

Healing Practices In Nasinu Village Vanua Levu, Fiji
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Introduction

Healing practices in Vanua Levu, Fiji represent a type of traditional knowledge that is used for ailments including sore throat, scratched eye, wind sickness, pink eye, stomach aches, broken bones and other various aches and pains. Healing in combination with traditional medicine among the people of Nasinu village was utilized as a means of treatment alternative to the expensive and distant hospital care. Healing in the village is a practice that has become integrated into the current belief system, and today continues to be a common practice among the villagers. Healing is used by the majority (if not all) of the people in the village and is an aspect of familial knowledge that is passed down through successive generations. Healing in general is an important aspect of village culture because of the reliance on its success rate and the secondary use of western medicine (the hospital). Healing is a type of traditional Fijian knowledge that is not only useful but aides in understanding the Fijian way of life.

Literature on this particular topic includes assessments of indigenous knowledge, Fijian views of the body and sickness, and other specific examples of healing in Fiji. In addition to this literature reviewing the difference and usefulness of both traditional medicine and modern medicine can be used to further understand healing practices in general. Healing is a type of indigenous knowledge that is passed down and has been recorded by various scholars.

Indigenous knowledge can be important when trying to understand the environment and various medicinal plants that are used in healing practices (Veitayaki 377). In addition this traditional knowledge has been contrasted to what is labeled as 'western' ideals of body and self (Kaplan 501). Traditional knowledge Fiji is obviously different to what others in various parts of the world experience and many scholars have found that this traditional knowledge can be useful to outsiders and easily contrasted to other forms of knowledge. Healing has also been said to have

spiritual connotations that make the practice of it some what ritualized (Biesele 757). All of these authors combine to create a literature on healing that encompasses its nature, importance as well as how it compares to other forms of medicine dissimilar to it.

The literature available has provided an overview of healing that is somewhat vague and results in a more in depth focus on the healing practices used in the various communities. In these works of literature, there is no representation of the way that the healing works, the various materials used, and the raw data associated with understanding it in an everyday context.

Through ethnographic interviews the literature could be shifted to include those accounts of healing, the way that healing works, the history and origins of it, as well as the various ailments treated. By exploring healing from a perspective that focuses more on its usage, the information that could be discovered would include those things that are missing from the current literature.

This paper (and research) seeks to understand healing in an everyday context, as well as attempting to understand the ways that this traditional form of knowledge is integrated into the current belief system in Nasinu village.

Methods

To collect information about healing practices in Fiji, a number of ethnographic methods can be used to aide in this study. Ethnographic interviews and participant observation represent the bulk of the practices in which information was gathered about healing in the village. By living in the village as a home stay for the duration of a month, this research could be conducted from a perspective more similarly to that of a community member or villager. There were 8 interviews conducted as well as multiple occasions where healing or the use of traditional medicine was witnessed first hand. This project attempts to study healing in Nasinu village and includes both

men and women as healers and practitioners of traditional medicine. This research design is limited by the time frame that this research will be gathered in. One month is a limitation of the research's ability to gather numerous accounts of healing, interviews and to ensure the validity of the interviews. This research will seek to answer questions including: what is healing, how does healing work, what is used in healing practices, how prominent is healing in village life, and how is healing incorporated into Fijian culture. These questions will be primarily addressed through interviews and participant observation to gather information from the people of Nasinu village.

Results

There are a number of various healing practices in Nasinu village including healing of the throat, eye, stomach, back, bones, heart, head, skin, and treatments for infertility. Healing is used by both men and women in the village where their abilities are inherited bilaterally from both parents. These healing abilities are inevitable, meaning that if a person has a parent who can heal they will also be able to heal. You only inherit the abilities that your parents possess, but you can inherit more than one ability if both parents contribute or if a parent can heal multiple ailments (that were inherited from their parents). Healing in general is learned from the parent that you inherited the abilities from. For example, in multiple interviews informants claimed that they either learned from their mother or their father at various ages ranging from 3-15. These practices are inherited but also learned, where practicing the type of healing will lead to a better execution of that healing type.

Healing is an extensive method of healthcare within the village of Nasinu and could even be considered their primary mode of care for sickness. When presenting with a particular ailment (like those listed above) a person will proceed to a healer before going to the hospital or in lieu

of medical care altogether. Each healer treated individuals at varying rates where those treated for a scratched eye and choking is done roughly once a month, but wind sickness is more common and is treated almost every week. In addition there was one healer that I interviewed that did healing for pink eye. This is a common disease and his family are the only ones who do this type of healing, so in this case the healing was done more often due to lack of healers. Each healer is specialized in their trade and has a very high success rate; a success rate that was orally recorded to be 100%. With its highly effective results, healing maintains popularity over any modern/western medical practices.

Healers in the village were recorded to not only be able to heal themselves, but also visited healers for ailments they could not heal. On more than one account, healers said that they visited other healers in their own village or in neighboring villages around the bay for various sicknesses. For example in my seventh interview, the man who was the primary healer for pink eye was currently suffering from an illness himself. He claimed that he had visited a healer but that he had not been healed. He attributed the little success to the fact that this healer was unknown to him and that it was his first time visiting this particular individual. Even with this example of a time when healing did not seem to work, each healer maintain their belief in their abilities and the abilities of others to heal. If healing fails it is attributed not to the ineffective healing but rather to the ineffective healer; the concept or tradition is not faulty, but rather the specific individual.

Healing in general is done by massaging the area affected by a particular disease or ailment. In the case of a stomachache, the healer would massage both the front and back of the stomach area in order to sooth the pain. Similarly, each healer would locate an area on the body where the sickness resided: in the case of choking or soar throat the throat was massaged, for

headaches the head and neck, for wind sickness the part of the skin that was inflamed, and so on. Each illness would be massaged with the hands of the healer, sometimes with the use of coconut oil to aide in the healing process. Others would use specific plants that worked in conjunction with their healing type. For instance in the case of a scratched eye, the healer would chew a leaf called Kove Kove and blow air into the eye (without removing the leaf or letting it exit the mouth). This type of healing works in combination with the use of medicinal plants as did many other types of healing. Whereas others did not use any type of plants, like in the case of wind sickness only the hands were used for massaging.



Figure 1: Nasinu village wind sickness healer

In addition to the healers that inherit their abilities/powers, there are also healers that use traditional medicine as a means of healing. In two of the interviews conducted in this research,

the healers were not inherently able to heal, but rather used their environment and the knowledge passed down to them to heal individuals. Ailments that can be healed by plants include chest colds, boils, infertility and heart problems (to name a few). These healers would use various plants in order to heal their patients including leaves and bark that could be made into drinkable concoctions. These treatments could vary in the way that these (non) healers would make them, how long they were to be taken for, and for what purpose they served. Each medicinal healer had learned their practice much like those innate healers. The knowledge was passed down from a parent in oral or written form. One informant even admitted to having a book filled with medicine made from plants in the village that her mother had recorded and given to her. These healers worked much like the innate healers where people with certain ailments would come to them for help. The main difference between these healers and the innate healers is their inability to inherit powers or abilities.



Figure 2: Guava leaves used in the healing of upset stomach

Sickness was described by many of the informants in various ways, all of them relating to the actions made by the individuals themselves. Sickness was seen to be caused by the actions of the individual. These sickness causing actions were recorded to be actions that were either unusual, wrong or somehow causing the person to be exposed to the outside (or possibly something bad) for a time. In interview six, the informant claimed that to Fijians sickness was caused by eating something that one shouldn't eat, shouldn't wear, or shouldn't do. For example, there is a *tabu*, or something that is taboo, restricting women from wearing pants outside of the house. This according to the informant could result in sickness. In addition eating too much food, according to interview eight, eating at the incorrect times (not breakfast, lunch and dinner) can result in sickness of the heart. In interview six she also describes actions including being too loud as a result of drunkenness as something that could cause sickness. All of these actions contribute to the onset of illness and should be avoided if at all possible.

Healing has been completely integrated into the current belief system of the Nasinu people. Healing comes traditionally from the parents and furthermore ancestors of the Fijian people and is passed down from generation to generation. Although this practice has been incorporated into the Fijians Christian beliefs. The healing practices were said by informants to be a gift from god, although simultaneously being a somehow genetic component passed down from the parents of an individual. In interview 2, the informant claimed that healing was given to her by god when she was born. This is a combination of both the Christian belief system and what is traditionally a Fijian practice.

In addition healing has also become integrated into the catholic belief system through the use of holy water as well as other practices. The priest of the Catholic Church was referred to as

a healer, although his abilities were not inherited and rather he used prayer as a way to heal. Holy water was utilized for specific ailments like demon possession or in the case of extreme (disease related) circumstances. For example, seizures are symptomatic of demon possession and can be healed through the use of holy water by various healers in the village and/or the priest. Holy water can be used by any of the healers although it is more commonly used by Catholics or in extreme circumstances. In interview four, the informant described a time when her daughter was sick and she used holy water, by spreading it on her and making her drink it, to heal her ailments.

Healing is an extensive part of Fijian culture and a crucial form of healthcare for the people of Nasinu. Most of the people in the village visit healers before seeking medical care from the hospital and they rely on its success as a means of traditional medicine. Healing has been described by answering questions like: what is healing, how does healing work, what is used in healing practices, how prominent is healing in village life, and how is healing incorporated into Fijian culture. Healing practices have been explained by those of Nasinu village in these various ways through numerous ethnographic interviews to allude at a new perspective/insight into the practice of healing in Fiji.

Analysis

The results of this study alluded to a perspective of healing that is unique to the village of Nasinu, but also unique because of the information that was gathered. Previously healing had been studied in an overarching way or by describing the various ways that healing is a part of traditional knowledge or other aspects of indigenous culture. This study sought to see healing as a unique aspect of culture separate from large themes. This study was aimed to gather information about the day-to-day aspects of healing as well as what it means to those people who

use it. This study was done in order to explain what healing was but also to understand how these methods exist in Nasinu culture specifically. Previous articles spoke of the importance of healing and traditional knowledge but lacked explanations of the types of healing, methodologies, usage, and meaning to those who use it. The results gathered in this study are meaningful because they suggest that healing is the primary type of healthcare while modern medicine is used secondarily. This notion supports previous literature's claims of how important indigenous knowledge is to the people of Fiji. Although, this research takes a more in depth look at how healing works as a type of care as well as its importance as a part of traditional knowledge and place in the overall culture.

Conclusion

Healing in this project has been described by informants in the village of Nasinu through ethnographic interviews and participant observation of healing practices. This research has added to the overall knowledge of healing in the Fijian islands and to healing practices in among indigenous populations or in general. The use of both medicinal plants and healing abilities are a prominent feature in Nasinu culture and can be seen as important aspects of their lifestyle. Previous literature has aided in this understanding although this research provides another angle to the topic. First hand experience with traditional healing and medicinal plant use has provided additional information about healing as well as shown that healing is still a viable way of treating illness in Fiji today.

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Appendix

Healing Interviews: Fiji
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Healing Interview 1

Ima Nono
28
Female

- healing is inherited from both the father and the mother
- they can have multiple healing abilities because of this
- ears, eyes, knees, throat, and skin ailments are all treated by healers
- women do more healing
- you start healing when you are young
- her mother showed her how
- she said that the more they practice the better they get
- healing is done by women because they are at home all day
- sometimes they use oil to aide in healing
- men can inherit healing powers as well
- healing is done two-three times
- most of the time it works
- people will go to the healer before going to the hospital
- healers can slow down the sickness or stop it completely
- they will go to the healer on the way to the hospital while they are waiting for the cab to come
- when the sickness is really bad the healers can use holy water from the Catholics to aide in the healing
- anyone can ask to use the holy water
- the Catholics are the ones that haled Lote when he was sick
- he went to the hospital simply to make sure he was alright
- the healing works most of the time
- she does healing of the ear which she inherited from her mom, but is also able to speed up the walking process in young childish by moving their legs around

Healing Interview 2

Vika Dilecaleca
29
Female

- she does healing of the eye (inside the eye) and healing of the throat
- she started when she was 15
- she saw her grandma doing it and because he blood is the same as there she can also do it
- she started practicing on small kids
- 1/3 of the village can heal
- its like a gift from god
- they cannot teach people to do it its in your blood
- the people who cannot do it probs have parents who cannot either
- most people go to healers when something is wrong
- this is the first step before the hospital
- her mom has more experienced so Vika is still learning
- for choking they use the coconut oil to massage the throat
- for the eye they use a leaf called Kove Kove
- they chew the Kove Kove then blow a breath (not the leaf) into the wounded eye
- broken bones, wind problem (daunicagi-healers for wind problem), pink eye healer (dausevaseva), broken bone healer (dauniveivovo), throat healer (dauniveiyamo), boils (dauniyabo).
- anyone can use holy water

- Lote was brought back to conscientiousness with holy water
- the Catholics use the holy water but anyone can be healed with it
- when people have demons they can use the holy water to get rid of it
- if someone has a demon they can pray with the priest and the demon will leave
- healing was given to her by god when she was born
- usually they heal with their hands by massaging

Healing Interview 3

Losana Soqovata

Female

- massaging of the whole body
- treats headache, stomach, and fever
- she has been healing since she was married-26 years
- she uses medicine to treat as well
- Bote Bote Koro for the stomach ach
- lemon is used for coughing
- bosucei is used for high blood pressure
- both of the medicines are a type of plant
- she inherited her healing from her dad
- her dad taught her how to do it
- he started teaching her when she was 9 years old
- she started with massaging for leg and back pain
- she heals both men and women
- her dad used to heal a lot
- most people in the village go to healers
- her family does not visit the hospital when sick, they do massaging and Fijian medicine
- her dad taught her mom to do the massaging as well
- you can be taught to heal as well as born with
- you have to inherit some part of the healing ability
- when she turned nine that's when the powers developed
- she does healing only when someone is sick somewhere like 1 a month possibly more
- the healing always works
- she has never seen a time that it did not work
- when she does massages there is a particular way that she had to learn from her dad
- she does back, legs and head
- she focuses on the neck muscles for the pain
- for a stomach ache she would massage the front and back of the stomach area
- for a headache she focuses on the head, scalp and face area
- she uses home made charcoal for diarrhea then drink it with water

Healing Interview 4

Kalesi Vodonaika

Female

- she does healing of the wounded eye and choking
- she inherited these from her mom
- she knew she could heal when she was in primary school
- she started healing at this time
- she did not have to learn but just watched her mom
- her dad did healing for chest pain, he did massages
- her dad used to have a shed and would treat people for all kinds of sickness
- drana leaf –use the skin an boil with water, then you drink it
- chest pain, stomach ache, headache are all treated with this
- he only massaged for chest pain and made medicine for pain
- dausolwai is the name for her dad chest pain healing and medicine

- the healing pairs with the use of plants for medicine
- when doing massages you give the medicine too
- matedina means all the sicknesses and it includes those that can be treated from the hospital
- having demons is also considered a sickness and the leaf he uses is for that as well
- for choking she uses coconut oil
- for wounded eye she used Kove Kove
- you chew the leaf and blow the air into the eye
- usually a healing heals by themselves, not with another person
- the holy water is for catholic belief but she can also use it
- she used it when Vika got sick and spread it on her
- Vika also drank some of it
- you can massage with the holy water as well as oil
- holy water is just drinking water in a bottle and you take it to the catholic priest who blesses the water
- you leave the water with him for one day then its holy water
- anyone can take the tap water to become holy water
- you use the holy water mostly with demon possession but for all sicknesses too
- whenever the medicine from the hospital has not worked then you use the holy water
- when people have seizures they use holy water
- seizures are usually a sign of demons and can happen to anyone of any age
- the catholic priest also does healing
- all the catholic members keep holy water in their house as a precaution
- they used to keep holy water in their house because Vika's grandma was a catholic
- Vika will teach her sons how to heal as well
- if someone is sick they can go to the priest and he will make a prayer
- you can go to the priest for any kind of sickness
- the priest only does healing through prayer
- the priests abilities and the ability to heal through massage are different skills but they all come from god
- usually she does healing one time a month
- she also visits healers
- healers have the ability to heal themselves
- she was in 6th grade when she learned
- the more you practice the better you are
- she has never not been able to heal someone
- Kalesi lili will also be able to do this and then will teach her in primary school

Healing Interview 5

Sevina Cagina

37

Female

- she does the healing of the eye on the outside
- she started doing healing in fourth grade
- she heals for the wind problem or cagi uca
- the wind sickness can also effect the other parts of the skin and causes a red itchy rash
- you can be at home and the certain kind of wind can blow and cause it
- sometimes she uses leaves, but most of the time just does massaging
- bote bote koro is the type of leaf
- you can use the leaf on any part of the body
- you squeeze the leaf in your hands then touch the effected skin
- she got this type of healing from her mom
- she only does wind healing
- her dad did not heal
- her mom taught her how to do it when she was younger
- she does a healing almost every week
- the wind sickness is more common than other types of sickness that need healing
- when the wind is a bit warm you can get the wind sickness, the spot will feel hot when it is effected

- she has never used holy water to heal with
- the holy water is usually used for demon possession
- uci is a type of leaf used for demon possession
- you can use uci instead of holy water but you can also use them together

Healing Interview 6

Sisilia Sovaia

70

Female

- she is a non-healer
- she uses a leaf for boils to heal them
- she uses the denibusi
- she also uses botebote nikore for boils
- draunirokete is also used for boils it is a leaf
- she just heals boils with plants
- she goes to healers to be healed
- she used to go to a healer for the wind sickness
- there are types of healers in the village
- the healers are choking, wounded eye, wind problem, boil, massage, pink eye, and soar throat
- for Fijians sickness is eating something you shouldn't eat
- uvi is more valuable than Kasava or other crops
- so this is a way that the ancestors could tell that someone was growing uvi
- it is more about the body, sickness is
- demon possession can be caused by something you did wrong in the village this way if you do not follow the rules you can get demon sickness
- so if the chief called for a community work ad you do not show up this can cause sickness
- breaking tabus can cause sickness
- these sicknesses from doing wrong can only be healed with Fijian medicine
- for ladies there is a tabu not to wear pants inside the house is fine
- no hats or shouting (like drunk people)
- so sickness in general is cause by a wrong action
- this is her opinion of this village of how sickness works
- she only does a healing when boils come
- boils are caused by the germs
- breaking the rules does not cause a specific disease but rather a disease in general
- those who have boils can sometimes or are more likely to have uvi farms
- so if a member of the family gets a boil it means that the men/father has an uvi farm

Healing Interview 7

Lemeki Matabogi

78

Male

- he does the healing of the eye
- he touches a bit of water then touches the pink eye as it is closed and massages it a little bit
- he can use any type of water
- he uses leaves too gasau (grass)
- the soft inside of the grass
- the water helps the healing
- in his genes and his small granddaughter (4) can do it
- he left school and started doing it he would practice after school
- the pink eye is common here and other villages would come here to see him be healed
- there are not many people that do it, only his family
- he is from the other village where his mom is from Krosi

- he inherited his healing skills from his father
- people from other villages used to come see his father too
- his father taught him how
- he saved a man once who had pink eye for a month and could not be healed by the hospital so someone told him to come see the healer, this man was a civil servant and when he came here the healer touched the eye and after two minutes the man fell asleep, when he awoke the pink eye was gone, the man rewarded him with false teeth
- people from nasinu also travel to other villagers for healers
- it depends on the people who need help whether or not they will bring him something in exchange
- normally people come to be healed every week
- if people get the pink eye they used to call him and he would go to them
- pink eye is caused by the amount of pain you have from being sick
- it can be caused from headache, back ache, or stomach ache
- treatment only fixes the eye
- if you are really sick from pink eye blood can come out of your nose
- you can be treated 2-3 times depending on how fast its getting better
- sickness to him is when you do weird things
- kids can get sickness from being outside instead of inside
- so sickness can come from being exposed to the outside or not taking care of yourself
- the sickness, he owns the land and needs to be respected and has the right to speak, so sickness can come from not following what he says
- where the people are planting is his land so if you keep planting and he says no you can get sick or someone in your family can get sick
- he is going to a healer, but he is still sick
- he did not know much about this healer but he thought he would try
- he has never tried to heal someone and It not worked
- he has never used the holy water to heal people he is not catholic

Healing Interview 8

Iva Pakidai

74

Female

- she does healing for infertility
- she gives those who are unable to have children a medicine
- she uses roots of the tomi tomi tree and and soni roots
- she collects the roots and grains it to give more liquid then adds 1 ½ inch of water, then you rap the whole thing in cloth, squeeze it and then you drink
- it lasts until all that's left when you squeeze is water (4 days)
- you should drink it before breakfast and before you sleep
- you take the medicine for four days
- this method has always worked
- she learned to do this from her mother
- her family is known for this medicine
- her mom left a notebook of all the medicines she made
- she also does medicine for heart problems
- uto dina is the name of the tree that is used as well as vesidina
- you use the trunk of the old trees for this medicine
- they are found in the bush
- scrape the bark from the tree
- there should be the same amount of each tree
- mix together and rap in cloth then you squeeze for four days and four nights
- you drink the same way as the other
- the type of healing she does is not in born, but she just learned the recipes from her mom
- people come to her for the recipes
- she makes a medicine 3 times a month
- medicine for high blood pressure

- tuvunidra-high blood pressure
- buaniviti-she uses the trunk of this tree
- it is not from here but found in the bush
- molikurukuru is a type of lemon
- it is like a normal lemon but they do not eat it-green
- use the trunk of both trees and same methods
- all her medicines are made with the same methods
- as long as the sickness is gone you do not have to take the medicine for all four days
- they have to eat at the right time and if you do not or you eat too much it is bad for the heart
- breakfast, lunch and dinner are the right times to eat, don't skip any but don't eat too much
- sickness is like eating the wrong food if you eat the food that does not do good for your body you will be sick
- good food prevents illness
- what food that is bad depends on each person
- eating the right food is the only thing that can prevent illness
- she has used holy water for healing
- she was in another place and got sick so the catholic people gave her holy water to drink and it helped her
- she is not catholic
- all kinds of sickness can be helped by holy water but mostly demon possession
- she helps people when they are possessed
- she forgot the name of the tree, but its beside her house she uses it to help with demon possession (burotukuna)
- she grabs leaves from the tree and adds water and squeezes
- you have to make the medicine with the person there
- jealousy of someone else of their possessions (things) can cause demon possession
- whoever does the cursing their victim will have a demon
- to curse you talk to the Fijian gods to the Vu
- if you worship a Fijian god then whatever they ask them to do will happen
- there are only a few Fijian gods
- different areas have different Vu's, here it is the salt lake Vu
- kava drinking can go along with talking to Fijian gods
- anyone can talk to the Fijian gods
- they want you to do things a certain way or else something bad can happen to you
- how the gods (Fijian) aren't as strong
- they think this is a good thing
- some people are infertile because the sperm and the egg do not match, and the medicine given is to help the two become compatible
- all of the medicine is from god, the medicine was made for a reason
- the medicine she gives can help women up to 70 after that no luck
- women in the village stop having babies in their fifties, children are healthy in these older women
- women in their fifties can have normal healthy babies