



ISSN Print: 2394-7500  
ISSN Online: 2394-5869  
Impact Factor: 5.2  
IJAR 2016; 2(8): 826-830  
www.allresearchjournal.com  
Received: 29-06-2016  
Accepted: 30-07-2016

**Dr. Mallarika Sarkar (Das)**  
Assistant Professor,  
Department of Sociology  
University of Gour Banga,  
Malda, West Bengal, India

**Smita Chakraborty**  
Research Scholar, Junior  
Research Fellow, UGC,  
Department of Sociology,  
Jadavpur University,  
West Bengal, Kolkata, India

**Correspondence**  
**Dr. Mallarika Sarkar (Das)**  
Assistant Professor  
Department of Sociology  
University of Gour Banga,  
Malda, West Bengal, India

## Alternative medical system

**Dr. Mallarika Sarkar (Das) and Smita Chakraborty**

### Abstract

Since the later half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there has been increasing public discontentment with conventional treatment, i.e., biomedicine or allopathic medicine. Instead of relying solely on biomedicine, citizens are increasingly seeking for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM), thus the interest in Alternative Medicine is continually escalating. In simple terms, Alternative Medicine refers to a group of diverse medical systems, practices and products that is not considered to be a part of conventional medicine. The trend is observable worldwide. Various studies confirm this trend. The reasons for this changing scenario are manifold. To depict this changing scenario this article attempts to provide an understanding of the increasing use of CAM therapy. Firstly, the paper attempts to define Complementary and Alternative medicine; Secondly, various features of Alternative Medicine are discussed to provide an understanding of its growing popularity; Thirdly, key differences between Complementary Medicine and Alternative Medicine are summarized; Fourthly, a range of Alternative Medical therapy is provided to acquaint us with various healing methods availed by the people; Fifthly, reasons for this changing scenario is highlighted; Sixthly, areas of ongoing controversy are discussed and finally the article projects the future scenario of CAM.

**Keywords:** Complementary and alternative medicine, biomedicine, holism, person-centered, therapeutic, empathetic communication, subjective approach, partnership

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Meaning and Definition of Alternative medicine

Defining Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) is a difficult task, because there is a constant change in the field. The notion of complementary medicine appeared only recently, since the 1970s. Historically before the term 'Alternatives' came into use, the phrases preferred by conventional physicians have been irregular medicine, fringe medicine, and quackery. The word Alternative Medicine literally means alternative to "something else". This "something else" is mainly referred to western medicine or allopathy or orthodox medicine. Existing definitions of the term 'alternative medicine' are often claimed to be inconclusive as they fail to address, firstly, the fundamental issue as to why they are 'alternative' and secondly, the diverse features of alternative medicine. However, the term has been defined in the following way: National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) defines CAM as "a group of diverse medical and health care systems, practices and products that are not presently considered to be part of conventional medicine". It can be defined as "a variety of therapeutic or preventive health care practices, such as homeopathy, naturopathy, chiropractic, and herbal medicine that do not follow generally accepted medical methods and may not have a scientific explanation for their effectiveness." Alternative medicine has been used in various countries like India and China much before the development of present day medical science. These include practices, which may be based on traditional medicine, folk knowledge, spiritual beliefs, or newly conceived approaches to healing. We can trace the roots of Complementary and Alternative medicine, thousands of years back to European healing traditions as well as to traditional Chinese medicine, Indian (Ayurvedic system) and other similar healing traditions across to world. These traditional medicine systems hold a common holistic approach; founded upon the assumption that well-being is linked intrinsically to the integration and balance of the whole person, i.e. body, mind and spirit in harmony with the environment and prevailing culture.

According to World Health Organization, (WHO), the terms "complementary medicine" or "alternative medicine" are used inter-changeably with traditional medicine in some countries. They refer to a broad set of health care practices that are not part of that country's own tradition and are not integrated into the dominant health care system. According to the works of Eskinazi, alternative medicines may be defined as an extensive set of healthcare practices that are not directly integrated into the dominant healthcare model, as they pose challenges to wide-ranging beliefs of the society as well as the integrated practices (i.e. cultural, economic, scientific, medical and educational).

According to Dr. S K Pal, in his article complementary and alternative medicine: an overview, Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) refers to a broad range of healing philosophies, approaches and therapies that exist largely outside the institutions where conventional health care is taught and provided. Cochrane Complementary Medicine Field, defines 'complementary and alternative medicine' as a broad domain of healing resources that encompasses all health systems, modalities, practices and their accompanying theories and beliefs, other than those intrinsic to the politically dominant health system of a particular society or culture in a given historical period. Complementary and Alternative medicine includes all such practices and ideas defined by their users as preventing or treating illness or promoting health and well-being.

## 2. Features of alternative medicine

The term Alternative Medicine means any form of medicine that is outside the main stream of western medicine. There are various features of Alternative Medicine. The features are as follows:

- a) **Holism:** The philosophy reflected in Complementary and Alternative Medicine is based on 'holism' or 'whole person approach'. It considers the health of a person as well – being, in its physical, mental, social and spiritual domain whereas modern medicine treats the body as a machine i.e. main emphasis is laid upon the physical aspects of life. Holistic approaches focus on the whole individual person rather than just diseased part of the body. Patients take an active role in the diagnosis and management of his/her illness. In this approach, health is defined as a state of physical well-being, mental alertness, socially adjusted, and spiritually developed and therefore holistic therapy aims to restore the harmony of body, mind and spirit. The unique feature of CAM therapy is that it addresses spirituality and the meaning of suffering directly unlike the conventional treatment.
- b) **Lifestyle:** Most of the systems under alternative medicine stress upon the maintenance of health by following healthy life styles i.e. they stress upon proper diet, exercise, human relations, sexuality, positive attitudes, clean environment, moral and spiritual values etc. All major CAM systems make these areas primary in disease treatment. Thus preventive and promotive aspects of health are given its due importance. The person is made conscious to maintain his total health.
- c) **Health as a dynamic state:** CAM therapy views health in its dynamic state rather than a static body. This dynamic definition of health focuses on resilience, or the capacity to cope against the challenges. This condition is described by the concept 'homeostasis, a self-regulating

process by which biological systems maintain stability while adjusting to changing conditions.

- d) **Healing:** CAM treatments are mainly directed towards strengthening the resilience, resistance and immune system of the individual concerned thereby reducing the susceptibility to illness. CAM therapy intends to heal a patient from within, fostering both care and cure and can be used complementary to conventional treatment, which is more disease focused. Alternative medicine addresses all kinds of disease.
- e) **Person-centered:** The individualized approach of CAM therapy, focus on treating the person rather than the condition and thereby the therapy vary to suit individual needs. It is a person-centered healthcare.
- f) **Health, stress and coping:** CAM treatment is concerned with the relationship between health, stress and coping. It focuses on factors that support human health and wellbeing, rather than on factors causing illness. The ultimate objective of the approach is to highlight the essential prerequisites for maintaining wellbeing and health and explores the reasons as to why some people stay healthy while others don't. This approach, central to CAM therapy, is not a common feature in biomedical realm.
- g) **Relationship of mutuality:** A positive therapeutic relationship between the patient and healthcare provider is another important feature of alternative medicine. People value the essential aspects central to CAM therapy such as empathetic communication, patient as an active participant in decision making about their treatment options, holistic approach and person-centered healthcare, and explanatory framework to deal with health and illness in consonance with the patient's needs, values, ethics, worldview and their own perception about health and illness.
- h) **Self-care and Patient Empowerment:** The concept of self-care, an important feature of CAM therapy requires an understanding of one's physical, mental and emotional state and the ability to take corrective action when required. Staying healthy therefore requires personal responsibility and involvement. When the patient develops this self-awareness and the knowledge to maintain health, he is empowered in truest sense. In this way, he is an active participant, the patient and healthcare professional act as partners.

The sum total of above reasoning has produced a positive faith in alternative medicine among the people. Thus, these are the various features of alternative medicines.

## 3. Differences between alternative medicines and complementary medicines

According to Arthritis Research, UK, (CAM) Complementary and alternative medicine comprises of various factors, such as:

- a) It tends to be holistic and includes therapies from various historical and cultural backgrounds
- b) It often needs the patient to take an active part in their own treatment with lifestyle changes (e.g. diet, exercise, meditation)
- c) It features therapies that are diverse in nature and origins. The ways in which these therapies are thought to work are also diverse, although many are based on the idea of enabling your body's ability to heal itself.

On the other hand, Conventional medicine also comprises of various factors such as:

- a) It mainly focuses on understanding and correcting the underlying problems that are causing the symptoms within the patients.
- b) It is often criticized for treating the patient's condition and not the patient as a person. It expects the patient to accept the diagnosis and treatment
- c) It does not recognize the importance of the patient's involvement and choice in their treatment.

Though the terms 'Alternative' medicine and 'Complementary' medicine are used interchangeably, there is difference between the two terms. One can differentiate between Alternative medicine and Complementary medicine by stating that Alternative medicines implies those treatments which a person uses instead of the conventional treatments known to them, while, complementary medicine implies the medicine that are used along with the conventional treatment. These non-mainstream health care practices can also be associated with the concept of integrative medicine, (or integrative health care), which combines both the mainstream medical therapies as well as complementary and alternative medicine. Many a times the people who suffer from cancer are provided with integrative health care approaches. The integrative health care approaches includes either providing the service of acupuncture or meditation or even yoga to help manage symptoms as well as the effect of the bio-medicines that are applied to the individuals for the cure of their disease. These cancer patients also undergo conventional treatments such as chemotherapy. Thus, CAM and AM are different from each other.

#### 4. Range of alternative medical systems

There are ranges of alternative medical systems in the present century. The various alternative medical systems present in the society are as follows:

- a) **Aromatherapy:** It treats an individual's inner state of mind. In many occasions, it helps the people to regain their normal mental condition and helps them to lead a better life ahead. It uses natural materials from the plants as well as a few aromatic oils or other aroma filled compounds. It's prime objective is to change the mood of the individual and thereby lead to both psychological and physical wellbeing.
- b) **Acupressure:** It is a type of alternative medicine in which the healer treats the symptoms by applying pressure with their fingers to the specific pressure points that are present in the human body. This process is said to reduce the stress level of the people, diminishes menstrual cramps, arthritis as well as other aches in the human body.
- c) **Acupuncture:** It is another measure of treating pain/disease by inserting the needle points at strategic points of the human body. It controls the flow of the vital energies within the body as restores a positive and healthy energy balance after the treatment procedure is over. It is popular in treating acute diseases among children as well as adults.
- d) **Astrology:** It is the study of the position of planets by which it assumes and attempts to interpret the positive/negative influence of the heavenly bodies into

the life of the individuals. It is believed by throng of individuals to promote positive result.

- e) **Ayurveda:** It is the traditional form of healing. It developed around 5000 years ago. It is referred to as the "Mother of all Healing". It puts an emphasis on the anticipation and encouragement for the healthy preservation of one's life by following a balanced life-style in accordance with a proper diet.
- f) **Auricular Therapy:** The practice of this therapy can be found in the ancient Egyptian writings which states that pain of a person can be reduced if the healer stimulates specific points on the ear of the patient. On many occasions, massaging as well as palpating specific points in the ear can also reduce physical pain of a patient.
- g) **Auto-Urine Therapy:** This practice is mainly associated with the Hindu system of Yoga. It makes the patients to use their own urine as food and medicine as it is believed to promote restorative healing agent. It also acts as a booster in the immunity system of mankind.
- h) **Bach Flower Remedies:** This is another practice of healing through the medium of using herbals. It is one kind of floral remedy, which is believed to change the patterns of disharmony within a person, as well as changes his emotional state of mind.
- i) **Chromo therapy:** It is also known as colour therapy. In this, the uses of colours are essential to bring about healing effects among the human beings.
- j) **Chinese Medicine:** The Oriental medical practitioners practice it. The healers are trained in using traditional as well as modern therapeutic methods like acupuncture, massage, heat therapy, nutritional guidance and so on. These methods helps the patients to be treated from a variety of diseases which are many a times acute in nature.
- k) **Chiropractic:** The spinal cord is the prime element in the human body and the practitioners of chiropractic believes that diseases strike a person due to less care taken of the spine. Trauma or mental pressure of an individual affects the backbone, which thereby creates further pain in the body. Most of the time, people do not know the right posture to sit, which thereby leads to misalignment of the spinal cord and thus inevitably leads to health problems in the future.
- l) **Counseling:** It is one form of psychotherapy, which deals with one to one individual. The counselors deals with depression, stress, addiction as well as other emotional ailments of the individuals. There are many other therapists who uses processes like ritual healing, energy healing, in order to treat the people out of their pathologies.
- m) **Cupping:** This is a traditional Chinese medical technique. It applies suction to the ailing part of the body by using ceramic glasses (or even bamboo cups) in order to increase the regional blood circulation. This is one of the most traditional unique ways of healing the people. Recently, this process became famous during the Rio Olympics when players body displayed that they used the traditional method of cupping in order to increase the regional blood circulation, thereby promoting healing.
- n) **Dance/Movement Therapies:** It is one of the most expressive healing methods that are used by a large number of people. It acts as a therapeutic tool as it leads to the both personal expression as well as psychological/

/emotional healing. In the recent era, many NGO's are coming up with this therapy as a part of their project to heal the sex workers across the globe.

- o) **Feng Shui:** Again it is another ancient Chinese practice of arranging the home or work environment of the people to promote health, prosperity as well as positive feelings in the house.

Other than these alternative medical systems, there are other varieties of alternative medical systems, which play a major role in healing the people of different societies. Therefore, these alternate healing practices do play a major role in the lives of the individuals.

### 5. Importance of Alternative Medicines

The reliance on biomedicine is changing in the present scenario. Since the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there has been increasing public discontentment with western medicine. Instead of depending solely on allopathic medicine, citizens are increasingly seeking for alternative and complementary methods for healing and thus the interest in alternatives is continuously rising. In today's society, we find a resurgence of natural healing methods.

Several studies reported various reasons as to why people use complementary and alternative medicine. As opined by Eurocam 2020 in their booklet, "The Contribution of Complementary and Alternative Medicine to Sustainable Healthcare in Europe", the motivations revealed generally fall into two main categories: so called 'pull' factors, that focus on the perceived positive effects of Complementary and Alternative medicine and 'push' factors that focus on the perceived negative aspects of conventional medicine.

Among the 'pull' factors, there is often a desire for the patients to take a more proactive role in the caring of one's own health. People expect and value aspects of treatment that provide a partnership in healthcare, in which healthcare needs of individual patients are fully acknowledged unlike the paternalistic model, embedded in seeking biomedical treatment characterized by high physician control and low patient control. Citizens value aspects of treatment, which provide empowerment, i.e., decision making, and a more holistic view of health and healing. For this reason, they opt for alternative and complementary methods. Secondly, patients value an approach that encourages their personal freedom, freedom to choose their own therapies, their doctors and practitioners, compatible with their needs, values, ethics, world-view, and their perception of the meaning of health and disease. Patients value the aspects of treatment where they can actively involve as equal partners in the consultation. They wish to consult caring healthcare professionals who understand them as whole human being, catering to the healthcare needs of individual patients.

The most common 'push' factors reported by Complementary and Alternative consumers are: firstly, dissatisfaction with aspects of conventional medicine because of their side effects, secondly, ineffective treatment in the case of chronic diseases; In many cases the specific cause of a disease is not known. Medical approaches do not work well under these conditions as they fail to provide supportive care, which the people otherwise find in seeking CAM. Thirdly, negative aspects of the doctor-patient relationship; perceived to be 'top-down' rather than collaborative. Biomedicine is often criticized for an objective approach. A subjective approach, often collaborative,

embedded in CAM in some cases proves to be a better healing method. Fourthly, an over-emphasis on symptoms to the utter disregard of the holistic overview of health and disease is another factor. Finally and the most important, the escalating costs of conventional healthcare coupled with a range of unmet needs like emotional, nutritional, financial, spiritual needs motivates the people to use alternative therapy.

### 6. Factors posing Challenges to Integration of Alternative medicine

There are several factors by which the system of alternate medicine is at stake at the modern century. The challenges to alternate medical system can be categorized under three main headings.

**6.1 Firstly, Political Factors:** Healthcare system and politics are interwoven with each other since the conventional time period. It's relationship is much complex in nature. Keeping healthy citizen within one's nation is each leader's responsibility. Though new health care centers are sprawling up in the nook and corner of each country in the world, for example, the Patanjali Yogpeeth, Haridwar. Theorists and researchers have also noted that the governments are also coming up with centers, which are promoting alternative medicines to the people. It is noted in the political sector that economic boom is taking place as people are largely going in to the treatments served by alternative medicine. For example, in the People's Republic of China, the Chinese Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is under the authority of the Chinese Ministry of Health. National Centre for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) was established at the National Institute of Health, USA in the 1990s to independently develop and support research on Complementary and Alternative Medicine.

**6.2 Secondly, Economic Factors:** Promotion for anything in the market needs money. Similarly, promotions for the wide popularity of alternative medical practices need a large amount of economic base. There are many countries where these alternative medical practices are not promoted at all as they do not contribute to the economy of the nation. Different classes of people, many a times, have different notion on the use of alternative medicines (AM), such as many higher class people are of the notion that AM are to be used by those who are economically backward and cannot afford to go in for modern technocratic bio-medical practices. In countries like Peru, the government's interest in traditional medicine began mostly in the context of providing affordable healthcare for indigenous populations, for example, in the Amazon basin where most people are too poor to afford costly Western medicine, and too remote to have access to it. In the modern century, these alternate medicines are turning to be alternate "products" to provide for healing of the people. Thus, the healthcare system is now developing itself and turning out to be the "healthcare industry" which is promoting the traditional indigenous practices of treating people. It is due to this particular reason that health related tourisms to different countries are also promoted by the nations. This kind of tourism among the nations acts as an impetus to substantial financial growth.

**6.3 Thirdly, Scientific Factors:** Science and Religion have always been the most debatable issue. Science or the people associated with science have always questioned the validity of the alternative medical systems. According to the scientists, chemical reactions are a better and faster way to provide healing to the people across the world. For example, in the US, established academics have been discredited and have had difficulties when attempting to do AM research and at times, explicit threats were made by mainstream medicine to individuals and institutions that would associate with alternative practitioners or who would do research in areas identified as alternative. The methods and approaches that are propagated by the practitioners of alternative medicine are a big matter of question that is pointed out by the scientists. If proper studies through government funding can be done then extra-ordinary results will come out portraying the uses or significance of alternative medicines among the people in the society. Results that can belt out from fields like Ayurveda, yoga, acupuncture or homeopathy can stir the world as well as the domain of science. Therefore, all these factors pose serious threat to the growth and development of alternative medicine, though its spread among the people could not be stopped by any of the above-mentioned factors.

### 7. Future of Complementary and Alternative Medicines

Throughout the world, patients in unprecedented numbers are going outside the realm of conventional medicine to look for help. This is a movement that has been building up since the late 1960s. Many alternative therapies are now moving to the hospital sector. Yoga, for example, is being tried out for the management of carpal tunnel syndrome. Yoga lifestyle intervention is also found to increase the regression of coronary atherosclerosis in patients with severe coronary artery disease. Hypnosis is being tried out in cancer clinics for the management of pain. The American Medical Association (AMA) and other medical associations have formally recognized hypnosis as a viable medical treatment. Clinical outcome and research papers in several areas of complementary therapies now find a place in orthodox medical journals, and it is no longer possible to maintain the traditional medical stance that referring patients to complementary therapists is unethical. The rapid increase in public interest and use of complementary and alternative therapies is exerting a powerful influence on medical education and has gained acceptance in several medical universities. A significant number of medical students want instructions in complementary therapies. Medical educators increasingly realize that it is not a question of whether to address these issues in the education of future physicians, but rather how to respond to these relentless challenges. Commonwealth health ministers have outlined key policy issue of integrating CAM with mainstream medicine. The ministers established the Commonwealth Working Group on Traditional and Complementary Health Systems to promote the integration of traditional health systems and complementary medicine into national health care.

It can be concluded by saying that the article doesn't try to demean the modern medical system and impose the benefit of alternative medicine rather it tries to pave the way to reach out to the masses with the amalgamation of both the bio-medicine as well as the modern health care practices so that the people can avail the best healing measures and can live a healthy life ahead in the future.

### References

1. Bell RM. A Review of Complementary and Alternative Medicine Practices among Cancer Survivors, *Clinical Journal of Oncology Nursing*. 2010; 14(3):365-370.
2. Blank M, Goodman R. Letter to the Editor: The fall and rise of Kilmer McCully. *The New York Times, Magazine Section*. 1997, 7.
3. CAM. The Contribution of Complementary and Alternative Medicine to Sustainable Healthcare in Europe, Eurocam, Belgium, 2014-2020, 10-16.
4. Eskinazi DP. NIH Technology Assessment Workshop on Alternative Medicine: Acupuncture, *Journal of Alternative Complementary Medicine*, 1996; (2):1-256.
5. Eskinazi DP *et al.* Botanicals: A role in US health care. Ed, Larchmont, NY: Mary Ann Liebert, Inc., 1999.
6. Eskinazi DP. Factors that Shape Alternative Medicine. *JAMA*. 1998; 280:1621-1623.
7. Fugh-Berman A. *Alternative Medicine: What Works*, Odonian Press, Tucson AZ. 1996, 50-52.
8. Jaminson DT *et al.* *Diseases Control Priorities in Developing Countries*, Ed, OUP, New York, 2006, 1281-1291.
9. Levin SJ, Jonas. *Essentials of Complementary and Alternative Medicines*, Lippincott Williams and Wilkins, 1999, 1-12.
10. Pal KS. *Complementary and Alternative Medicine: An Overview*, *Current Science*. 2002; 82(5):518-524.
11. Stacey M. The fall and rise of Kilmer McCully. *The New York Times, Magazine Section*, 1997.