

The Questionable Science of Community-Based Response and Social Mobilization

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What is a “community-based response?”

AKA: Why we should do ordinary medical anthropology in
extraordinary epidemics.

Assumptions about Communities in Ebola Social Mobilization Campaigns

1. Communities are adults
2. Communities are similar in their vulnerability to infectious disease spread
3. Diagnostic practices only take place in the presence of trained medical professionals
4. Health seeking behaviors are going to divide into two liens: “traditional medicine” *or* western biomedicine.
5. The politics of health happen in the public health sector.
6. Communities like to resist stuff.
7. There’s nothing in these communities to work with without foreign contributions.
8. People just don’t understand what we’re talking about when we talk about health.

Community-based Reports of Co-morbidity and Health-Seeking Behaviors in Four Monrovia Communities During the West African Ebola Epidemic

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1. Communities are made of free and autonomous Adults.
2. Communities are similar in their vulnerability to infectious disease spread.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of study population by community. Count (column percent).

	Fendell (n=53)	Gbangay Town (n=69)	Saye Town (n=90)	St. Paul's Bridge (n=256)	Missing Community Information (n=37)	Overall (n=505)
Male	24 (46.2)	30 (44.1)	35 (39.8)	115 (45.8)	20 (54.1)	224 (45.2)
Female	28 (53.8)	38 (55.9)	53 (60.2)	136 (54.2)	17 (45.9)	272 (54.8)
<5years old	12 (22.6)	11 (15.9)	11 (12.2)	39 (15.2)	6 (16.2)	79 (15.6)
6-15 years	12 (22.6)	10 (14.5)	11 (12.2)	44 (17.2)	4 (10.8)	81 (16.0)
15-45 years	13 (24.5)	29 (42.0)	37 (41.1)	104 (40.6)	22 (59.8)	205 (40.6)
>45 years	16 (30.2)	19 (27.5)	31 (34.4)	69 (27.0)	5 (13.5)	140 (27.7)
Presently sick*	43 (81.1)	50 (72.5)	69 (76.7)	160 (62.5)	28 (75.7)	350 (69.3)
Past sick*	18 (34.6)	24 (34.8)	32 (35.6)	111 (43.4)	7 (18.9)	192 (38.1)
Deceased*	0 (0)	2 (2.9)	3 (3.3)	41 (16.0)	3 (8.1)	49 (9.7)

*p<0.05

3. Diagnostic practices only take place in the presence of trained medical professionals.

Table 2: Self-reported diagnoses for sick and diseased individuals. Count (column percent).

Diagnosis	Fendell (n=53)	Gbangay Town (n=69)	Saye Town (n=90)	St. Paul's Bridge (n=256)	Missing Community Information (n=37)	Overall (n=505)
Malaria	7	17	13	48	13	98 (13.7)
Witchcraft	1	1	1	3	0	6 (0.8)
Asthma	0	0	0	3	4	7 (1.0%)
Rheumatism	2	2	1	2	0	7 (1.0%)
Cholera	0	0	0	5	0	5 (0.7%)
Cold/Flu	0	4	3	10	4	21 (2.9%)
Diabetes/Sugar	0	1	1	3	1	6 (0.8%)
Ebola	0	0	4	9	0	13 (1.8%)
Blood Pressure	2	6	4	18	1	31 (4.3%)
Injury	3	0	0	4	0	7 (1.0%)
Typhoid	1	4	7	5	2	19 (2.7%)
Ulcer	2	0	3	2	1	8 (1.1%)

*Only diagnoses with 5 or more responses are depicted

*61.9% of data were missing or coded as “non-response”

4. Health seeking behaviors are going to divide into two liens: “traditional medicine” or Western biomedicine.

Table 3: Sick individuals’ first attempt to seek care by community. Count (column percent).

	Fendell Community		Gbangay Town		Saye Town		St. Paul’s Bridge		Community Unknown		Total
Hospital	7	(31.8%)	6	(46.2%)	10	(27.0%)	20	(13.2%)	2	(66.7%)	45 (19.9%)
Clinic	1	(4.5%)	0	(0.0%)	4	(10.8%)	6	(4.0%)	1	(33.3%)	12 (5.3%)
Doctor/Nurse/ GP/ PA	0	(0.0%)	1	(7.7%)	5	(13.5%)	11	(7.3%)	0	(0.0%)	17 (7.5%)
Drug Vendor/ Pharmacy	11	(50.0%)	5	(38.5%)	3	(8.1%)	77	(51.0%)	0	(0.0%)	96 (42.5%)
Ebola Hospital [#]	0	(0.0%)	0	(0.0%)	2	(5.4%)	14	(9.3%)	0	(0.0%)	16 (7.1%)
Health worker in social network	0	(0.0%)	1	(7.7%)	4	(10.8%)	2	(1.3%)	0	(0.0%)	7 (3.1%)
Herbalist/ Native Healer	2	(9.1%)	0	(0.0%)	1	(2.7%)	1	(0.7%)	0	(0.0%)	4 (1.8%)
Home Care	0	(0.0%)	0	(0.0%)	3	(8.1%)	6	(4.0%)	0	(0.0%)	9 (4.0%)
Unknown	1	(4.5%)	0	(0.0%)	0	(0.0%)	0	(0.0%)	0	(0.0%)	1 (0.4%)
Nothing	0	(0.0%)	0	(0.0%)	3	(8.1%)	13	(8.6%)	0	(0.0%)	16 (7.1%)
Previously Diagnosed	0	(0.0%)	0	(0.0%)	2	(5.4%)	1	(0.7%)	0	(0.0%)	3 (1.3%)
Total	22		13		37		151		3		226

[#] includes responses of “Ebola Treatment Unit”, “Called Ebola team”, as well as “Ebola hospital”



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5. The Politics Of Health Are Happening In The Public Health Sector.

6. Communities like to resist stuff.

Table 4: Burial practices for recently deceased.

Burial Practice	Count
Ebola task force/response team took the body	19
Body was buried at the hospital	5
Family buried the body/health team did not “teach” body and left it with family	6
Buried or awaiting burial by the Burial Team	2
Body was taken to the village	1
Ebola Response Team approved a normal burial	1
Total	34

7. There's nothing in these communities to work with without foreign contributions.

Supplementary Data File 2: Qualitative Data on Treatment Sought

Treatment Code	Qualitative Details
Bought Medicine from drug vendor/drugstore /pharmacy	Aminofin, amoxicillin, amodiaquine, antacid, antibiotic, antusinate, artimeter, asthma pump, atenolol, b-complex, b-2, chloramphenicol, chloramphenamine, chloroquine, ciproflaxin, cough syrup, diclofenac, doxycycline, erythromycin, eye drops, ferrous, foliate acid, folic acid, gas syrup, glucose, levoflaxin, logma (antimalarial intravenous and tablets), metformin, metronidazole, multivitamin, glycogen, omeprazole, oral rehydration solution, pain killer tablet, paracetamol (PCM pills and syrup), quinine, reserpine, rifampin, salbutamol, septrine, spectrum, ventolin, vermoz (parasites), zantac
Generic treatment purchased or obtained	Medicines, generic treatment, unknown drug, pills from drugstore, ointment, mosquito net, medicines previously prescribed by doctor, medications given by hospital, malaria medicines, injection, drugs, drip (iv fluids)
Nothing	Nothing, rest, water, nothing due to financial reasons, no drugs due to financial problems
Traditional medicine	Dried rattlesnake, hair cutting, herbs, traditional medicine, traditional healing rubbing of cheeks, Nigerian rock, herbal treatment, herbal leaves, fruits
Clinic or hospital	Generic treatment at hospital, hospitalized, generic treatment at ETU, doctor treated him
Extraordinary treatment (surgery, blood transfusion)	Blood transfusion, blood tonic, prostate operation, surgery, operation, antibodies

Treatment Code	Qualitative Details
Sore body/Body pain/Joint Pain/Bone Pain	Body pain, sore in legs, constant pain, leg pain, pain in legs, muscle pain, pain in ankles, burning pain, body burning, back pain, upper back pain, lower back pain, joint pain, bone pain, neck pain, stiff neck, pain in neck, waist pain, pain around waist, pain in both sides of the waist
Stomach pain/Abdominal pain	Stomach pain, abdominal pain, burning pain in stomach, burning stomach after eating, large stomach, sore in stomach, ulcer, stomach turning, upset stomach, bowel issues, dislocating bowels while using toilet, dysentery, diarrhea, running stomach, toileting, watery stool, constipation, hardly uses the toilet, abdominal discomfort, gas in abdomen, belching, 'I feel like it moving up and down and I suspect that it is gas'
Bitter tongue/mouth	Bitter tongue, bitter mouth
Bleeding	Bleeding
Pelvic pain/vaginal bleeding	Vaginal bleeding, prolonged menses, sore between the legs
Blood pressure problems	High blood pressure, low blood pressure, blood pressure problems, low blood, pressure
Vision problems	Blurry eyes, eyes turning, eyes swinging, fluid leaking from eyes, eyes swinging when sitting or walking, eye dime, eyes get dim, eyes itching
Breathing issues/Asthma	Breathing fast, fast breathing, can't breathe, asthma
Chest and Heart Issues	Burning sensation in chest, heart hurting, heart pain, pain in chest, fast heartbeat, heart palpitations
Urination issues	Burning when peeing, difficulty with urination, urinating much, discolored urine, yellow urine, urinating a lot at night
Lightheaded/Dizziness	Can fall off, dizziness, brain swinging
Pain/burning of Feet/Palms	Burning under the feet, feet and palms burning, pain under feet
Cannot walk	Cannot walk, unable to walk, difficult to walk
Chewing of tongue	Chewing of tongue
Hot Skin, Chills and Sweats	Chills, chills and sweats, cold sweats, sweating, profuse sweating, shivering, hot skin, hot skin at night, hotness in body, skin feeling hot, burning skin, skin hot and cold
Headache	Headache, burning pain on forehead
Cold	Feels cold, feels cold in evening, feels chill, feels chill in evening and night, chronic cold, fresh cold
Weakness/Fatigue	Fatigue, weakness in body, feeling tired, feel weak when walking, joint weakness, neck weakness
Coughing	Coughing, excessive coughing
Crying	Crying
Yellow eyes	Yellow coloration of the eye, yellow eye, eyes yellow
Ear and Hearing issues	Ear halting, difficulty hearing, fluid from ear, ear pain
Losing consciousness/fainting	Fainting, fall off
Feeling strange	Feeling strange
Felt sick	Felt sick, he was sick, feels miserable
Fever	Fever, fever at night, light fever, high temperature
Foaming at the mouth	Foam at the mouth, fume at mouth, foaming
Halting	Body halting, head halting, ear halting, heart halting, bone halting, gum halting
He had an accident	He had an accident

Local Idioms of Routine Symptoms (an excerpt)

8. People just don't understand what we're talking about when we talk about health.

Alors...

What are we talking about when we talk about
community-based responses to the Ebola
epidemic?

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