

**Research Article**

# Place of folk medicine in the life of the modern population of Russia on the example of villages of the Udmurt Republic.

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**ABSTRACT**

The article considers the place and role of folk medicine in the Republic of Udmurtia. Traditional medicine arose as a response to the desperate situation of people who had no other possibility of healing. Residents of the villages of the Udmurt Republic were the object of study. As a result of the sociological research, the population's awareness of the methods of folk medicine was revealed. The importance of the population's appeal to folk medicine was assessed, and the reasons for the preference of folk medicine instead of the official one were identified. Based on the data obtained, an important role of the folk medicine was revealed, involving a large part of the population in its use, in addition, the population has sufficient knowledge regarding the practices, means, methods of folk medicine. If folk medicine is too widespread among the population, even in times of scientific progress, it can be concluded that official medicine is unworkable today, since it is not a profitable alternative to folk medicine for people.

**Keywords:** folk medicine, quackery, traditional healers, rural population, sociology of health, sociology of medicine.

**INTRODUCTION**

The topic of folk medicine is often overshadowed, despite its undeniable relevance at any historical stage. Witchcraft originates from the emergence of mankind, and for a fairly long time - up to the XIX century - it remains the only way to provide any medical assistance for the Russian people until the founding of rural medicine. However, in some regions, even the approval of rural medicine for a long time could not outweigh the prevailing influence of traditional healers. For example, even in the second half of the XIX century, they satisfied the medical needs of the Siberian peasantry. At first glance, scientific and technological progress has completely supplanted such activities from the life of the modern population, however, to this day, various representatives of unscientific medicine - healers, chiropractors, fortune-tellers - do not go short for visitors. For some people, this fact is surprising, since the development of science at this point in time makes it possible to refute a significant part of the methods of treatment in alternative medicine, however, this circumstance does not prevent the population of villages and villages from turning to such practices and even hoping for their successful outcome.

For a long period, the importance of folk medicine was downgraded by public health authorities and official medicine. Nevertheless, over the past few years, the attitude towards it has changed. Today it is accepted as a centuries-old experience of healing each individual ethnic group.

Of course, since the advent of folk medicine, it has changed somewhat. For example, the traditions of transferring witchcraft knowledge were transformed. Previously, bloodline oral transfer of information prevailed, but now the acquisition of knowledge of folk medicine is more mixed: information is contained both in the media and in print publications, and the old way of teaching with a healer is also used. Folk healers themselves now record their knowledge on paper, in particular, the texts of conspiracies. The modernization that has taken place allows us to make the assumption that folk medicine does not disappear at all, but only changes the form of its existence.

**METHODS**

The problem of the prevalence of folk medicine would be most expedient to study from such an object, which, presumably, has certain characteristics. Firstly, at least some of the studied respondents should practice folk medicine techniques so that the questionnaire, declared as a research method, has the opportunity to fully disclose problem. Secondly, the infrastructure among which the representatives of the object live, and the medical services that they use in the absence of a better option, should not be sufficiently developed, since it is these circumstances that force the population to turn to folk medicine. Thirdly, it is desirable that the respondents being studied constitute a fairly traditional society, because, as you know, folk

medicine represents the cultural heritage of each nation.

Based on the above criteria, the object of research is the rural population of the Udmurt Republic. In addition, Udmurtia does not have cities with a population exceeding one million. In addition, the republic is located quite far from other cities with a population of over one million, which undoubtedly also played a role in the presence of echoes of folk medicine in everyday life. As you know, cities with a population of one million or more have a much more developed infrastructure. Moreover, the surrounding settlements are also under their influence, in which economic development is also at a higher level than in areas remote from cities with a population of one million. The choice of the Udmurt Republic is advisable, since most of the population has neither high wages, nor constant access to medical services with a sufficiently high degree of susceptibility to various diseases.

The choice of the Udmurt Republic is mainly due to the tendency of its people to mention pagan spirits in their speech, despite the fact that the majority of the population living in the villages and villages considers themselves Orthodox. As you know, in a narrow sense, paganism is a polytheistic belief; in a broader sense it represents all the religious beliefs of primitive tribes: fetishism, ancestor cult, totemism, etc.

The objective of the study was to identify the place of folk medicine in the life of the modern rural population using the example of residents of the Udmurt Republic. Since it is required to study the behavior and opinions of a large number of people, it is most expedient to use a questionnaire as a research method. Elderly people who did not have access to the Internet or did not know how to use it were interviewed directly, therefore, in addition to the answers recorded in the questionnaire, it was possible to clarify some of their statements about folk medicine. Therefore, we can state that the survey used the method of questionnaire with interview elements.

The questionnaire survey was conducted among the residents of the Udmurt Republic, mainly among the rural population, as their way of life is more imbued with traditions and customs. The survey involved 2,153 people.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

People think of folk medicine mainly as a treatment with herbs and other exclusively natural drugs, which was chosen by 83% of people. The survey suggested a choice of several answer options, so the respondents did not ignore other definitions of folk medicine: appeal to supernatural forces, the transfer of treatment experience from one generation to another, as well as all methods that can be used in addition to a pharmacy and a

hospital scored at least 25%. It can be assumed that in an era of rapid scientific progress, medical science only confirms those methods from folk medicine that have been accumulated with the help of empirical observation, for example, many discoveries and the creation of herbal medicines are based on folk medicine, while the effectiveness of conspiracies against diseases is not find scientific evidence, so turning to magic is the least popular answer among those surveyed. This distribution of opinions is quite predictable, given that about half (45%) of respondents have universities degrees.

Almost all respondents know some methods of folk medicine; only 1.7% say they are completely unaware of such techniques. Most know up to 5 methods - 43.4%, more than 5 - 30.2%, more than 10 account for 24.5%, among which the majority are elderly people. Communication with respondents allowed us to record some of the methods of folk medicine used by residents of the Udmurt Republic. At first glance, it might seem that the only reason for such a distribution of answers is that with each generational change, knowledge of folk medicine methods decreases, but one of the respondents noticed that all folk medicine techniques are recalled when the corresponding ailments appear, therefore the reliability of the answers is distorted. Another respondent noted that young people have better health, therefore they do not yet have experience of treatment with the help of folk medicine. This also explains the knowledge of healers, chiropractors, healers and other people who heal with the help of folk medicine. Mainly older people remembered from 7 to 10 techniques, who, in general, know more due to their age. Also, awareness in this regard was noted by people living mainly in the village, since the village population is also characterized by a greater adherence to traditions, including such traditional occupations as quackery, as well as a more pronounced cohesion. Most often (77.3%) the respondents still know from 1 to 5 folk healers, which also testifies to the sufficient prevalence of folk medicine among the Udmurt population. It is worth noting that about 60% of those who answered at least once used their services, and those who never used folk medicine, there are only 7.5%. Slightly more of those who constantly practice the use of folk medicine, that is, are treated with folk medicine for every ailment - 9.4%. The overwhelming majority of respondents chose the option "rather rarely", since the presence of official medicine has long supplanted treatment exclusively with folk medicine, but the respondents do not exclude the possibility of using the latter.

In addition, the question of the source of knowledge of folk medicine will allow us to consider the place of folk medicine, since it reveals the reason for its spread among people. 56.6% are aware of the folk methods thanks to their relatives, 15% - the

environment in the village. The popularity of these answers illustrates the primacy of the factor of cohesion of the population, but moreover, the value of family and family ties, which are the reason for such a wide spread of folk medicine among the inhabitants of villages and towns in comparison with the townspeople.

The most controversial issue was the effectiveness of folk medicine methods. More often, the answer is positive - 37.7%, rather positive was noted by 22.6%, the answer "only a small part is beneficial" was chosen by 28.3%. Moreover, none chose the option "absolutely do not help". The lack of a common popular opinion is due to the presumably the fact that not all respondents have a medical education in order to assess the effectiveness of folk medicine.

Of course, important factors in the spread of folk medicine are such circumstances as the great cohesion of rural residents, the traditional way of life, as well as the indisputable advantage of the natural origin of its methods and the absence of chemicals, which was noted by more than 70% of respondents. However, there are also less obvious factors that, albeit indirectly, contribute to the spread of folk medicine. Finding these factors helps the questionnaire questions about possible reasons for choosing folk medicine.

The absolute majority (about 70%) noted the high cost of drugs and hospital treatment as a reason to seek other measures. Considering the level of salaries in the Udmurt Republic, such a result is quite predictable, however, it illustrates a far-from-favorable situation. Some respondents added that they know about the agreement between doctors and pharmacies (doctors prescribe more expensive drugs to receive a percentage of the pharmacy's income), therefore, when they are sick, they try to buy cheap analogues, the names of which can be found on the Internet. This cannot be called a positive phenomenon, since, firstly, it contributes to less trust in doctors, and secondly, the Internet is not always a competent and safe source of information.

Another significant reason for the choice of folk medicine among the respondents is the ineffectiveness of drugs or treatment in hospitals, which was chosen by more than half of the respondents. Many respondents expressed an idea, which has already become a saying: "One is treated, the other is crippled". Often there were complaints that most drugs only temporarily dull pain, and even after a course of treatment in the hospital, the disease relapses. Many stories about visits to healers came after the story that the hospital either did not know how to cure, or could not correctly diagnose the disease.

The results of the questionnaire survey showed that

the distance to the hospital is not a problem for them, however, this option was the most popular among the residents of the villages of the Udmurt Republic, who participated in the study (60.4%). However, almost all of the villagers noted problems with hospital accessibility (about a third of all responses). This is also related to the lack of time to visit doctors, which was noted by more than half of the respondents. As it turned out, mainly one nurse is on duty in the villages, in some cases she works only a few days a week. Moreover, there have been villages that lack even such a minimum of medical personnel. The respondents specified that the nurse most often only gives an anesthetic injection so that the patient can wait for the ambulance to arrive. Considering that inside the settlement with accessible hospital location, the residents have to wait for the ambulance for a long time; the ambulance get to the villages even longer, which was also mentioned by the respondents. It is also worth noting that the villages are mainly populated by the elderly population, which means that age-related health problems and risks are much higher compared to the rural and urban population, who does not have such difficulties with access to health care.

The interviewees noticed that a significant proportion of folk medicine methods consists in making an alcohol tincture of a plant. There were also respondents who joked as follows: "Our men take only one folk remedy - vodka. Even if the wound is external, they still take vodka inside". Despite the fact that alcoholism is not directly related to the research topic, it manifests itself even when studying the role of folk medicine and indicates the presence of social problems and the malfunctioning of social structures.

## SUMMARY

Thus, folk medicine continues to exist, but people, due to the development of science, to a lesser extent than before, note its magical component, preferring to perceive it as a treatment using natural remedies that can potentially acquire the status of official, scientifically confirmed. Nevertheless, this does not reduce its prevalence among the population. On the contrary, the rational, positive kernel in terms of natural origin contributes to its popularity even among people with higher education. However, the place of folk medicine is determined not only by its merits. An insufficient number of medical personnel, institutions, poorly developed drugs and their inaccessibility and other above-mentioned shortcomings reveal such an acute social problem as the failure of modern official medicine in Russia, and in the Udmurt Republic in particular.

## CONCLUSIONS

Folk medicine, indeed, has changed in the course of scientific and technological progress, slowly freeing of the magic part and increasing the prevalence of the empirical one. It is worth noting that medical scientists are aware of the value of the experience that was based on direct observation, since it is this experience that allows scientific discoveries, invent new medicines and treatment methods, relying on the methods of folk medicine. Thus, folk medicine is not losing its grounds in the life of the Russian population, but is only being modernized. Making a huge contribution to official medicine with its vast, centuries-old experience, folk medicine finds scientific justification for a huge number of methods, thereby only approaching the official form of its existence. Moreover, the confirmation of its effectiveness by scientists further promotes folk medicine even in the era of scientific progress even among the most skeptical people, since, unlike other drugs and methods of treatment, it has significant advantages, namely low time and financial costs for its use and natural origin, which eliminates the risk of damage from chemicals, like the composition of other drugs.

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