EXPLANATORY MODELS OF SCHIZOPHRENIA IN THE TZ'UTUJIL MAYA

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Background: This qualitative study was part of a larger study of untreated schizophrenia in Guatemala conducted in 2001 which has not previously been published. At that time there was limited access to mental health care, medical care and television in Santiago Atitlán. This resulted in limited influence of the medical explanatory models in the community.
Methods: Individuals with schizophrenia were identified and diagnosed by psychiatrists using the SCAN. Over a seven-month period, 20 family members of individuals with schizophrenia and 40 community leaders were interviewed. Three individuals being treated for schizophrenia by a traditional healer were followed.
Objectives: This study examined how this Tz'utujil community identified, interpreted, explained and treated individuals with the syndrome "ch'ornaj", a psychotic disorder consistent with schizophrenia. The primary objective was to examine the explanatory models of illness of ch'ornaj, including how the local community described, identified, and interpreted the disorder.
Results: In Tz' utujil ch'ornaj refers to an illness of the mind. There are seven explanatory models of ch'ornaj. Three are individual causes: interpersonal conflict (example, mal de ojo); breaking community norms (example, possession by spirits) and breaking religious morality (example, possession by the devil). Four structural causes for ch'ornaj were identified: sociopolitical – internal armed conflict and state terror (example, nervios and PTSD), economic – poverty (example malnutrition), external – tourism (example, substance abuse), and physical – injuries to the body (example, traumatic brain injury). Rilaj Mam is a symbol of the hybridity in which Mayan culture navigates both traditional and western paradigms
Discussion: This study also showed the multidimensionality of ch' ornaj, one constituted and experienced through the Tz'utujil worldview and the other the catholic or evangelical renditions. The findings highlight the need for mental health services aligned with the cultural and spiritual beliefs of the Maya population.

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Learning Objectives
At the conclusion of this presentation, participants will be able to:
1. Gain an understanding of explanatory models of disease in an indigenous community that has had limited exposure to medical model of schizophrenia.
2. Describe examples of the seven individual and explanatory and structural models of schizophrenia.