

## ● Research Article

# The meaning of complementary, alternative and traditional medicine among the Indonesian psychology community: a pilot study

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### ABSTRACT

**OBJECTIVE:** Complementary, alternative and traditional medicine (CATM) is a new field, as well as a promising area of study and practice in psychology. It is important to research the cultural context and meaning of CATM, including its definitions and examples, among different communities of psychology because CATM's use is dependent on how it is understood by the members. The aim of this pilot study is to provide an interpretation of the Indonesian psychology community's understanding of CATM through a qualitative approach.

**METHODS:** Online interviews with open-ended questions and purposive sampling were used. Participants were dominantly psychologists or lecturers in clinical psychology area. Ten males and 12 females with an average age of  $28.0 \pm 2.5$  years voluntarily participated in this study. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and reviewed and analysed by the two authors to ensure accuracy of interpretation.

**RESULTS:** It was found that there was no single meaning of CATM among the Indonesian community of psychology. Participants were not familiar enough with the terms and tended to use them with overlap. It can be suggested that "complementary medicine" and "alternative medicine" or "complementary-alternative medicine" combined provides more suitable terminology for use among Indonesian psychology community when communicating with other health care professionals.

**CONCLUSION:** The understanding of the terms and examples of CATM were diverse and were often used interchangeably in the projects/interviews. It was also found that Indonesian psychologists required more education regarding CATM. In addition, future studies with more participants from various aspects of the psychology community should be conducted to capture a more representative sample.

**Keywords:** complementary and alternative medicine; traditional medicine; holistic medicine; integrative medicine; health psychology; Indonesia

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## 1 Introduction

The definitions of, and distinctions between complementary, alternative and traditional medicine (CATM) and conventional medicine have been unclear and inconsistent across nations and cultures.<sup>[1,2]</sup> CATM's ambiguous meaning inhibits the effort to create integrated and holistic medicine. Therefore, it is important to document how CATM is understood within the field of psychology, particularly because of the growing interest in this promising topic. Psychology, as a part of the mental health field, benefits from CATM in several ways. Preceding studies have shown that various CATM modalities, such as acupuncture, herbal medicine, and yoga, benefit mental health clients.<sup>[3,4]</sup> Unfortunately, there is a knowledge gap in CATM study. Previous studies of CATM have mostly been conducted in non-Asian nations by practitioners of conventional medicine.<sup>[3,5]</sup> Such studies mainly rely on the definition of CATM from the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine in the USA.<sup>[6,7]</sup>

It is crucial to understand the meaning of CATM, including its definition and examples, among the various fields of psychology (such as clinical, educational, social, and industrial-organizational psychology). Additionally, diverse cultural contexts may bring different understanding of the term. This understanding will provide a more comprehensive view for integrating conventional medicine and CATM.<sup>[8,9]</sup> In Indonesia, for example, alternative and traditional medicine has been part of the culture for a long time. This pilot study focused on a sample of the Indonesian community of psychology based on the understanding that CATM is an essential part of the Indonesian culture, tradition and natural heritage.<sup>[10-12]</sup> The purpose of this pilot study is to explore the meaning of “complementary medicine”, “alternative medicine” and “traditional medicine” among the Indonesian psychology community, through a qualitative, descriptive approach.

## 2 Methods

### 2.1 Study design

To explore the meaning of CATM in the Indonesian community of psychology, a qualitative and descriptive study was used to discover and understand the participants' point of view.<sup>[13,14]</sup> The meaning of CATM in the psychology community was surveyed using online interviews which incorporated video and audio calls software. This allowed for a broader exploration process despite the distance between researcher and participants.<sup>[15]</sup> The ethical clearance for this study was granted from the University of Ciputra.

Purposive convenience sampling was used to gain a

wide variety of experience and ensure research credibility. Participants were selected from the attendance list of a health psychology mini-seminar held in Indonesia in early 2015. The seminar was predominantly attended by psychology students, lecturers and psychologists. The inclusion criterion was that participants hold at least a bachelor's degree in psychology from a university in Indonesia. Participants were predominantly psychologists or lecturers in the field of clinical psychology.

### 2.2 Data collection

The data were collected through open-ended questions in an online interview that lasted 20–35 min. Three open-ended questions in Indonesian were asked to participants: 1) What is the meaning of “complementary medicine” and give an example; 2) What is the meaning of “alternative medicine” and give an example; and 3) What is the meaning of “traditional medicine” and give an example. Participants were told to answer based on their own knowledge, without looking at any scientific or popular references, as there were no wrong or right answers in the interview. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The recruitment of participants discontinued when data saturation was reached after the 19th interview and the next three interviews were conducted to validate the saturation.

### 2.3 Data analysis

A pseudonym with initials was used to protect each participants' identity. To ensure the trustworthiness of this study, several steps were taken.<sup>[16]</sup> All verbatim transcripts were reviewed and analysed by both authors to ensure their accuracy. A summative approach to qualitative content analysis was used because it enabled basic insight into how a word is interpreted by the participant.<sup>[17,18]</sup> Each participant's answer was read thoroughly several times to obtain a sense of the whole and primary perception, and then essential sentences were highlighted.<sup>[19]</sup> To conclude, participants' answers were compared and their commonality was sought. This process was conducted independently by each author and then the findings were compiled to ensure quality of analysis.

## 3 Results

A total of 22 participants (10 males and 12 females) with an average age of  $28.0 \pm 2.5$  years voluntarily participated in this study (Table 1).

### 3.1 Complementary medicine

Fifteen participants interpreted complementary medicine as a complement for conventional medicine or prescribed drugs. They perceived that the aim of complementary medicine is to create a more comprehensive and optimal medication for patients. Only AA said that complementary medicine has been scientifically tested and is therefore safe

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