



Self-Health-Care Practice among Female Facebook Users through the Lenses of Medical Anthropology

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ABSTRACT

Now-a-days female users of social media are embedded them in health information seeking through internet. This article investigates on the practice of self-health-care of Facebook female users and its impact on their lifestyle. As part of the methodological issues, qualitative approach like in-depth interview and focus group discussions (FGDs) is applied. The major findings of the research are that health promotional pages on Facebook provide information on health and improve the practice of self-health care among female users ideologically, socially as well as culturally. These trends influence them to be more concern about their elementary knowledge of health, self-determination capability, and thus change their lifestyle.

Keywords: Self health-care; Facebook; Social media; Female users.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Bangladesh, nearly fifteen millions of people in the whole population live in the capital city of Dhaka.¹ Health is one of the elementary needs of human being. People seek healthcare services from their family members, relatives, friends, neighbors, adult those who have comprehensive knowledge and illness experiences. Before seeking these sort of health care practice, a large number of people like to take healthcare service according to their self-perception. This practice is named by self-health care under popular sector of health care service in medical anthropology. Now-a-days, social media² is a great source of information to provide the primary health care knowledge. Of many social networking sites available on the Web, Facebook (FB) is the most popular, with more than 750 million users and 30 billion pieces of content (web links, news stories, blog posts, notes, photo albums) shared each month (Facebook, 2011). Self-health care³ practice is one of them. In December, 2012, the total FB users in Asia were 254,336,520.⁴ In the same year, the total FB users in Bangladesh were 3,352,680.⁵ The most noteworthy thing is that, female users constitute the majority of FB users (Fitzgerald, 2012) and they are receiving health related information from FB. This article examines how FB with its interactive features promotes female users self-health care practice and impact on their lifestyle.

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of the study is:

- To explore the perception of female users regarding their own health and wellbeing through FB and its influence on their lifestyle.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Results of many researches conducted on self health care practices through Internet, show the diverse practice of self-health care among female users. Self-care elements are most practiced in all the age categories and female respondents had the highest proportions (Geteri et. al., 2013) usually mothers or grandmothers, who diagnosis most common illness and treat them with the materials at hand (Chrisman, 1977). It has been estimated that, about 70-90% of health care takes place within this popular sector⁶, in both Western and Non-Western societies (Kleinman et.al., 1978).

¹ <http://www.citypopulation.de/php/bangladesh-dhaka.php>

² Social media includes computer-based tools that allow people to create, share or exchange information, ideas, picture, videos etc. to participate in social networking process.

³ Self health care includes any intentional actions that we take to care for our physical, mental and emotional health. It can also be an important part of the healing process. It is unique for everyone. The notion that self healthcare is a fundamental pillar of health and social care means it is an essential component of a modern health care system and of health care pluralism.

⁴ <http://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm>

⁵ <http://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm>

⁶ In popular sector, family is the major arenas of health care consist of non-professionals, non-specialists. Here the process is based on self-treatment, self-medication. Sometimes people take advice given by their relatives,

Self health care as a “self” that relates to itself freely and transparently, with full knowledge, what proponents of self-care do not say is that this self-health relation is mediated and highly structured, relying on a cadre of so-called experts and technicians, deploying a vocabulary that is sometimes frightening, alienating, and often incomprehensible (Murray, 2007). Evidence shows that, there is a strong relationship between self health care and self-monitoring practice. The idea of self-monitoring is an act where individuals receive information about their health status with the aim that they will act on this to improve their health. The ways in which individuals made sense of the information they received from self-monitoring technologies, relating it to their own experiences and more embodied assessments of their body and health. Sometimes, self-monitoring technologies may well lead people to construct and interact with their bodies in diverse ways. This feedback provides to maintain and improve a particular health behavior (Lynch et. al., 2014).

Self-care is a key component of current policies to manage long term conditions. Promotion of self-care requires an understanding of people’s own self-care practices and needs to be understood in the context of health care pluralism (MacKichan et. al., 2011).

FB, as a part of cyber culture, plays a significant role promoting health care information. Cyber culture can be considered as a new cultural model- as a technology, as a new social context, a new creative and collaborative tool, and as a medium of communication (Ardevol, 2005). While FB has the users of female users, it plays the same role. Not only that, different social media channels on FB manage their brand, with its image and information, for advertising purposes (Park et.al. 2011). The interactive capabilities offered on FB also make virtual content-sharing activities easy for users and encourage target audiences. It is effective in getting the attention of audience (Thackeray et al., 2008). In this research, it has been examined that, the elevation of FB pages promote female users familiar with different health relate pages and their applications in their real life. These practices further stimulate their other FB friends.

By analyzing the above literature review, a common trend has been understood that is, health promotional pages on FB promote of female users to connect with it more effectively and enthuse themselves to practice self-health care in their life. All this review has been done with economical, marketing and business promotional aspects. However, there is a limited research on how these health promotional pages impact on them ideologically, psychologically, socially and culturally. This research is an attempt to find out the existing health care practice on medical anthropological perspective.

4. METHODOLOGY

4. 1. Study area and selection criteria of informants

To study female FB users, we had to select three prominent private university female students in Dhaka city, Bangladesh namely North South University, BRAC University and East West University. As part of the research, snowball sampling and interviews including 18 in-depth interviews and 6 FGDs were organized within these areas. It helped to understand

friends, neighbors or workmates, cult or self help groups etc. About 70-90% of health care takes place within this sector.

intensively the perception of self-health-care trends through FB; each FGD were consisting of 6-8 informants.

The respondents who gave consent to provide information were interviewed along with their other FB friends. Their pseudonyms were used for maintaining confidentiality of the respondents. To select the female respondents, the following criteria were considered:

- The female respondents are 20-25 years old;
- Each has an account on FB and uses it in a regular basis.

The researcher in this paper used both primary and secondary data collection methods. The primary data was collected from 60 female FB users in Dhaka city. For the secondary information, the researcher took the help of both printed and electronic documents. The intensive observation on different health promotional pages on FB was also done for nearly 6 months. The study made use of qualitative data analysis to achieve the objective of the research.

4. 2. Self-health care as a part of popular health sector

Health care has three sectors: popular sector, folk sector and professional sector. Each sector has its own ways of explaining, defining and specifying (Kleinman, 1980).

These are:

4. 2. 1. Popular sector

This is the lay, non-professional, non-specialist domain of the society, where all kinds of therapeutic options are utilized by people without any payment, and without consulting any folk healers or medical practitioners. Among these options are self-treatment or self-medication, device or treatment given by a relative, friend, neighbors or workmates, healing and mutual care activities in a church, cult, self-health group, consultation with lay person who has special experience of a particular disorder or of treatment of a physical state.

4. 2. 2. Folk sector

This sector is especially seen in non-western societies. Here certain individuals are specialized in some forms of healing which are either sacred or secular, or a mixture of the two. These healers are not part of the official medical system and they occupy an intermediate position between the popular and professional sectors.

4. 2. 3. Professional sector

This sector comprised of the organized legally sanctioned healing professions such as modern western scientific medicine also known as allopathy or biomedicine.

Self-health care stands for ‘caring thyself’ related to what people do for them to establish and maintain health, prevent and deal with illness. It includes: hygiene (general and personal); nutrition (type and quality of food eaten); healthy lifestyle (sporting activities, leisure etc.); environmental factors (living conditions, social habits, etc.); socioeconomic factors (income level, cultural beliefs, etc.); self-medication (WHO, 1998; The Department of Health, 2005). Self health care is the ability of individuals, families and communities to promote health, prevent disease, and maintain health and to cope with illness and disability

with or without the support of a health-care provider' (WHO, 2013).⁷ It is also related with the decisions and actions taken by someone who is facing a health problem in order to cope with it and improve his or her health (The Government of Canada's public health agency, 2004).

Self health care promotes a great contribution in existing health care services especially in the popular sectors⁸. Popular sector includes self-medication, device or treatment given by a relative, friend, neighbors or workmates, healing and mutual care activities in a church, cult, self health group, consultation with lay person who has special experience of a particular disorder or of treatment of a physical state (Helman, 1994).

On the basis of the above definitions, self health care is associated with some factors concerning lifestyle which include: maintaining thyself like beautification, taking care of skin color and well-being, maintaining diet chart, exercising and maintaining a particular schedule for sleeping, rising up and bathing; ready access to preventive measures; the increased potential to manage certain illnesses through self-care; environmental factors; demographic and epidemiological factors and so on.

As self-health care is an essential part of popular sector, it has different types as: **regulatory, preventive, reactive, and restorative** self health care (Barofsky, 1978). These four types of popular self health care practices are used mainly among the internet users especially FB female users. This research is a reflection of searching these pluralistic self-health care practices.

A common element of social media sites is that, the contents are often created and shared by the users of the sites (Gangadharbatla, 2011) which increase capabilities for interactive communication and information (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010) and also self-management behaviors of health care community⁹. FB has become the most popular destinations on Internet now-a-days. It is the preferred source of health information for those who use social media sites for health purposes (Dolan, 2011). Interactive conversations of female users with friends through sharing videos and photos, commenting on FB, create a space for its friends to make aware of themselves on health related issues¹⁰.

Thus, using FB, knowing significant information on self health-care, can make momentous contributions to health and quality of life. It is not only related to physical fitness, but also with mental, spiritual and social wellbeing.

5. HEALTH CARE IS NOT ONLY AN ISSUE OF THERAPEUTIC PRACTICE OF HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

The concept of health care is associated with professional doctors, nurses, medicine, treatment and so on. However, curing is not only an issue of professional or expertise knowledge of health professionals about certain health condition. Expertise knowledge is necessary whenever concern personnel feel to go for the treatment by others. The female respondents participated in this research, experience the same situation. In most of the cases,

⁷ See detail on Webber et.al. 2013.

⁸ All kinds of therapeutic options that people utilize without any payment, and without consulting any folk healers or medical practitioners is called the popular sector of health care service.

⁹ Health care community refers a group of people where they collectively practice their health related issues.

¹⁰ Worldwide female users are the most Facebook users. See detail on Britney, 2012

they take necessary measures by themselves. Sometimes they do not take any preventive measures for curing themselves. According to them, treatment is not always necessary. They have certain experience gathered from personal experience, illness experience by other family members and now from FB pages regarding health.

“Jar nai kau tar ache Google”. (In Bengali) (IDI 1)

“Those who has nobody, She has Google” (IDI 1)

“Dakter er sobsomoy dorker ke? Amra nejera e to jante pare kon osukher jonno ke korte hobe, kevabe thakte hobe, ke medicine nete hobe”(In Bengali) (FGDs 1)

“Is there any need of seeking a doctor always? We know what to do, how to treat and which medicine should we need to take”. (FGDs 1)

Respondents interviewed in the research said that, they know how to treat with illness like fever, cold, vomiting, headache, food poisoning, diarrhea and any other primary health care treatment. Respondent believe that, they are able to heal by self and also cured in most of the cases. Availability of so many options and information on FB pages promote themselves to make them aware of and share that information to others. In this purpose, FB plays a vital role to serve their demand.

6. FAMILY STILL A MATTER FOR A GIRL

Societal and familial expectation regarding girl is still considered as a burden. Son Preferences are always get priority (Findings form FGDs 4). No matter if female get access to higher education or other options. The respondents participated in this research said that, society still a matter for them and also for their family. The respondents having brother are sometimes get less privilege to get access to health care treatment. Illnesses are prioritized on the basis of gender relation, age, sex, and future expectation from that person. Brothers or other male members of a family get opportunity to visit doctor in emergency cases than female members.

“Amader family educated kintu basai amr vai ta jokhon osustho hoi tokhon sobai basto hoe jai. Ar amra chenta kore thak aktu smoy deki. Valo hoe jabo. Neje neje e saranor chesta kore. Besi osubedha hole net e browse kore, facebook e deki, friend der page theke jene nei. Sobsomoy to ar baire doctor dekanor sujog pai na. Basai o bolte eche hoina. Bolle e bole, aktu deko. Thek hoe jabe sob. Ajonno nejee chesta kore”. (In Bengali) (IDI 2)

“I belong to educated family however still whenever my brother become ill, all are busy with him. On the contrary, we think to take more time to become cure by ourselves. When I face more problems regarding health, I browse on net, search on FB or page link of

my friend's timeline. There is no scope to seek doctors always in time. Even I do not want to share with my parents always. When I tried to tell them, they just said, "just wait. Everything will be ok". That is why, I try by myself". (IDI 2)

Although there are so many options and opportunities for seeking health care treatment in urban scenario however, respondents participated in this research have limited scope to utilize them properly. According to some respondents in FGDs, *Female should not be getting ill*. It indicates that, a society does not demand a female to become ill or sick for a while. If they become ill, the whole family will be suffered. So, it is better not to become ill and be always in a sound health mentally and physically. As university students, respondents argued, they have to handle both inside and outside the household. On the contrary, in this digital world, they have to attach with their surrounding world through FB and other social media. As we know that, information technology has delivered us the numerous opportunities to be 'glocal'¹¹ and it has been promoted to get all sorts of information. When they become ill, they utilize this time by searching different information on health issues on FB and eventually they get benefited for a while.

7. CHANGE THE PERCEPTION REGARDING HEALTH

By getting information, female users can be 'empowered'¹² by taking charge of life without the help of consulting a doctor. These trends of health seeking behavior¹³, where a person is getting information and influence to maintain their health without consulting with professionals, can be regarded as self-health care. In this case, the necessity of doctors is becoming less prioritized. Individual's choice become prominent seeking health care. These seeking practices are seen in various aspects.

7. 1. Change in habitual practice

In regulatory self-health care practices, healing thyself change the existing practice of health care. Eating, sleeping and bathing etc. can be considered as **regulatory self-health care practices** especially eating habits, sleeping time etc. Say for, everyone has different needs; a reasonable guideline is that most people need 6-8 hours of sleep per night. However, this information is sometimes overlooked by us which are harmful to us. These types of information can be availed from internet.

"I had dark circles. I was feeling tensed because my face was becoming pale. Few months ago, I noticed one of my friend's FB wall post about

¹¹ Global and local are interconnected; here the term is used to exemplify the transcended identity of an individual because of using information technology.

¹² Empowerment is a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power (that is, the capacity to implement) in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important. See detail in Page, 1999.

¹³ Health seeking behavior indicates what people do in order to maintain his/her health. It varies from person to person ranging from individual behavior to collective behavior. People search for health seeking behavior within the popular sectors, folk sectors or professional sectors.

causes of dark circles. Then I understood that this problem is caused due to my sleeping late at night. I thought of this matter and for many weeks I tried to sleep early. Now this problem is reduced through timely sleeping, following beautify tips, washing eyes on regular basis. Thus I need not to visit doctors or other counselors". (IDI 4)

This sort of information promotes the female informants to be more attached with those pages. Eventually they are used to getting update information and using 'like', 'tag' and 'share' to interact with others.

7. 2. Change in regular health care practice

Another aspect of self-health care practice is *preventive self-health-care* which can be categorized as exercising, dieting, brushing teeth etc.

"Usually I don't take tea. One of my friends posted a link about the positive effects of taking green tea. Here, I found the information that it helps to reduce fat from body. My friends sometimes made fun of me and this made me feel very shy. Now taking tea three times is my regular habit and I observed that I am already losing my weight". (IDI 5)

This case depicts that, the information collected from her friend's FB wall, she become aware of her health before overweight. Now she knows better than before to take preventive measures to control her body by herself. These become possible with the help of connecting with this social network.

7. 3. Less prioritization of health experts

Reactive self health-care includes responding to symptoms without a physician's intervention.

"I was having trouble with hair fall problem. My relatives suggested changing shampoo and oil but that did not impact on my hair. One day I searched on hair fall related pages on FB. Then I found some pages with videos and I follow their instruction intensively. After six month I observed less hair fall. I shared that information with my FB friends who are facing same problems". (IDI 6)

This case demonstrates that without a physician's intervention she get experienced about how to take reactive health care measures. Dependency on FB information about health issues promotes her to be more aware of and take necessary steps about her physical condition.

7. 4. Change in behavioral aspects

The forth self-health care trend named *restorative self-health-care* which includes behavior change and compliance with the treatment of self.

"I usually did not take my breakfast. I thought that it was a way of reducing obesity. Once I was on FB and I saw one advertisement on there: "Skipping

breakfast may increase your risk of obesity or make it harder to lose weight". It touched me a lot. From then, I use to maintain my breakfast regularly. Now I think that how fool was I. May be no doctor will give me this information free of charge". (IDI 7)

From the above discussion, it can be said that, health care trend are increasing due to the massive online users of FB. However, it has made information more convenient and satisfying through unique interactive features of "News feeds" such as "sharing videos and photos", "commenting" and answering of "quizzes" on FB. Thus the female users get to grips with their everyday habitual practice. Thus they can change their habitual practices achieved throughout life. This practice is a part of the popular sector.

8. SELF-HEALTH CARE AS A DIMENSION OF HEALTH CARE PLURALISM

The significant change is that greater access to information on FB increases individual's interest in personal health. Also, it is resulting in growing demand for direct participation in health care decisions. Moreover, awareness of the impact of certain lifestyle has increased among female users. These practices are enabling them to assume greater responsibility for their health care needs and capacity for self-care. Thus, a woman can choose her preference from alternatives and determine what to do with her health. Seeking health is not only a matter of biological or medical aspects. It is associated with social, cultural, ideological aspects also. Although, there are so many obstacles regarding social, cultural, religious and ideological biasness, research shows that, they can transcend the existing boundary and find out new ways to adapt with different ways of healing themselves by self-practices.

9. CONCLUSIONS

Worldwide, self health care practice as well as self-healing is being promoted as a means of reducing the health care burden form professional sectors. In Bangladesh, this sort of practice is comparatively new. The results of this content analysis indicate that a few messages of the health related pages can do a great deal to a life especially to female users. Most significantly, by using health related promotional pages on FB, female users are playing as a model of self care practitioner. They are used to get health information from FB and thus their regulatory, preventive, restorative and reactive self health care practices are changing. Thus it can be said that, health professionals or the knowledge of the health expertise is not enough to understand the existing health care problems especially in doctor-patient relationship. Understanding self-health care is equally important to understand this issue. Not only that, there are so many socio-cultural, ideological and psychological aspects are performing in seeking health. Society demand *female should not becoming ill*; they are bound to maintain this practice socially and culturally but not in their real life always. They seek and find out multiple options and practices within and beyond the boundary of the society. They are now influencing by social media and changing their lifestyle and also their preferences to become concern about their health. Now the female users, as a role model in their family, can take health seeking decision for themselves and also for their family members with the help of this social media. This is the diversity of health care pluralism where female users can

individually take their decisions regarding health with the assistance of the information on FB.

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Her main interest lies in Climate Change, Gender issues, Body, Violence; Medical Anthropology, Language, Society and Culture and Urban Anthropology.



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