

A dental-anthropological study of health and illness behaviour among Orang Asli of the Semai Tribe: the perspective of traditional healers

Type: Article

Abstract:

This observational study investigates and describes the oral health beliefs and illness behaviour in the Semai tribe of Orang Asli community. Data was obtained from a "Key informant interview" method i.e. the village Tok Halaq (Traditional healer). Information about common oral diseases and conditions were illustrated with enlarged pictures of dental caries, periodontal disease, oral cancer and cleft. The most common oral problem was toothache. This is treated by self-medication. However if the pain still persist, the Tok Halaq was consulted to start traditional methods. He will identify the cause. If "germs" were thought to be the cause, he will ask the person to see a doctor. Otherwise, he attempts traditional treatment. If the effort failed after a few days, the person will be advised to see a doctor. It appears that the Tok Halaq plays an influential role in prevention, promotion and the healing process in this community. Hence any effort to promote oral health and prevent oral disease must seek their cooperation. Their beliefs on causes of common oral diseases are described in the text.

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