary prayer ceremony, which is now called a confessional activity. In this activity, families will usually come to their elders (who are considered to understand the customary rules) to find out what violations have been committed and how to resolve them. This is usually done by apologizing or paying a fine to the sick person. However, confession activity is also carried out by the slaughter of Wam (pig) if the person's illness is considered to be serious. In the past, this kind of activity was led by the head of the tribe, because the head of the tribe was thought to understand the customary rules. Technically, this activity usually begins with the chief of the tribe going to the garden to see (according to his belief) what violations have been committed by the community and reinforced by the slaughter of pigs. During the process of slaughtering the pig, the Chief will look at the anatomy of the pig being killed, so that the Chief will be able to tell and explain the violations committed by the person and discuss or discuss with the community how to deal with them. Now that religion has entered people's lives and affects people's lives, there are technical differences in the activities of these events, but they have the same purpose. People who are Christian, they still kill the pig. Previously, the family would invite the community or extended family to come to the house so that people who are sick can confess if there is an attitude or action that they have intentionally violated customary law and also apologize if there is an action that they have not intentionally taken, after which they will have a meal together. In the meantime, for people who are Muslims, recognition activities or events are carried out by slaughtering several chickens; the technical activities are the same, only different animals are killed. Traditional medicine is also still practiced by people of the Assotipo tribe, for example, people of the Assotipo tribe use itchy leaves for the body when they are sick or tired by rubbing itchy leaves in the affected area. In addition, treatment is also done by cutting the skin on the affected part of the body to remove dirty blood on the affected part, but not all parts of the body can be done in this way. In order to maintain health, the community also uses a number of



methods, such as hand washing before eating, environmental cleanliness by maintaining natural habitat, and food also consumed from natural plantations or plants that do not use chemical fertilizers. However, in daily life and social activities, people from adolescence to adulthood and even the elderly smoke because of the fact that the geographical conditions are quite cold, and this is also the reason why people rarely shower, even though they rarely get sweat even after planting. The existence of a massive smoking phenomenon among adolescents to the elderly indicates a lack of socialization regarding a healthy lifestyle in the Assotipo tribe. Several previous studies have linked belief in causes of illness to models of health belief [11,12]. Health belief models are analyzed by exploring four dimensions: perceived susceptibility, perceived severity, perceived benefits, and perceived barriers [13,14]. In the Assotipo tribe, belief in the disease and its causes is largely influenced by the strength of belief in ancestral religions. Similar beliefs are also found in earlier Javanese tribes in literature studies and traditional Javanese arts [15,16]. The concept of illness, illness and cause of illness that is relevant to the everyday life of a community, especially those with strong traditional values, not only affects and applies to the community in general, but also affects health workers who come from local people. This phenomenon of local knowledge influence on health workers was identified in an ethnographic study of health among the Muyu tribe in Mindiptana District, Boven Digoel, Papua. Health workers who have acquired modern medical knowledge still believe in the correctness of local knowledge. Local health workers also believe that the blood of women in the Muyu tribe is dirty. Childbirth blood has a magical atmosphere that can cause pain to the entire family at home [17,18]. This is the case when the patient's illness is believed to be caused by something magically.

## **5. Conclusion**

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that:

- a. The concept of health in the Assotipo tribe is characterized by a person's condition that can still walk far, can work, can garden and do activities as usual. Meanwhile, the concept of illness for the tribal community of Asotipo is due to violations committed by the community, both violations of customary law and relationships between individuals and other individuals, as well as interference by evil spirits. The majority of the community's view of health and disease is related to the balance of natural strength and human strength, so that the Asotipo tribe community needs to harmonize between man and nature as their place of residence or nature as the mother of the Asotipo ethnic community.
- b. The behavior of seeking treatment for the people of the Assotipo tribe, that is, that many people have gone to Puskesmas with minor complaints. However, under certain conditions, a very strong cultural attachment prevents the community from making health care workers a top priority. The attachment to a strong culture and lack of health-related information will lead people to prefer treatment methods using traditional cultural methods, that is, confession activities that are believed to cure disease, but when the disease does not heal, they will continue to receive medical treatment while still assuming part of the usual violations. The community believes that if a confessional activity is not carried out, the person who is sick will not be healed.

## **6. Suggestion**

There are a number of suggestions regarding the finding of this research:

- a. To the relevant Government, in order to make regulations that are the focal point and to ensure the implementation or realization of integrated health in the form of socialization, implementation and granting of health insurance rights to the community, in particular to the Asotipo tribe community.
- b. In particular, the Asotipo ethnic community must be empowered by making community health ambassadors in their respective areas. They will provide some training in the necessary health fields, the task of socializing the concept of health and the proper handling of illness. It also bridges communication between the community and health workers, whether directly or indirectly.
- c. For Public Health Centers (Puskesmas), as a first-level health service facility, communication management must be established on the basis of cultural morality in order to solve health problems adapted to local cultural habits.

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