

# Addressing Misconceptions and Promoting Inclusive Care: A Comparative Review of Conventional and Traditional Medicine in Mental Health Management

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**Abstract.** Management of mental conditions remains challenging, especially in rural areas and among people with little or no mental health literacy. Misconceptions regarding conventional psychiatric remedies, such as the assumption that psychiatric medicine leads to lifelong dependence on medication, prevent people from getting appropriate care. By contrasting traditional medicine approaches to mental health management, this review strives to dispel myths and foster inclusive care that is culturally sensitive. This review emphasises blending conventional medical approaches to deliver comprehensive, scientifically validated care. The review also highlights the importance of community-based education, increased access to mental health services, and collaborative care models focusing on evidence-based medicine.

**Keywords:** Mental Health; Conventional Medicine; Traditional Medicine; Evidence-Based Medicine; Psychotherapy; Inclusive Care.

## INTRODUCTION

Mental health is integral to human well-being, impacting emotions, thoughts, and behaviour. In the concept of mental health, an individual is not considered healthy just for the mere absence of a disease condition. The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines mental health as a state of well-being that allows one to cope with the stress of life, realise his/her potential, study and work

effectively, and contribute to the community [1]. However, for a higher percentage of the world population, attaining this level of mental health status remains a challenge, with over one billion individuals suffering from mental or addiction disorders [2].

Mental health disorders are one of the leading causes of disability and a significant risk factor for untimely death [3]. The burden of morbidity

and mortality from mental health concerns is increasingly affecting all sociodemographic stages [4]. Despite its significance, many people often overlook mental health compared to the overall disease burden, especially in rural areas where cultural beliefs about divinity, witchcraft, disease, ancestral spirits, and societal misconduct fuel misconceptions, misunderstanding, and stigmatisation [5-7].

These beliefs and cultural perceptions of mental disorders can be the basis for explaining why conventional therapies for mental disorders are widely rejected in rural regions and among those with poor mental health literacy. Instead, traditional healing practices, which are frequently rooted in cultural and spiritual beliefs, have become the mainstream for managing mental health issues among this population. As a result, people from these characteristic populations normalise seeking help from traditional healers, who do not use scientifically proven methods to diagnose and treat mental problems. Relying on conventional healing approaches can delay evidence-based care, impacting treatment outcomes and prognosis [8].

This review strives to dispel myths about conventional psychiatric therapies and foster a more inclusive model of mental health care that will integrate conventional and traditional medicine practices while respecting cultural values grounded in evidence-based medicine (EBM).

The hallmark of evidence-based medicine is the cautious use of the best available clinical research in guiding medical practice. This method combines clinical evidence with credible scientific knowledge, ensuring treatment decisions are based on proven outcomes [9, 10]. In mental health care, EBM enables physicians to make effective, patient-centred decisions [11].

Figure 1 shows the three basic components of EBM: clinical expertise, best research evidence, and patient values. Integrating these components is a cornerstone for making informed decisions in healthcare and mental healthcare. The interaction of these components provides a comprehensive framework that results in the best possible care for patients.

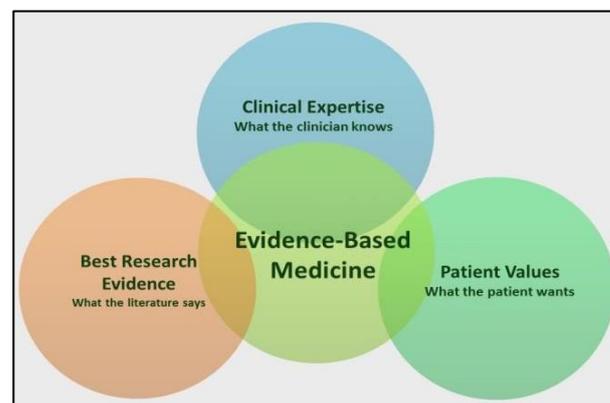


Figure 1 – A Venn diagram illustrating the core components of evidence-based medicine

Despite the demonstrated benefits of conventional healthcare approaches, widespread misconceptions exist about their application, particularly among rural populations. People often link these misconceptions to cultural beliefs and a lack of knowledge about modern psychological and pharmacological treatments. For instance, many among these populations believe that conventional treatments, such as psychopharmacological therapy (e.g., antidepressants, mood stabilisers and antipsychotics) or psychotherapy (e.g., Cognitive Behavioural Therapy or CBT), only provide temporary relief or do not address the leading causes of mental illness [12]. Some fear pharmaceutical dependency or believe that psychological treatments, such as therapy, are ineffective for long-term recovery [12]. These beliefs cause a significant reluctance to accept standard mental health care, even when scientifically validated remedies can be a breakthrough [12].

Moreover, traditional medicine, being frequently perceived as more "natural" and "holistic," often reinforces the rejection of conventional care [13]. Traditional medicine is deeply rooted in cultural and historical contexts, representing healing methods, values, and beliefs. For example, many people view herbal medicines, spiritual healing methods, and acupuncture as safer alternatives, believing they offer more permanent solutions compared to what they perceive as merely symptomatic relief provided by modern psychiatric treatments. Although traditional medicines are culturally acceptable, they lack the rigorous scientific evidence that conventional medicine features. For example, St. John's Wort, which has been found applicable in the management of depression, have limited or inconclusive evidence compared to extensive studies supporting psychotherapy and pharmacotherapy [14, 15].

This review will critically explore common misconceptions about traditional mental health remedies, particularly in rural settings. Simultaneously, it will emphasise the advantages of the integrative care model that combines conventional medicine with evidence-based practice, supporting a more inclusive and comprehensive mental healthcare model that will be scientifically proven and culturally acceptable.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

*Conventional Medicine Approaches in Mental Health Management.* Conventional medicine, known as Western or Orthodox medicine, is the cornerstone of managing mental illnesses and is rich in scientific knowledge, clinical competence, and evidence-based practice. In the context of conventional medicine, mental health care predominantly involves the administration of pharmaceutical interventions and psychotherapies, both of which are constantly refined through rigorous clinical studies.

At the core of conventional medicine is its reliance on empirical evidence from controlled interventions, making it a key component of modern healthcare [11]. The combination of psychopharmacological therapies and psychotherapies has recorded success in managing a variety of mental health conditions, including depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety, and schizophrenia [16].

People commonly take medications such as antidepressants, antipsychotics, and mood stabilisers to address chemical (neurotransmitter) imbalances in the brain, which many researchers believe are disrupted in various mental health conditions. Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) and serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs) are usually indicated for depression as they work to regulate serotonin and norepinephrine imbalance in individuals suffering from mood disorders [17]. Antipsychotic medications, including the typical and atypical, are usually indicated for schizophrenia, in which dopamine imbalance contributes to symptoms like hallucinations and delusions. These medications have undergone rigorous clinical trials, and their roles effectively investigate the handling of different mental health disorders.

Psychotherapy, like Psychopharmacological medications, is an integral part of the conventional approach to mental health. Research has demonstrated that Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

(CBT) helps treat depression, anxiety, and PTSD [18]. CBT helps in identifying and changing harmful thought patterns and behaviours that are contributing to mental health problems. It teaches individuals coping mechanisms, problem-solving abilities, and techniques to handle stress and improve emotions. Moreover, Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) and psychodynamic therapy help individuals understand their feelings and resolve underlying psychological disorders that may affect their mental health [19, 20]. Healthcare providers frequently offer these therapies in an organised and timely setting, and they have proven instrumental in helping patients cope with their condition and minimise the likelihood of relapse [21].

Incorporating evidence-based medicine (EBM) into traditional medicine in the context of mental health care ensures healthcare professionals follow the most current scientifically proven guidelines. EBM practice guides the treatment recommendations that mental health practitioners use, guaranteeing the rational use of medications. Previous studies have consistently shown that SSRIs considerably relieve depressed symptoms in the majority of patients, making them useful as first-line therapies [22]. Likewise, CBT has consistently been shown to be effective in treating anxiety and depression, establishing its status as a first-line therapy [23]. Despite the strong evidence supporting conventional therapies, misconception about their usage continues, particularly in rural settings. Notably, among the miscommunications is that traditional therapies (psychopharmacological agents) provide just short-term relief without addressing the root cause of mental health disorders. Many believe that medications such as antidepressants only mask symptoms and do not provide permanent recovery, causing some to reject all pharmacological therapy [12]. On the other hand, pharmacological therapies, when combined with psychotherapy, can give long-term beneficial outcomes and lower likelihood of relapse [21]. Additionally, research shows that patients who receive both medication and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) for depression have better long-term outcomes than those who receive one treatment [16].

Another popular misconception is that psychopharmacological medications are addictive or can be detrimental when used for long periods [12]. Many routinely prescribed drugs do not provide evidence to support this assumption.

SSRIs and SNRIs are non-addictive and have minimal and tolerable side effects when used for long [24, 25]. SSRIs are typically considered safe for long-term administration, unlike benzodiazepines, which can develop into dependence [25]. The fear of addiction and dependence has contributed to some people in rural areas refusing psychopharmacological therapy, preferring alternative treatments that may lack the rigorous evidence foundation of pharmacological medicines.

Despite these challenging misconceptions, properly and mindfully integrating conventional medicine practices can result in a more holistic and inclusive care model that will be highly acceptable. For example, acupuncture is included in treatment programs for individuals receiving conventional care, particularly those experiencing side effects from medications or those preferring non-pharmacological interventions [26, 27]. Such integration can provide patients with a larger range of therapy alternatives, potentially increasing treatment adherence and overall satisfaction with care.

*Traditional Medicine Approaches in Mental Health Management.* Diverse communities base traditional medicine on their cultural practices, values, and beliefs, and it plays a vital role in managing mental health, especially in rural and underserved areas. The methods are usually diverse, covering various treatments, including herbal remedies, acupuncture, spiritual healing, and other traditional interventions. Many people frequently believe that conventional medicine is more holistic. It focuses on the individual's mind, body, and spirit, while conventional medicine addresses specific symptoms or biochemical abnormalities according to some schools of thought. Despite its historical and cultural relevance, traditional medicine's effectiveness in mental health management is still being debated and researched.

Herbal medicine is one of the most common types of traditional medicine employed in the management of mental health issues, with many plant-based drugs believed to be therapeutically effective. However, compared to conventional medicine, the clinical evidence supporting the broad use of herbal remedies in mental health care is frequently insufficient; this is because many traditional drugs do not undergo the rigorous scientific examination required by evidence-based medicine (EBM), and their efficacy varies

depending on preparation, dosage, and individual response. For example, a study on lavender oil suggests that it can alleviate anxiety and stress-related restlessness, but the conditions for a well-established use are not met [28].

Acupuncture, which is another standard traditional medicine, is becoming popular as a potential adjuvant therapy for a variety of mental health conditions, including depression, anxiety, and stress. Acupuncture originates from traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), which involves inserting small needles into specific sites on the body to encourage energy flow or restore balance and promote healing. Researchers believe that the practice impacts the neurological system and alters brain chemistry. However, scientists are still investigating the precise mechanisms. Acupuncture may help relieve anxiety symptoms when used with conventional therapy, according to clinical trials [29]. However, the evidence for acupuncture, like that of herbal medicines, is inconsistent, and more research is needed to determine its long-term efficacy in mental health care.

Moreover, traditional medicine frequently incorporates spiritual healing and practices such as meditation, prayer, and rituals. Practitioners commonly use these methods alongside other treatments, based on the theory that spiritual forces influence mental health. While such techniques are difficult to prove using scientific methods, there is an increasing understanding of their possible psychological advantages. Meditation is gaining popularity due to its ability to relieve stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms [30, 31]. Furthermore, prayer and spiritual activities can provide individuals with hope and support, which are essential in mental health rehabilitation. However, scientific research has provided limited validation of spiritual healing, and many practitioners view it as a supplementary or complementary technique rather than a primary treatment for mental health conditions.

Despite its extensive use, traditional medicine has severe drawbacks compared to conventional treatments. One primary concern is the lack of reliable scientific studies supporting the efficacy and safety of many conventional therapies. Unlike orthodox medicine, which uses randomised controlled trials (RCTs) and large-scale clinical research to establish therapeutic efficacy, traditional medicine frequently relies on anecdotal evidence and historical use. One of the funda-

mental reasons why mainstream medical practitioners and researchers view conventional approaches to mental health with scepticism is the lack of empirical proof. Furthermore, traditional medicine lacks defined standards for diagnosis and treatment, which can lead to variances in the quality of care delivered.

Additionally, there are safety concerns when traditional treatments are utilised without sufficient guidance or monitoring. While many herbal remedies are generally considered safe owing to the claim that they are of natural sources, they can interact with pharmaceutical drugs, causing adverse side effects. St. John's Wort has been linked to decreased effectiveness of various medications, including oral contraceptives and anticoagulants [32]; this emphasises the significance of combining traditional methods and orthodox medicine to promote patient safety while respecting cultural choices and beliefs.

*Comparing the Features of Conventional and Traditional Medicine Approaches in Mental Health Management.* Traditional approaches employed in mental healthcare differ in their unique advantages and disadvantages. To effectively manage mental health conditions, conventional medicine solely relies on pharmacological treatment options and pharmacotherapies such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), which is founded on proven scientific findings. However, there are issues of rejection from the rural communities based on some claims and misconceptions, including side effects and misconceptions about their long-term efficacy. Traditional medicine, which includes herbal medicines, acupuncture, and spiritual practices, provides a more holistic approach. Still, it lacks the scientific validation of conventional treatments and can pose safety risks, especially when co-administered with psychopharmacological agents. Table 1 compares both approaches, exploring their strengths and weaknesses.

Table 1 – Comparing Features of Conventional and Traditional Medicine Approaches in Mental Healthcare

Comparing Characteristics	Conventional Medicine Approaches	Traditional Medicine Approaches
Definition	Evidence-based, scientifically sound, and pharmacological interventions	Holistic, culturally rooted approaches (e.g., herbal remedies, acupuncture, spiritual healing), historically passed among generations
Common Treatments	Include Antidepressants, antipsychotics, mood stabilisers, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), and Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT)	Include Herbal remedies, acupuncture, meditation, spiritual healing, and prayer.
Efficacy	Clinically proven with a strong evidence base; effective for a wide range of mental health conditions	Variable (often not reproducible methods) usually lack robust scientific evidence; effectiveness may vary based on individual response and treatment method.
Safety	Medications and therapies are rigorously tested for safety; however, side effects and interactions can occur, which are usually tolerable when rationally used	Safety concerns may arise owing to a lack of standardisation; herbal medicines can interact with prescription medicine (e.g., St. John's Wort), and acupuncture can cause injury if misused.
Scientific Basis	Backed by scientific research and clinical trials	Largely anecdotal or based on historical use; some practices supported by emerging research (e.g., acupuncture, meditation)
Side Effects	Well-documented side effects; potential for adverse reactions with medications	Variable potential for interactions with conventional medications and safety concerns with unsupervised use
Accessibility	Widely available in most healthcare systems, often covered by insurance	Limited availability, available in Indigenous communities of origin, may require out-of-pocket expenses
Cultural Acceptance	Often viewed as foreign (western), but widely accepted in many regions	Strong cultural significance, particularly in non-Western societies, may be preferred in rural or underserved areas

*Challenges in Integrating Conventional and Traditional Medicine Practices and Future Directions.* While healthcare systems and practitioners find promise in integrating orthodox and traditional medical approaches in mental health care, they often encounter various obstacles that they must address to build a more inclusive, effective, and sustainable care model. One such challenge, which is very significant, is the scarcity of resources available for implementing evidence-based therapies in areas where traditional medicine is predominant. In many rural or underserved regions, access to modern mental health professionals and infrastructure is limited, which hinders the adoption of orthodox medicine [33]. This issue of limited resources is usually worsened by the scarcity of skilled healthcare professionals capable of bridging the gap. In such cases, implementing evidence-based medicine (EBM) as a standard for mental health care can be challenging without significant investment in education, personnel and infrastructure. As a result, patients frequently turn to traditional treatment options, which may not meet the same rigorous safety and efficacy requirements as conventional medicine.

However, the lack of proven scientific evidence to support many traditional medicinal approaches remains challenging. The broader medical community views traditional treatments skeptically due to the lack of large-scale, high-quality clinical trials that test their efficacy. While certain conventional practices, such as acupuncture and herbal remedies, have shown promise in addressing mental health conditions, the evidence base remains limited and inconsistent. However, integrating traditional approaches into formal health systems becomes impossible without the kind of rigorous, peer-reviewed research that distinguishes orthodox medicine. Research on conventional medicine is sometimes of inconsistent quality, with small sample sizes, methodological errors, or biases that impair its reliability [34]; this provides a hurdle to traditional medicine's general acceptance in mainstream healthcare, especially in situations where patients anticipate treatments that have been shown effective.

Another issue of significant concern is that of cultural attitudes toward mental health care. In many societies, especially in rural areas, there remains a strong stigma attached to seeking professional help for mental health issues [35]. Due

to this stigma, those who suffer from mental health conditions may be reluctant to seek treatment due to fear of judgment or ostracism. Moreover, a lack of mental health literacy in these areas implies that people may not fully understand the nature and pathology of mental health conditions to be able to appreciate the benefits of conventional medicine. For example, there is a view that psychiatric drugs mask symptoms without delivering long-term treatment, and this leads to opting for alternatives [12]. Therefore, overcoming such cultural obstacles necessitates education, awareness, and a sensitive and inclusive strategy honouring and incorporating cultural values.

Aside from cultural and resource constraints, there is also the question of professional development and teamwork. Mental health practitioners, whether from orthodox or traditional backgrounds, frequently operate under discrete paradigms that do not intersect. This difference makes it challenging to develop a collaborative model that includes the best features of both approaches. Moreover, training programs for mental health professionals, particularly in rural areas, tend to focus on either orthodox approaches or traditional healing practices, with few collaborative characteristics to promote integration. This division limits collaboration and mutual understanding among practitioners of both systems. However, there is a growing interest in multidisciplinary training, in which mental health workers receive education in conventional medicine and traditional healing approaches. Such initiatives could help bridge the gap by encouraging mutual respect and cooperation among therapeutic techniques while improving patient care.

Moving forward, resolving these issues will require a multifaceted approach. One promising trend is the growing drive to incorporate traditional medicine into official healthcare systems. In countries like India and China, conventional medicine has received more attention as a supplemental treatment option [36], as they have also received advanced scientific examination in the same way as orthodox medicines, which has aided in determining their safety and efficacy. However, it is noteworthy that the World Health Organisation (WHO) has promoted integrating traditional medicine into national healthcare systems by offering guidelines for the safe and effective use of herbal remedies and complementary therapies [1].

Another crucial future path is to increase mental health knowledge and understanding, particularly in underserved and rural communities. Education initiatives focused on de-stigmatising mental health concerns and highlighting the benefits of obtaining professional care may be effective in reprogramming people's views for the better. Community-based interventions, including traditional healers and modern mental health specialists, may be particularly beneficial. Such treatments could help patients appreciate the strengths and limitations of both systems, prompting them to seek a more integrated approach to treatment that incorporates the best of both worlds.

Additionally, advances in technology featuring telemedicine and mobile health platforms have the potential to significantly reduce some of the barriers to accessing professional mental healthcare. In many rural and underserved populations, healthcare providers can use technology to deliver evidence-based therapies remotely, including psychotherapy and medication management. These platforms may also facilitate communication between traditional and orthodox practitioners, allowing them to work together.

Ultimately, the future of mental health management depends on creating a more inclusive care model that recognises the importance of orthodox and traditional medicine. To achieve this,

considerable effort needs to be geared towards research, education, and policymaking, as well as the creation of an environment that encourages the integration of various techniques that will embrace the benefits of both systems, allowing for a more effective and equitable mental health care system that values cultural diversity and supports the well-being of all persons.

## CONCLUSIONS

In exploring the significance of evidence-based medicine (EBM) in mental health management, this review showed substantial disparities and potential for integrating orthodox and traditional medical methods into an inclusive care model.

However, integrating orthodox and traditional medicine faces several challenges, including cultural stigma, limited resources, and the need for thorough research. Addressing these challenging factors necessitates investments in research, education, and interdisciplinary collaboration.

Finally, the future of mental health care is dependent on our capacity to develop an evidence-based system that is also culturally sensitive, as the worldwide society faces an escalating prevalence of mental health issues. By integrating the benefits of conventional medicine, we can improve treatment outcomes, increase societal acceptance, and ensure that care is both scientifically sound and acceptable.

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