

Medicinal Plants: Their Roles to the Folk Healers (Tambalan) of Tomas Oppus

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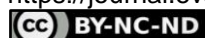
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Abstract

A folk healer is an indigenous medical practitioner who also uses medicinal plants to treat patients with common or ordinary ailments, as well as illnesses. This study aims to identify the role of medicinal plants in the folk healers of Tomas Oppus. The descriptive exploratory approach was conducted by face-to-face semi-structured interview with five identified folk healers through purposive sampling method. Results revealed that majority of the folk healers obtained their healing abilities, from their ancestors, but some claimed that it was through self-thought. Furthermore, the role of the medicinal plants to the folk healers of Tomas Oppus is for curing illnesses as well as for culture preservation because through traditional healing it helps pass the medical beliefs of our ancestors from generation to generation and still continue to use despite the rampancy of modern medicines that undergo scientific measures or clinical trials. Moreover, even though folk healers do not have the expertise of diagnosing illnesses and treating them with medicinal plants like doctors or any other medical practitioner, folk healers are still able to give good diagnoses and give the right medication because they already

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have knowledge about sickness and cure that they learned from their parents or ancestors. It is concluded that folk healers can cure various kinds of illnesses using different medical plants.

Keywords: Folk healers; healing abilities; medicinal plants, Tomas Oppus, Southern Leyte

Introduction

Traditional healing is part of Philippine society and culture. Traditional healing methods date back to 14,000 B.C. in China, the Greco-Arabic region of the world, and Western countries. It is the earliest type of organized healing that adheres to a set of fundamental principles. This type of activity in the Philippines predates the introduction of modern medications by our early ancestors who engaged in traditional healing. A traditional healer in Cebuano society is referred to as a "tambalan", according to Del Fierro and Nolasco (2013). In the Philippines, a folk healer is a native medical doctor who uses indigenous methods to treat people in agony or who have been afflicted by supernatural causes for a long time. The folk healers are a group of families that have a reputation for being able to cure a wide range of illnesses (Berdon, 2016).

Berdon (2016) also added, slowly, such kind of belief or practice is fading away. Many individuals are turning to doctors who employ Western medicine and scientific advancements to treat their illnesses. A substantial percentage of our human population has been unable to benefit from modern medical technology because of their inadequate economic status. Traditional medicine is still practiced by rural communities in developing countries around the turn of the century. On the one hand, because only the wealthy can afford modern hospitals, the country's healthcare needs are mostly determined by their ability to pay. The poor, on the other hand, must resort to traditional treatment methods.

In this manner, the researcher's interest and curiosity about how the folk healers help patients to be cured, of any common disease drives the conduct to do this research. There are many related studies about folk healers. These studies, however, primarily focus on the other characteristics of traditional healing practices and various healing

treatments or procedures performed by the folk healers such as decoctions, poultices, fumigation, anointing, cupping, prayers, incantation, and various magical procedures. Fewer studies focus on the use of medicinal plants in treating patients' ailments, and no studies have been conducted about the folk healers of the province of Southern Leyte.

In view thereof, the study seeks to address these gaps. Along this line, the study aimed to identify the role of medicinal plants in traditional healing techniques, uncover various healing therapies or methods, and the medicinal plants used by folk healers to treat their patients' ailments. In addition, this research sheds light on the origins of the folk healer's power to heal common ailments. It is envisioned that this study was to inspire other researchers to embark on a more detailed investigation of traditional healing, specifically on the use of medicinal plants.

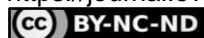
Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

This study was anchored on the theory of Erickson's Theory of Disease Causation.

Historically, anthropologists have always been interested in health and illness, diagnosis and healing, and death and dying. This has been both as a consequence of the discipline's wider concerns with the management of crises and the search for causality in everyday life, and due to the role of science, religion, magic, and ritual in protecting community welfare and ensuring continuity through generations. While medical anthropology as a discrete subdiscipline has a briefer history, its genesis is tied to anthropology's most fundamental questions of social and cultural life (Manderson, L., 1998). Moreover, the standards of healthy behaviors and lifestyles and the perceptions of the causes, transmission, and treatment of diseases vary from society to society as elaborated in medical anthropology. Further, the types and distribution of diseases also vary according to the type of social and economic organizations of societies. Human societies since the very beginning have held different ways of explaining the causes of diseases and other misfortunes. The mechanisms of addressing health problems also depend on the type of disease causation theories people hold (Doda, 2005). Hence, this led to the Theory of Disease of Causation.

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The Theory of Disease of Causation was conceptualized by Pamela I. Erickson. Dr. Erickson is a Professor of Anthropology and Community Medicine in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Connecticut. Additionally, her areas of expertise include medical anthropology, ethnomedicine, maternal and child health, global health, and ethnographic research methods. She then also focuses on the sexual and reproductive health of adolescents and emerging adults, sexual cultures, and reproduction and fitness aspects of warfare.

On the other hand, Erickson's theory on Disease Causation explains why people become ill. This casual theory provides the rationale for the treatment and prevention of illness and disease. Thus, all medical systems have both preventive and curative strategies. They also have healthcare practitioners with specialized knowledge, skills, and training who are recognized as healers through certification, examination, initiation, or public recognition. In some medical systems, training is codified (e.g., books, schools, and licensing), in others it is informal (e.g., apprenticeship, self-taught, gift from higher powers). According to Karim et al. (1994), in the traditional medical system, the healer's approach to illness depends on the perceived causation. The healing process follows different stages for different perceived causes. The first stage entails the identification of the cause of illness; according to Karim et al. (1994), this stage is vital to the entire healing process because the 'who' – or causation factor is ascertained and thus gives the healer an idea of what to use for the healing. The second stage involves the removal of hostile sources, which may be through rituals and sacrifices to appease offered spirits, neutralizing witchcraft and sorcery, or prescribing certain herbal medication.

The study seeks to conceptualize the identification and descriptions of medicinal plants used by traditional healers, as well as the role played by medicinal plants in the healing abilities of folk healers. A folk healer will use a specific type and parts of medical plants depending on the type of illness and how severe it is, as implied in Erickson's Theory of Disease Causation. In this matter, the role of the medical plants in healing various illnesses depends on the perceived causation.

Methodology

This study used descriptive exploratory design to investigate the unfamiliar in the field of medicine. The researchers used a purposive sampling method wherein they were the ones who chose individuals who could provide in-depth and comprehensive information on the topic under study. Two criteria were applied in selecting the participants. The respondents should be folk healers who are residents of Barangay San Isidro and Barangay Looc Tomas Oppus, Southern Leyte and the folk healer also uses medicinal plants in curing illnesses. The researchers approached the chosen participants from their respective homes and thoroughly explained to the participants what the study was all about. After the participants agreed to be the respondents, the researchers asked the interview guide questions, and the respondents shared their experiences to the best of their knowledge. The researchers were able to interview five participants based on the premise that they had given their full consent to be the respondents of the study. The participants of every subject in the research entailed no risk or harm. Likewise, no monetary payment was given to the participants for their participation in the study. To protect the identities and privacy of the participants, their statements were written in the transcriptions under codes rather than their real names. The researchers were able to interview five participants and these participants were coded into FH1, FH2, FH3, FH4, and FH5. After collecting the data, the researchers analyzed and interpreted the data. The researchers made use of John Creswell's thematic analysis and interpretation procedure. The process brought order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data. The general procedures, namely: obtaining data, preparation of data, transcription of the interview verbatim, coding process, identifying and analyzing meaningful segments, and grouping the segments into categories. The process repeated to identify more categories from other sets of data, that were combined into themes.

Results and Discussion

Healing Abilities of Folk Healers (Tambalan) and Cultural Preservation

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The data gathered from the interviews of the folk healers show that they inherited their healing abilities from their ancestors, which are passed down through the generations. The majority of the folk healers claimed that they learned to heal from their parents, or grandmother and grandfather, who were also folk healers. However, there were also folk healers who claimed that they acquired their healing abilities solely through self-thought.

“I don't have someone who taught me to heal illnesses. I don't even want to be a folk healer. But in my family, my mother is the only one who does folk healing, but she only does it for the family.” (Waman ko makakat-on ug kanang naay magtudlo kay waman gani koy gusto nga mag mananbalay ko. Pero sa ahong pamilya, ang ahong nanay mao raman jud to ang manambalay sa amo pero di pud to sija mo tambal sa laing taw.)-FH2

“I learned it myself. No one taught me how to cure illnesses because I live in the mountains, and when my child gets sick, I don't know where else to go. I do folk healing as long as the medicinal plants that I use aren't poisonous and as long as they can cure the illness of my child.” (Ako raman. Wamay nag tudlo naho largo naman kay nag pujo man lagi ko sa bukid ja ug masakit ahong bata kinsa may ahong sampiton, iring? Nagtambal-tambal raman ko basta laman di jud makahilo, ug unsay naa ipa inom. Kay ug masakit ahong bata, asa man ko pa ingon? Mag kuha raku ug amol unja mag kub-kub raku sa gamut. Kani laging way silinagn kinsay may imo sampiton? Mo lugsong kapa unja ang imong bata nag hungak na.)-FH4

According to Bibon (2021), on the one hand, life experiences paved the training to becoming a folk healer. Primarily related to the passed knowledge from a folk healer in the family, others were shaped by personal experiences related to treating a sick family member. On the other hand, the reputation and power of the indigenous healers depend upon how they become healers, that is, to what degree they have the requisite knowledge and devices for treatment, and whether or not they have supernatural connections. However, to become a general practitioner, the healer has to accumulate the necessary esoteric and empirical knowledge

about sickness and cure. In this manner, the medical knowledge that a healer can be acquired in various means, either in an empirical or miraculous nature (Yoshida, 1985).

“I learned folk healing from my parents and grandparents.” (Sa along ginikan ko nakakat-on sa pag panambal, ug sa mga apuhan naho.)-FH3

Medicinal plants are one of the main sources of traditional healing. They play a significant role in culture preservation because traditional healing helps pass the medical beliefs of our ancestors from one generation to the next. The prolongation goes on and the practice continues despite the rampancy of modern medicines that undergo scientific measures or clinical trials. According to Bibon (2021), family is the center of origin of passed knowledge in folk healing where acquired practices were primarily rooted through apprenticeship.

Before modern medicines were introduced by this kind of practice in the Philippines, Filipino early ancestors engaged in traditional healing (Berdon et al., 2016). Traditional healing is a part of the Filipino culture that has been passed down through many generations and is continuously being practiced, especially in far-flung barrios and barangays in the country. It has a rich history dating back to the pre-colonial period when Babaylan, aside from being a religious leader, served as the main dispenser of health care to everyone in the community (Labastida, 2016).

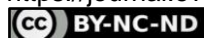
Traditional healing by folk healers and the healing practices hold relevance in Filipino culture today. Hence, as supported by Crisol and Oledan (2017), culture bearers such as these folk healers in other parts of the country, should be given more societal and academic attention because they cater to an important function in Philippine culture.

The Learned Healing Abilities of Folk Healers and Diagnosing Illnesses

“I learned folk healing from my parents. They taught me about the kinds of medicinal plants that can cure specific illnesses. They taught me which medicinal plants can cure fever and cough.” (Nakakat-on ko ug

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pagpanambal sa ahong ginikanan sauna. Mo ingon ra sija nga ang kanang sagbuta dai mao nay paras hilanat, kana mao nay paras ubo.)-F1

According to Fierro and Nolasco (2013), generally, folk healers have acquired their abilities through observation and practice. Healing skills were learned from a parent, grandparent, or a close relative who, over time, taught them the value of alternative medicine. Knowledge of indigenous medicine among them is used in association with religious activities believing that lack of trust and devotion to their spiritual patron will make their healing power disappear.

As with other healers, there is usually a history of a healer in the family line, and they would attribute it as their "calling." The power or ability is credited to a supernatural being, often, attributed to the Holy Spirit. Often lacking in formal education, their skills are based on and honed from hand-me-down practices and lore, with a long period of understudy or apprenticeship with a family elder or a local healer. Years of patience and study bring the healer into a familiarity with the lore, rituals, and modalities of diagnosis and healing, the prayers, bulong and orasyon, and the use of herbal medicinal plants. (Apostol and Baet, 2007)

At a young age, a folk healer observed their parents treating illnesses or ailments with medicinal plants. They can see how their parents treat a specific illness with medicinal plants, which parts of the plants to use, and how to administer it. The folk healer learns not only the importance of using medicinal plants to cure illness but also how to diagnose illnesses. This extensive knowledge of the medicinal uses of plants and where they can be grown, as well as their skills in preparation and administration, are also passed down from their ancestors. Even though folk healers do not have the precise expertise of diagnosing illness and treating it with medicinal plants like medical doctors or any other medical practitioner, folk healers are still able to give accurate diagnoses and give the right medication because they already have knowledge about sickness and cure that they learned from their parents or ancestors. They know the proper diagnosis of treating the illness because it has been proven and tested by their parents or ancestors, who are also folk healers who successfully cured their patients using medicinal plants. That is why,

even though medical practitioners have developed medicines to treat illnesses, people continue to seek medical help from folk healers not only because it is less expensive, but also because it is as effective as those medicinal drugs.

Medicinal Plants According to the Diagnose Illness





Herbal medicine is widely used in our community, especially to the folk healers in Tomas Oppus, Southern Leyte. It can heal illnesses and deliver the required nutrients to the body. Herbs are significant in curing internal and external illnesses of the human body. It is beneficial for the people, particularly the less fortunate because most of them cannot afford to go to the hospital due to high hospital bills. Besides, these medicinal plants can provide remedies for their illnesses. It provides them convenience since most of the herbs grow in their surroundings. Herbs and traditional healers are thus interconnected and play important roles. Folk healers shared their knowledge of providing remedies to the sick. A folk healer learns these ways of healing from the ancestors. And some of them learn through observation. With this, they have been able to help the community with less financial support.

The lists of herbal medicines in the table below are used by the folk healers found in the community of Tomas Oppus. These medicinal plants were grown by the folk healers in their backyards, gardens, or elsewhere in their surroundings. Hence, curing illnesses or ailments is quick because there is no need to get the cure to far places. At the same time, because the treatment is quick, fatalities and illness worsening are reduced.



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Table 1:


The list of herbal medicines in the table is used of the "mananambalay"
found in the community of Tomas Oppus

FEVER					
Name of Herbal (Local Name)	Picture	Scientific Name	Part of Herbal Used	Preparation	Administration
Gabon		Blumea balsamifera	Leaves	Soak in cold water	Ingestion
Busikad		Kyllinga brevifolia	Roots	Soaked in water	Ingestion
Tawa-tawa		Euphorbia hirta	Stem, Leaves, Roots	Boil in water	Ingestion
Lagnob		Moraceae	Roots	Soaked in water	Ingestion


STOMACH PAIN					
Name of Herbal (Local Name)	Picture	Scientific Name	Part of Herbal Used	Preparation	Administration

Away Agkot			Leaves	Soaked in water	Ingestion
Madre de Cacao		Gliricidia sepium	Leaves	Soaked the young leaves in hot water	Ingestion
Bujon			Roots	Boil in water	Ingestion
Mansanitas		Arctostaphylos manzanita	Young leaves	Boil in water	Ingestion

DIARRHEA



Name of Herbal (Local Name)	Picture	Scientific Name	Part of Herbal Used	Preparation	Administration
Bayabas		Psidium guajava	Young leaves	Boil in water	Ingestion

MUSCLE PAIN


Name of Herbal (Local Name)	Picture	Scientific Name	Part of Herbal Used	Preparation	Administration
Tubata		Jatropha curcas linn	Leaves	Heat the leaves by passing them through the fire	Rub it on the affected part of the body

LOWER BLOOD PLAIN


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Hibi-hibi		Mimosa pudica	Roots		
Tanglad		Cymbopogon	Leaves and Stem (for at least 15 leaves along with its roots)		

DENGUE

Name of Herbal (Local Name)	Picture	Scientific Name	Part of Herbal Used	Preparation	Administration
Tawa-tawa		Euphorbia hirta	Stem, Leaves, Roots	Boil in water	Ingestion


KIDNEY

Name of Herbal (Local Name)	Picture	Scientific Name	Part of Herbal Used	Preparation	Administration
Kumintang		Catharanthus roseus	Roots	Boil in water	Ingestion


CHICKENPOX

Buwak Hangga			Roots	Soaked in warm water	Ingestion
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DISINFECT WOUNDS

Name of Herbal (Local Name)	Picture	Scientific Name	Part of Herbal Used	Preparation	Administration
Bayabas		Psidium guajava	Young leaves	Boil in water	Ingestion

BURNS


Name of Herbal (Local Name)	Picture	Scientific Name	Part of Herbal Used	Preparation	Administration
Tomato (Kamatis)		Solanum lycopersicum	Fruit	Cut the tomato into parallel thin slices working from the top of the tomato toward to bottom	Apply the parallel slices of the tomato to the burned skin

RELAPSE

Name of Herbal (Local Name)	Picture	Scientific Name	Part of Herbal Used	Preparation	Administration
Lagnob		Moraceae	Roots	Soaked in water	Ingestion
Elepante-Elepante			Roots	Boil in water	Ingestion

GOITER

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Gubana		Anona muricata Linn	Leaves, roots	-Take about 2 inches of root and then peel it. After that, boil the peeled root in water.	Ingestion
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The study found that medicinal plants play an important role in treating patients' illnesses, ailments, and signs and symptoms. Moreover, it plays an important role in cultural preservation because treating illnesses with medicinal plants is considered local knowledge. Although there are folk healers who gain their healing abilities through self-thought, however, the concept of healing illness with medicinal plants is already an established culture. Any individual can be a folk healer as long as he has the right knowledge on the proper use of different herbal medicines which is necessary to benefit from the natural healing effect. In addition, the study also reveals that even though there are professional doctors or hospitals for medical help, some people would still prefer the folk healer not only because it is cheaper, but also because it is part of our culture. People have the assurance about their health if they also receive diagnosis from folk healers. Traditional healing practices continue despite modern science because Filipino early ancestors engaged in traditional healing long before modern medicines were introduced in the Philippines.

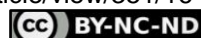
In this regard, it is recommended that the support for indigenous healers should be extended given their significant role in the medical system and for culture preservation. Furthermore, the local government units, in collaboration with the barangay leaders, should develop program/s or ordinances aimed at the propagation of medicinal plants found within the local environment.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that, as implied by Erickson's Theory of Disease Causation, the approach of folk healers to illness is dependent on the perceived causation. The healing process differs depending on the perceived causes. A folk healer cures their patients' illnesses or ailments differently depending on the type of illness, how severe it is, or the causes of the illness. Further, the folk healers prescribe certain herbal medications

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and decide how to treat the patients based on the illness and its causes as well. Interviews also reveal that these folk healers can cure various kinds of illnesses that are caused by supernatural or natural forces. Medicinal plants can cure illnesses such as fever, colds, flu, dengue, blood pressure, disinfect wounds, diarrhea, muscle pain, stomachache, chicken fox, skin diseases, stomach pain, relapse, kidney, and goiter. They cure these illnesses by using different medical plants.

It is recommended to have support from the local government in the propagation of medicinal plants found within or even in remote areas in the locality considering that most of the medicinal plants of the folk healers are taken within their locality.

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