

Research Project

Molecular, Clinical, and Anthropological Study of Unknown Fever: A Study of People with Wild Animal Exposure in Indonesia

Third-party funded project

Project title Molecular, Clinical, and Anthropological Study of Unknown Fever: A Study of People with Wild Animal Exposure in Indonesia

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Fever is a common clinical symptom of an infection due to malaria, dengue, typhoid fever, or other infections. However, not all fever can be definitely diagnosed because this symptom, even in severe clinical appearance, may self-recover without knowing the specific infection agent. Physicians can sometimes exclude some definite infections but still we do not know the exact aetiology. Lay people may believe that it is because of new moon cycle, due to common physical development, or even related to supernatural causes.

The northeastern part of the Island of Sulawesi (Indonesia) shows some ethnic groups with different characteristics, for instance, the Minahasa, the Bolaang Mongondow, and the Gorontalo. The Minahasa ethnicity is predominantly Christian while the ethnic groups of Bolaang Mongondow and Gorontalo are predominantly Muslim. This characteristic brings them also to different habits of food consumption. One of the specific practices of Minahasa people is the intake of wild animals such as forest bat, wild pig, wild forest rat, monkey, snake (especially python), lizard, some wild birds, and other wild animals. On the other hand, the two last mentioned ethnic groups who are of Muslim faith are prohibited to consume such extreme food. In relation to above Minahasa food consumption practices, the mentioned wild animals have been hunted for years, a fact which has significantly decreased their number until now. Today, we may find these animals only in the forests of Bolaang Mongondow and Gorontalo. These realities result in a different way of human exposure to the wild animals: The animal exposure of Minahasa people is predominantly due to their animal food consumption while the exposure of Bolaang Mongondow and Gorontalo persons is mainly due to their role as hunters and catchers.

There are also some villages in Bolaang Mongondow and Gorontalo region which are inhabited by Minahasa people who are predominantly Christian. As mentioned above they experience a different wild animal exposure compared to the (mainly Muslim) local people of Bolaang Mongondow and Gorontalo although they share the same environment. These two different ways of exposure of differing people but who live in the same location can therefore be compared scientifically to each other: One way of exposure due to wild animal intake/consumption and one way without any animal intake/consumption.

This study aims to know and understand the aetiology of unknown fever, in particular fever which may be caused by the exposure of Bolaang Mongondow and Gorontalo people hunting and catching wild animals, and the relevant social and cultural practices of members of these two ethnic groups. This research follows thus a scientific perspective of molecular, clinical and anthropological approaches in particular by applying their respective scientific methodological procedures.

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