

Unveiling The Folk Healing Strategies Of Traditional Doctors In Burauen, Leyte

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Abstract - This research aimed to unveil the enduring folk healing strategies still practiced by traditional healers or *tambalans* in Burauen, Leyte. This also includes identifying the different illnesses they typically cure, how their folk medicine practices differ across various *barangays* in Burauen, and the observable changes in the folk medicine practices over time. Through the interview of five traditional healers or *tambalans*, the researcher found out that they acquired their skills through various means, including attending training and seminars, divine intervention, inherent abilities, and familial influence. The illnesses they treat are categorized into two: physical and spiritual. Most of them employ a range of healing methods, such as using medicinal plants, massage techniques, rituals, and prayers. Faith plays a crucial role in the healing process, underscoring the deep cultural roots of their practices. While traditional healers share many commonalities, they also exhibit differences. Also, it was found that some healers are unable to treat individuals with whom they share close ties, while others may differ in their sincerity, with a few being perceived as exploitative. Furthermore, many healers observe specific days for their practices, though some can perform healing at any time.

Index Terms - Folk Medicine, Folk Healing Strategies, Folk Healer, Traditional Doctor

I. INTRODUCTION

Throughout centuries across countries, despite the advancement and knowledge of Western medicines, some people still resort to traditional healing to address their demands for health and well-being. Early civilizations built a healthcare system to explain illness and developed strategies for dealing with both physical and mental problems, in which culture plays an integral part. Cross-culturally, illness, disease, and misfortunes are believed to be caused by spiritual beings. Spirits inflict illness on people who violate a taboo (Peoples and Garrick, 2021). To fight against these illnesses, diseases, and misfortunes, cultural knowledge regarding particular events might be necessary. Most of the time, since the causes of specific ailments are unexplainable, folk healers offer descriptions of the causes of misfortune (Turkey Ministry of Culture and Tourism n.d). This kind of practice still exists in the modern world despite the advancement and knowledge of Western medicines.

Folk healing is an embedded part of a group's culture as it is connected with the indigenous beliefs of the group. Cultural explanations and curative methods are developed by every group for coping with different kinds of diseases that affect normal life. These traditional practices and expertise are passed through generations. Those individuals possessing indigenous knowledge on health preservation are called folk healers. Folk healers can identify and cure diseases and disorders using various plants available in their environment (Gulapa, 2022). To appease the spirits that may cause the disease, folk healers utilized herbal plants and performed rituals.

As with any other cultural group in the world, the Philippines also has various folk healing practices led by folk healers in different groups. Its existence is thought to have started for hundreds of years, even before the colonization by the Spaniards. The roots of traditional medicine can be traced back to the practices of various ethnic and indigenous groups in the country. One known assumption is that the spectrum of traditional medicine in the Philippines has been brought about by the influences mainly of ethnic Chinese traditional medicine systems, local folklore, and experiments with the use of medicinal resources (Crisol, 2020). However, from centuries of Spanish colonization in the country, the prior ancestral beliefs of the Chinese have merged their influence with Christian beliefs. This is evident in amulets or *anting-anting*, which are believed to protect an individual from sickness, natural calamities, and even violence caused by humans, which are blended with church-adapted prayers (World Health Organization, 2005).

Today, every known group in the country has its local folk healers. They are called in various names - *sirkano*, *surhano*, *baylan*, *haplasan*, *tambalan* and *mananambal*. In most cases, these specialists are old men and women in the group; they interpret dreams, diagnose illnesses, and attend all the ceremonies connected

with society's right of passage (Jocano, 1966). In Eastern Visayas, folk healers are called "*tambalan*" or "*mananambal*". They provide medication for various natural and supernatural illnesses.

A person can become a *tambalan* by way of heredity (*guipasunod*), training (*gui-agak*), calling through dreams (*guipadamgohan*), or knowledge infusion (*guitugahan*). Belief in spirits is common to *tambalans* as they believe that *engkantos* can bring disease. However, because they believe that therapeutic herbs are God's property, the *Tambalans* also ask the Christian God for permission before using them (Galleon, 1976). Additionally, before picking the therapeutic plants in the forests, these *tambalans* repeat church prayers twice. Traditional *hilots* in the country, on the other hand, usually receive their training early on. They can occasionally become midwives and specialize in injuries to the bones and muscles.

Subsequently, traditional medical knowledge is important to a particular culture since it is a collective knowledge passed from generation to generation. It is essential to record the activities of folk healers, including their use of traditional medicine, in order to keep a particular group's cultural identity from being eradicated. Additionally, as folk medicine is one method of treating many illnesses, especially those that are prevalent in their region, recording the traditional knowledge of the folk healers can help to conserve and safeguard indigenous cultures (World Intellectual Property Organization, n.d.).

Over the years, because of the increasing dominance of Western medicine, it is evident that the visibility of folk healing practices is slowly losing its glitter. This study aims to unveil the enduring folk healing strategies still practiced by traditional doctors in Burauen, Leyte. Although research about traditional healing practices has been conducted in other regions of the Philippines, it is undeniable that information about the healing strategies among *Tambalans* in Leyte has remained largely underexplored. Hence, this study will provide an appreciation of the cultural healing practices in the region that are passed down from generation to generation and dating back to the pre-colonial period. Studies on this can result in the enrichment of folk healing and the development of policies concerning traditional healing in Burauen, Leyte.

Statement of the Problem

Folk medicine refers to traditional health knowledge and healing practices anchored in cultural beliefs of body physiology and health preservation rather than Western or modern medicine (Laguio, 2023). These practices have existed since the Sumerians more than 5,000 years ago. Their foundation lies in the knowledge of our early predecessors, especially in regards to the therapeutic use of plants.

Despite the development of professional medicine, folk medicine remains popular and widely used worldwide. It is anticipated that as society develops and advances, contemporary advancements will likewise have an impact on and shape traditional medicine practices.

Burauen, the locale of this study, is well known for its enduring popularity of folk medicine. However, like elsewhere, modernization influences the continuity, adaptation, or even disappearance of certain folk medicine practices. Moreover, the fact that folk medicine remains a largely unexplored area of study in Burauen further emphasizes the importance of conducting this research.

Relative to this, this paper aims to bridge the following research gaps:

1. What are the enduring folk medicine practices in Burauen?
2. What changes have occurred in these folk medicine practices over time?
3. How do these folk medicine practices differ across various barangays in Burauen?

Conceptual Framework

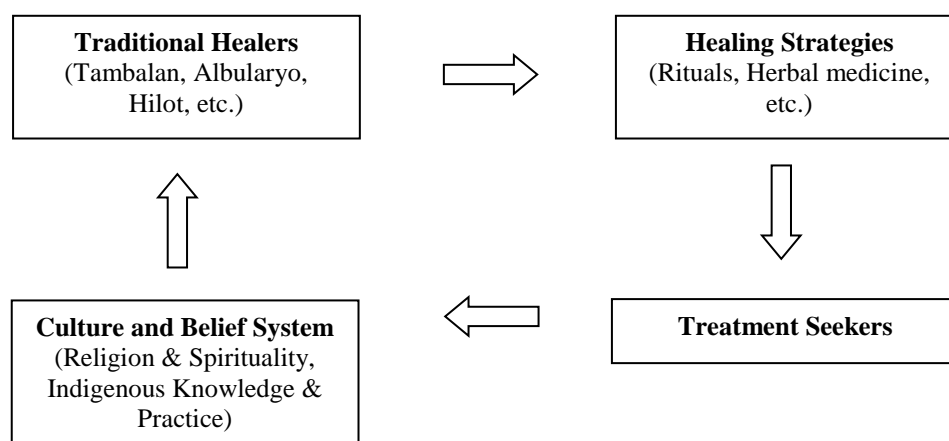


Figure 1. Relationship between variables in the study.

This conceptual framework illustrates the relationships between traditional healers, healing strategies, treatment seekers, and the culture & belief system in Burauen, Leyte. By drawing into the connection of these elements, the study aims to explore the different healing strategies employed by traditional healers to treatment-seeking individuals and how these practices are affected by the existing culture and belief system in a community.

Traditional healers also known locally as *tambalan*, *albulario*, or *hilot* are health practitioners utilizing long-standing healing strategies that may include rituals based on traditions, religion, and the healer's spiritual inclination. Additionally, traditional healers may also draw from their immediate environment and make use of herbal medicines to cure various illnesses. Traditional healers and the strategies they employ are deeply rooted to the culture and belief system practiced in the community, the latter serving as the foundation upon which healing strategies are built. The existing cultural practice in the community also heavily influences the health-seeking behaviors of individuals, developing deep trust in traditional healing due to familiarity and accessibility.

Theoretical Framework

Rondilla et al., (2021) defined folk healing or folk medicine as a set of knowledge and practices that is concerned with how our body works and how health can be preserved. As a subfield of medical anthropology, folk medicine is a reflection of indigenous health beliefs that may be influenced by social relations, cultural ecology, and even political environment. Folk medicine and healers play a significant role in the healthcare system of many developing countries (WHO, 2002). In the Philippines, folk healing is a long-standing locally accepted means to identify causes and treatment of sickness. The application of unique means to achieve diagnosis and unconventional methods of treatment would often be frowned upon by licensed medical practitioners.

With access to quality health care remaining to be a pressing problem in the country, folk healers have provided an alternative to less privileged Filipinos especially those living in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas. This can also be linked to the accessibility, acceptability, and affordability of the treatment. Despite the proliferation of facilities intended for modern medicine, folk healers or *tambalans* are still being patronized in Eastern Visayas, bringing psycho-religion-therapeutic effects to health-seeking individuals using a variety of healing strategies.

This part of the paper explains and reviews existing concepts and theories relevant to the subject matter being studied.

Placebo Effect & Classical Conditioning Theory

In the medical field, placebo effect occurs when a fake medical intervention results in the improvement of a patient's condition. This phenomenon is usually associated with the positive perception of the patient towards the used medical intervention (Munnangi et al., 2023). This occurrence is explained by the complex relationship and interaction of the body and mind or the interplay of psychological and neurobiological mechanisms. Aside from the dummy intervention being administered to patients, placebo effect also extends to the results of patient-physician relationship, modulation of expectations, self-awareness, and even religion.

In the early days, the placebo effect was treated as a nuisance variable that needs to be controlled. Skeptics argue that the placebo effect only alters the view of patients towards the sickness but does nothing to cure it. However, with recent advances on the phenomenon, it is now recognized as an occurrence that has the potential to improve patient outcomes and greatly influences the way patients respond to treatments for pain, anxiety, and even for surgeries (Colagui et al., 2015). Rather than being just regarded as response biases, placebo creates actual effects on the brain and body.

Therapeutic patterns that heighten placebo effects are especially prominent in unconventional healing which includes folk or traditional healing (Kaptchuk, 2002). People patronizing traditional medicine and receiving unconventional treatments experience peace of mind and improvement in condition which is akin to the psychological benefits of placebo (Sato & Costa-i-Font, 2012). The ingrained cultural and religious origin and relevance of folk medicine enhances the perceived effectiveness of the treatment administered. Placebo effect in folk medicine can mean that a patient simply expects for the situation to get better which results in a self-fulfilling prophecy, creating a strong connection between one's belief and an actual occurrence (Stack, 2018).

A distinct mechanism of placebo effect in folk medicine is classical conditioning. Drawing into this approach, placebo is considered as a conditioned stimulus while placebo effects are conditioned responses (Babel, 2019). In folk medicine, certain symbols or practices that are included in the healing process may act as conditioned stimuli. Over time, patients utilizing folk medicine associate these with relief or alleviation of pain, even without actual medical intervention. The effect on the patient is then considered as the conditioned response, as patients experience improvement in their condition due to their belief in the effectiveness of the treatment. With increased exposure to folk medicine and its practices, the repeated association of the rituals to positive health results gradually strengthens the belief of the patient, making the placebo effect more apparent. Classical conditioning outlines how folk healing may lead to actual relief or improvement in a patient's condition through the placebo effect.

George Herbert Mead's Symbolic Interactionism Theory

Developed by the American Philosopher George Herbert Mead, symbolic interactionism is a micro-level theory that explains how society evolves through maintained and repeated interactions between individuals (Carter and Fuller, 2015). The theory is a bottom-up approach in understanding the holistic operations of the society. The central idea of the symbolic interactionist thought is the notion that members of the society utilize language and significant symbols to communicate with each other and create meanings. According to this theory, individuals then act based on the meaning attached to an object or situation and this meaning is constantly being recreated or modified.

Drawing into the basic tenets of symbolic interactionism, this framework can be used to understand meanings behind folk healing practices and processes. In many traditional healing systems, folk healers and their patients co-create and share symbolic meanings that revolve around illness and healing. The symbols, rituals, and language utilized by folk healers are deeply embedded and internalized in the established belief system of the community. As folk healers and patients repeatedly interact, they create and reinforce meanings attached to the healing process (Normayani et al., 2023).

Ethnomedicine

Ethnomedicine is the study of traditional medicine including the culturally appropriate process of diagnosing an illness and administering a cure. This body of knowledge and practices are passed on orally or through written texts from one generation to another and focuses on the cultural interpretation of health and illness (Chattopadhyay, 2010). Following an emic perspective to studying culture, ethnomedicine follows an insider's view of medical processes practiced within a culture. It looks at medicine as a part of a larger culture and thus explains the mechanisms behind certain societal norms practiced related to medicine (Quinlan, 2022). With its deep cultural roots, ethnomedicine heavily relies on belief systems and religious practices. Health practitioners in ethnomedicine utilizes resources readily available in the local community and would often use rituals with long-held cultural significance. With ethnomedicine's close connection to belief systems and traditional practices in a specific culture, it leads to a natural overlap with folk medicine, the latter emphasizing healing practices rooted in specific local and cultural contexts. Folk medicine remains to be a significant part of ethnomedicine, serving as the representation of people's actual and lived experiences on traditional healing practices.

Scope and Delimitation

This research study focuses on examining the folk healing strategies used by traditional doctors, mostly known as “tambalan” in Eastern Visayas. While aiming to uncover traditional doctors’ healing practices and its evolution, the study will focus on Burauen wherein the study will explore the people from Burauen who have been practicing folk healing for at least two years and above. The research study will be conducted through interviews with the traditional healers and patients, observation as well as documentation of the healing practices.

Definition of Terms

Folk medicine - the mixture of traditional healing practices and beliefs that involve herbal medicine, spirituality, and manual therapies in order to diagnose, treat or prevent an ailment or illness.

Folk healing strategies – a set of healing methods developed and employed by traditional doctors or folk healers in order to diagnose and treat illness.

Mananambal or Tambalan – the local name given to traditional doctors or folk healers in Eastern Visayas who provide treatment for various natural and supernatural illnesses.

Traditional doctor or Folk healer – refers to practitioners who utilize traditional healing practices involving herbal remedies, spirituality, and physical exercises to deal with illnesses.

II. LITERATURE SURVEY

For centuries, countries have developed unique systems of treating illnesses while utilizing knowledge, skills, and practices that are deeply intertwined with the culture of indigenous groups. Folk medicine has been developed through generations in various societies around the world. Before the onset of modern medicine, the majority of the world population relied on this traditional knowledge to prevent, diagnose, and treat sickness (Agrawal, 2019). The use of plants for healing purposes is as old as human civilization. Archaeologists have found evidence of medicinal plant use in burial sites dating back more than 60,000 years. Civilizations such as ancient Egypt, China, and India recorded detailed medical knowledge about the use of herbs for healing (Goodman and Gilman, 1996). In prehistoric societies, healers or shamans were believed to possess the ability to interact with the spirit world, using rituals, chants, and the invocation of spirits to heal the sick. Archaeological evidence of shamans’ roles in healing has been found in ancient human settlements (Winkelman, 1992).

Traditional medical knowledge is vital to a culture, representing collective knowledge passed down through generations. To preserve a particular group's cultural identity, it is crucial to document the methods used by folk healers, including the usage of folk medicine. Documenting this knowledge also helps protect indigenous communities and preserve valuable resources for treating diseases, especially those prevalent in their regions (World Intellectual Property Organization, n.d.). According to Rondilla et al. (2021), people believe that folk medicine works well for resolving health issues, and their satisfaction with it is based on past experiences, family customs, and mistrust of the modern healthcare system.

Folk medicine has been practiced in the Philippines for hundreds of years, even before its colonization. Just like in other countries, folk medicine in the Philippines traces its roots to the practices of ethnic and indigenous groups. The variation in folk medicine practices in the Philippines was assumed to be influenced by Chinese traditional medicine as a result of the Philippine-China connection during the pre-colonial era. Early Filipinos would utilize medicinal plants readily available in the environment, like *Lagundi*, Lemon Leaves, and Coconut, to cure natural or supernatural illnesses. With over three centuries of Spanish colonization, indigenous groups began integrating Christian beliefs and practices with folk healing traditions. This fusion gave rise to unique healing practices where folk healers used prayers, statues of saints, and religious objects in their treatments (World Health Organization, 2005).

The government of the Philippines has recognized the importance of traditional medicine and has taken steps to support and promote it. In 1992, the Department of Health launched the Traditional Medicine Program, and in 1997, Republic Act No. 8423, the Traditional and Alternative Medicine Act or TAMA was enacted. This law institutionalized support for traditional healing practices and led to the creation of the Philippine Institute of Traditional and Alternative Health Care (PITAHC), which promotes research and product development in traditional medicine.

According to the Philippine Congress (1997), TAMA represents a legal framework that not only recognizes traditional medicine but also aims to ensure its quality and safety. The act allows PITAHC to standardize practices and products, which is important for public safety. This government support means that

traditional medicine is given legitimacy alongside modern medical practices, promoting its use within communities and hospitals alike.

The health and wellbeing of Filipino communities are significantly impacted by the ongoing use and support of traditional medicine. In rural areas where hospitals and other contemporary medical facilities may be few, traditional medicine provides easily accessible treatment. The government makes sure that these communities can maintain their health without depending entirely on costly or unavailable modern therapies by encouraging safe and efficient traditional practices. Traditional medicine's acceptance as a legitimate component of healthcare offers an inclusive healthcare option that helps close the gap between various social and economic groups.

The relationship between traditional and modern medicine also promotes cultural preservation. As traditional practices are incorporated into healthcare, they become more widely respected and are less likely to be forgotten or replaced. This preservation helps reinforce Filipino identity and pride, as traditional medicine is a living part of the culture. The studies by Espole and Muhat (2022) and Octaviano Rondilla et al. (2021) emphasize that cultural practices in healthcare are not only valuable for healing but are also meaningful ways to stay connected to one's heritage. Government initiatives like TAMA reinforce these cultural values, further encouraging younger generations to appreciate and continue these traditions.

Finally, the integration of traditional medicine into modern healthcare can improve the patient experience by recognizing and respecting cultural beliefs. When doctors and healthcare workers show understanding toward traditional practices, it builds trust and cooperation between patients and providers. As a result, patients are more likely to seek care and follow treatment plans, contributing to better overall health outcomes.

In rural areas, especially in the Philippines, economically disadvantaged people often turn to folk healers for healthcare services due to the availability and affordability of folk remedies. Despite the proliferation of modern healthcare facilities, the ongoing healthcare crisis and the high cost of services push many Filipinos to continue seeking traditional healing practices. These practices, with their strong cultural and religious ties, maintain a deep trust among locals (Rondilla et al., 2021).

In Eastern Visayas, folk healing remains deeply embedded in the community's traditions, beliefs, and history. Folk healers, called mananambal or tambalan, occupy a unique position in the rural areas, providing treatment for various ailments. Galleon (1976) states that traditional medicines are given as coconut oil mixed with chopped medicinal plants (hapas), beverages (ilimnon), and concoctions of dried leaves, roots, and branches (tinutum). These techniques address spiritual and psychological problems in addition to physical ones, demonstrating the close connection between religion, culture, and health in the area. Dissatisfaction with traditional treatment, especially when people feel that modern doctors are unable to identify witchcraft-related problems or heal certain ailments, is the reason why tambalans are still preferred despite modern medicine (Welz, Klein, and Mendrad, 2018; Tiston, 1978).

Despite the government's efforts, traditional healing faces many challenges. Dr. Isidro C. Sia (2014) identified the continuing loss of knowledge on traditional medicine, the need to strengthen research, and the limitation of funding as significant obstacles. This knowledge is often passed down in secrecy, usually from parent to child, and may be lost when the owners of the knowledge pass away (Khumalo et al., 2018). Without proper preservation measures, valuable traditional medicinal knowledge may disappear, leading to a negative impact on the health of communities that depend on it.

Efforts are being made to preserve this knowledge. For example, the Philippine government's National Greening Program partnered with the Cantabon Healers Association to plant medicinal plants in forests to ensure the sustainability of forest resources. Additionally, local initiatives, such as those in Siquijor, focus on educating younger generations about traditional healing practices to help preserve the cultural and ecological knowledge associated with folk medicine (Mansueto, 2015).

Even though the traditional healing culture faces numerous obstacles, it has managed to endure and adapt in the face of globalization, the impact of Western healthcare institutions, and the intricate history of colonization. These historical events have led to the blending of native and foreign healing practices, superstitions, and beliefs (Apostol and Baet, 2007). Nonetheless, traditional knowledge can survive and even flourish in contemporary culture with sustained preservation efforts.

In a study by Rondilla et. al., (2021), they found that many people are drawn to traditional medicine because they believe in its natural approach to healing and feel a strong connection to their cultural roots. This motivation is even stronger among those who see health as a balance of mind, body, and spirit. This deep connection to heritage and holistic health explains why traditional medicine remains popular, even as modern medicine becomes more widely available.

In conclusion, the Philippines' indigenous knowledge-based traditional medicine still plays a vital role in the country's healthcare system, particularly in rural areas with limited access to contemporary medical care. The government's support for these practices through initiatives like TAMA and the efforts to preserve medicinal plant resources demonstrate the importance of maintaining this cultural heritage. Traditional healing can thrive by being documented, promoted, and incorporated into contemporary healthcare systems, protecting Filipino culture and offering future generations easily accessible healthcare options.

III. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Based on the nature of the research statement, qualitative research design was utilized for the study. A qualitative research approach is particularly suitable for exploring social phenomena, such as traditional healing practices adapted by local folk healers. This approach allowed the researchers to focus on the experiences of folk healers and offered flexibility in data collection. Qualitative approach offered a comprehensive framework for understanding and exploring the various practices of traditional healers in Burauen, Leyte.

Research Locale

The study area is Burauen, a 1st class municipality located in the province of Leyte, Philippines. It encompasses a total land area of approximately 31,732.94 hectares and has a population density of around 200 inhabitants per square kilometer. Burauen has seventy-seven barangays and a population exceeding fifty thousand residents. In terms of healthcare infrastructure, the municipality is served by the Rural Health Unit and the Burauen District Hospital, which are the primary facilities catering to the medical needs of the local population. However, challenges exist due to the geographic distribution of the barangays, with thirty-nine of them situated in upland areas, thereby limiting residents' access to healthcare services. These geographical barriers, coupled by financial constraints, often lead the residents to seek medical consultation from folk healers within their immediate communities.



Figure 2. Map of Burauen, Leyte

Research Respondents

The municipality of Burauen in the province of Leyte, located in Eastern Visayas, Philippines, is known for its strong tradition of patronage in folk medicine. This enduring practice is influenced by the cultural significance of traditional healing and the region's geographical and financial constraints in accessing conventional medical services. These factors led the researchers to choose Burauen as the study site, focusing on the lived experiences of local folk healers residing in the area.

Sampling Technique

This study employed a phenomenological approach to comprehend the lived experiences of folk healers or *tambalans* in Burauen, Leyte. Using convenience sampling, a number of *tambalans* in the said locale practicing folk medicine on the day of data collection were approached and interviewed on separate instances. The data gathered was then analyzed through thematic analysis.

Research Instrument

The research study utilized unstructured interviews in local dialect as a research instrument. Unstructured interviews in local dialects allows researchers to understand the folk healing practices from the respondents' perspectives. Before the interview, the respondents were asked for their consent to record the conversation, and all agreed. The participants' responses were subsequently recorded using a voice recorder to ensure the accurate documentation of all data. These research instruments enable respondents to comfortably share their knowledge of healing practices. Conversely, researchers effectively record the relevant information needed in the study.

Data Gathering Procedure

The research study used purposive sampling to select participants who are practitioners of folk healing. The researchers constructed interview questions to be provided to the participants. Before the interview, the researchers asked for the respondents' consent to participate in the study and provided a letter of consent. Once consent was already approved, the researchers conducted the interview using the interview guide and recorded their responses to collect data. The data was then assessed and interpreted to derive answers to the research questions.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results, analysis, and interpretation of the findings in the study. The research investigates the healing practices of traditional doctors or folk healers in Burauen, Leyte. Participants were selected using convenience sampling and thematic analysis was employed to identify sub themes and overarching themes from the collected responses.

Figure 3. *Demographic Profile of Respondents*

Respondent	Age	Gender	Address	Years in practice
Respondent 1	51	Female	Brgy. Bayog District 9 Burauen, Leyte	14 years
Respondent 2	79	Female	Brgy. Arado, Burauen, Leyte	30 years
Respondent 3	49	Female	Brgy. San Diego District IX, Burauen, Leyte	20 years
Respondent 4	64	Male	Brgy. Libas Burauen, Leyte	42 years
Respondent 5	68	Female	Pob. District VI, Burauen, Leyte	26 ears

Figure 3 provides the demographic profile of the study participants. All respondents are recognized both within and beyond their respective barangays as folk healers, having established a reputation in this capacity. Additionally, each participant has been practicing folk healing for over a decade, contributing to their extensive knowledge and expertise in the field. The respondents reside in different barangays, thereby representing an area within the municipality.

The six phases for Thematic Analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) were followed.

1. Familiarizing oneself with data
2. Generalizing initial codes
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes and
6. Producing the report

Answers gathered from the responses were read several times and the researcher took notes on the initial and preliminary codes that emerged while taking the research question in mind. The identified initial codes were separated and codes conveying similar meanings were then grouped. These codes were modified in order to avoid duplication and eliminate codes conveying exactly the same message. The altered codes implying similar contents were then formed into initial themes. The identified initial themes were reviewed, modified, and developed. Initial themes carrying overlapping meanings were again grouped together, making a new and more general theme. Several rounds of coding, grouping, modifying, and reviewing was conducted on the gathered responses before moving on to the final phase.

Beginning the Practice of Folk Medicine

When asked about the beginning of their folk healing practices, two respondents indicated that they started in their 20s. Respondent 3 began practicing as a *hilot* at the age of 29, following the birth of her daughter, while Respondent 4 began at 22, after receiving guidance from his '*maestro*'. The other two participants began their practices in their 40s – Respondent 2 at the age of 49 and Respondent 5 at 42. Lastly, Respondent 1 shared that she began her journey as a folk healer at 37 years old. A majority of the respondents reported experiencing a significant life event prior to them practicing folk healing. For instance, Respondent 5 survived a natural disaster which led her to reflect on how she could repay the divine for her survival. Respondent 3's decision to become a traditional healer followed after the birth of her child, while Respondent 4 attributed his folk healing practice to the revelation he received.

"Naiha na, nakadto pa kami ha Cantimawa. Mga 2010." (... long time ago, when we were still living in Cantimawa. Probably back in 2010.) - Respondent 1

"Naiha na Ginoo ko ... waray pa an Yolanda ngani, nanambal na ako. Waray pa singkwenta nak edad." (I began quite some time ago. I had been a healer for a long time before Typhoon Yolanda. I started when I was still not yet in my 50s.) - Respondent 2

"Tikang pagburod ko ha akon anak. Mga 20 years na naghihilot." (I started when I became pregnant with my child. I've been a practicing hilot for 20 years.) - Respondent 3

"Una magtikang ako panambal 22 pala an akon edad ... an nagsugo hiton ha akon an maestro." (I started when I was only 22 years old ... It was Maestro who instructed me to start.) - Respondent 4

"Nagtikang ako 42 an akon edad so 26 years na." (I started when I was 42 years old so I have been practicing for 26 years.) - Respondent 5

The Process of Becoming a Tambalan

Apprenticeship. Respondents 2 and 5 claimed that they underwent a seminar to learn massage skills. Respondent 2's response *"Nagpaseminar man ako..."* (I underwent a seminar...) and Respondent's 5 *"120 days ako nga nagseminar..."* (I attended a 120-day seminar) led to the emergence of a common theme which is apprenticeship. An apprenticeship is a training method where an individual acquires expertise in an art, trade, or craft under a formal agreement that specifies the duration and terms of the relationship between the master and the apprentice. It emphasizes the transfer of knowledge and skills from an experienced mentor to a less experienced learner, primarily through practical experience and guided instruction (International Encyclopedia of Education, 2010).

Divine Providence. Respondent 1 stated that *"kanan Diyos pagbuot kay waray ko man ito eskwelahi..."* (it was God's will because I did not study about it). On the other hand, Respondent 4 *"An nagsugo hiton ha akon hi maestro..."* (the one who instructed me was master...). When asked about who this master was, he responded that it was God. Respondent 5 answered *"...nagpakiana kun anhon ko pangalagad ha Ginoo. Nakasulod ak ha organisasyon ha simbahan. May ada nga nadisgrasya ngan akon gin hilot. Tikang hadto, damo na an nakasabut ngan nag bantog nga may bag-o nga parag hilot."* (I asked as to how can I served God. I joined an organization in the church. Someone got into accident and I provided a hilot service. From then on, I became popular healer in our area.) All three accounts corroborate that it was God's ordination or plan that led them to choose the vocation of being a folk healer.

Self-Acquired. Respondent 1 stated that *"Kay waray ko man ito pag eskwelahi. Basta nahabaro la ako. Waray may nagtutdo ha akon."* (I did not learn it formally. I just learned it. No one taught me.) Respondent 3 responded *"Waray nagtutdo. Kusa la."* (No one taught me. It was naturally gained). The responses show that some respondents acquired their healing skills naturally, like it was inherently with them.

Familial Influence. Respondent 2 answered “*Nag-istudyo kay akon apoy kay tambalan. Amo adto an nagtutdo ha akon.*” (I studied it because my grandparent was a folk healer. My grandparent was the one who mentored me). Although only one (1) respondent answered, family can still be a significant factor that influences one’s choice in practicing folk medicine.

Themes	Sub-themes
Apprenticeship	Educated oneself through attending seminars - Attended a seminar and learned proper way of hilot massage
Divine Providence	Taught by no one but by God’s will Divine revelations to heal the sick. Divine gift granted in exchange for surviving a natural disaster.
Self-Acquired	Acquisition of skill without anyone’s mentorship Learned from no one, acquired spontaneously
Familial Influence	Taught by a folk healer grandparent

Figure 4. Themes and sub-themes regarding how respondents became folk healers.

Common Illnesses and Diseases Typically Cured

After a thorough analysis of informant’s responses regarding the illnesses they typically cure, the researchers classified them into two (2) common themes: physical ailments and spiritual illness.

Respondent 1 typically cures deformed or misaligned bones, muscle cramps or gas pain, relapse, or postpartum fatigue. Respondent 2 cures swelling, fever, infertility, individuals possessed by evil spirits, and sickness caused by supernatural beings. Respondent 3 also heals people with deformed or misaligned bones, performs body massage, and also helps those who are infertile. Respondent 4 heals skin infections, stomach pains, cancer, appendicitis, UTI, also cures deformed or misaligned bones, heals infertile, and sickness caused by supernatural beings like *kahuynon* or *engkanto* (fairies). Further, Respondent 4 added “*It akon la masisiring ngatanan nga sakit kun maayon ha ak.*” which means that he cures all forms of illnesses as long as it goes well with his method of treatment. Lastly, Respondent 5 heals migraine, infertility, and spiritual illness.

Based on the data above, we can conclude that all respondents are capable of curing not only physical ailments like fever, migraine, muscle cramps, or gas pain but also more serious conditions such as infections, appendicitis, deformed or misaligned bones, cancer, etc.

It can also be noted that all respondents are “hilot,” which refers to traditional Filipino healers who used chiropractic manipulation and massage for healing or relaxation purposes. It is revealed in this study that hilots perform healing practices to cure deformed or misaligned bones (Respondents 1, 3, and 4), to treat infertility (Respondents 2, 3, 4, and 5), and for body massage (Respondent 3).

Moreover, Respondents 2, 4, and 5 treat spiritual illnesses known as “*gindarahugan*” (cursed by mythical creatures), “*ginsangkayan*” (possessed by evil creatures), “*ginsaniban*” (possessed by spirits of the dead), “*sakit sa kalag*” (illness in the spirit) commonly caused by supernatural beings.

Respondent	Physical Ailments	Spiritual Illness
1	“ <i>Piang</i> (injured leg or foot), <i>panuhot</i> (cold stress), <i>bughat</i> (relapse or postpartum fatigue)”	
2	“ <i>Hubag</i> (swelling) ... <i>hiranat</i> (fever)” “ <i>Sugad dire ka nakaanak, poydi gehapon ako maghilot para magburod ka.</i> ” (I help those who are unable to bear a child.)	“ <i>ginsangkayan, sugad hiton ginkuanan hin dire sugad ha aton? Sinaniban, natambal ako.</i> ” (I treat those who were possessed by evil creatures and spirits.) “ <i>Orasyon, darahog, di man poydi nakon isumat an mga pulong, bawal man iton.</i> ” (I perform chants to treat those who were cursed by evil creatures. I cannot disclose the words since it’s prohibited to do so.)
3	“ <i>Mga piang. May napamassage.</i> ” (I perform a massage for those with misaligned or injured legs or feet.) “ <i>Nahilot para mapataas hin matres, karuyag mag anak.</i> ” (I can adjust the uterus of a woman to prepare her for pregnancy.)	
4	“ <i>ul-ul hin tiyan</i> (stomach pain), <i>cancer, appendix</i> (problems on the appendix), <i>UTI</i> ” “ <i>Nahilot gehap ako. It ak paghilot duduwa ka klase, naghihilot gihap ako hin dire na anak, naghihilot gihap ako kun may mga bari.</i> ” (I perform massages to those who are infertile and those suffering from bone fractures.)	“ <i>gindarahugan</i> ” (cursed by mythical creatures)
5	“ <i>Migraine, dire nakaanak.</i> (Migraine and those who are infertile.)	“ <i>sakit ha kalag</i> ” (illness in the spirit)

Figure 5. Physical and spiritual ailments treated by participants.

Methods and Strategies for Treating Illnesses or Diseases

This theme explores the responses of participants concerning the methods and strategies they employed for treating illnesses or diseases. The study indicates that traditional healers, commonly referred to as *tambalans*, utilize a variety of approaches, including the use of various herbal plants, massage techniques, rituals, and prayers, to address different health issues prevalent in their communities.

Massage. Upon inquiry about their methods and strategies used in treating illness or diseases, respondent 1 stated that she utilizes her hands for massage therapy. When it is necessary to alleviate pain, she applies a tampok (local compress). Respondent 3 also mentioned that she utilizes massage with the use of efficascent oil.

“Tak kamot amo tak gin gagamit paghilot. Kun angay tampusan, nagamit ak hin tamos. (I use my hands when performing massages. If needed, I use local compress.) - Respondent 1

“An pirti pagbanyos ko han efficascent amo iton an akon (Asiti han efficascent ha lagas, Asiti mansinilla). Ha surok surok nakapkap ngan nahilot, nahilot para mapataas hin matres, karuyag mag anak.” (I utilize efficascent oil when performing massages in the stomach. I also treat those who are infertile.) - Respondent 3

Herbal Medicine. Respondents 1 and 2 emphasized that they use various herbal remedies to treat different diseases. They stated that there are numerous herbal treatments, such as for relaxation, pain relief, and others. She also incorporates prayers when performing treatments.

“It kada sakit, iba-iba nga dahon it gin gagamit pagtambal. Ako it nangunguha mismo hit mga dahon” (For every illness, different leaves are used for treatment. I personally pick the leaves that I use.) - Respondent 1

“Herbal, ay sus kadamu ton, panhimasma, kalipayan, lakdan, madyo, pana ngan damo pa. Orasyon kun darahog” (I use local plants for treating illnesses. For those who were cursed by evil creatures, I perform a chant.) - Respondent 2

Prayer. Respondents 1 and 3 stated that while doing the massage they offer prayers to God for guidance.

“Kinahanglan matuo ka la. Importante it pagtuo kay bis ano nga mga medisina kun diri ka natuo, waray. (It’s essential that you believe. No matter how many medications are used, they are pointless if you don’t believe.) - Respondent 1

“Kun naghihilot ako, nangangamuyo ako ha Ginoo nga buligan ako kay waray ko man in hiya pag eskwelahi.” (Since I didn’t formally study massage, I always ask God for assistance.) - Respondent 3

According to Wangkheirakpam (2018), these practitioners possess indigenous knowledge related to health preservation and body physiology, deeply rooted in their cultural practices. The study illustrates that tambalans employ a variety of strategies tailored to the specific illnesses present in their patients, which include the utilization of herbal plants, manual therapies, and spiritual invocations. This rich diversity in practices reflects the unique methodologies employed by tambalans in their healing processes.

Similarities and Difference of Practices Among Tambalans

This theme explores the similarities and differences in practices among respondents serving as tambalans. The data collected indicates both commonalities and distinctions in their healing methods.

Faith. Respondent 1 stated that one must have faith. She said that belief is essential because regardless of the medicine, if one does not believe, it will not work. Similarly, Respondent 2 remarked that the word of God is the foundation of her devotion.

“Kinahanglan matuo ka la. Importante it pagtuo kay bis ano nga mga medisina kun diri ka natuo, waray.” (It’s essential that you believe. No matter how many medications are used, they are pointless if you don’t believe.) - Respondent 1

“Pulong han Ginoo an akon gindedebosyon.” (I meditate on the Word of God.) - Respondent 1

Both respondent 1 and 2 underscore the importance of prayer as a vital component in their approach to treating illnesses and diseases. According to Galleon (1976), tambalans seek divine guidance from the Christian God with every use of medicinal plants, viewing them as a divine gift. Additionally, these healers typically recite church prayers twice prior to gathering medicinal resources from the forest.

Familial Ties. Respondent 3 shared that individuals seek her services for massage therapy because other tambalans in their area are unable to provide treatment due to familial ties.

“Pakiramdan ko ako an gindadayo dinhi kay an iba sugad haakon, ha tabok ngadto ha luyo duha an parahilot pero ira pamilya nakadi haakon ira ginpapahilot kay diri hira nakakuan kun haira kadugo” (Since we cannot treat someone if we are related to them by blood, the families of other healers in the neighborhood would come to me for treatment.) - Respondent 3

Honesty. Respondent 4 expressed that he distinguishes himself from other tambalans by maintaining honesty with those who seek his assistance. He stated that unlike some tambalans who may mislead their clients, he prefers to be honest about their conditions.

“Kay it iba liwat na tambalan nag bibinuwa. It ak gusto it dire ako nagbinuwa” (While some healers would tell lies, I would rather not.) - Respondent 4

Availability. While many tambalans focus their healing practices on specific days, such as Saturdays and Tuesdays, Respondent 4 indicated that he does not restrict his services to particular times, welcoming individuals who request help at any hour.

“An una Byernes la ngan martes amo an tugot, sering ko dire ako kay kun nagkasit hin sabado, maiya padaw umabot hit martes. Mapatay anay. It ak karuyag, kun puwede waray limit it ak panambal, bisan ano nga oras.” (My Maestro gave me permission to conduct healing on Tuesdays and Fridays. Since some people will become ill on other days and their condition can worsen, I made an appeal. I now do healing at any time of day because of this.) - Respondent 4

These insights illustrate the varied practices and beliefs among tambalans, highlighting their commitment to blending faith with their therapeutic techniques and many more.

Changes in Folk Medicine Practices Over Time

Use of Modern Practices. Respondent 1 mentions the use of gatas-gatas, showing how new plants are being adopted for their healing properties which help in situations such as treating fevers. Respondent 2 now uses modern medicines like Neozep and Efficascent oil along with medicines for coughs and colds.

“Naggamit na ako yana hin gatas-gatas. Kun hiranat, pinapag laso ko hira hin gatas-gatas, depende kun pira ka adlaw it hiranat. Sinmulod la haak hunahuna nga makabulig ini nga banwa.” (I used asthma weed or gatas-gatas and other plants for treating fever. I simply thought that these plants would be useful.) - Respondent 1

“Iton akon mga banyos hit mga hiranat la, efficascent, nagamit ako hin medisina. Kun ano nga sakit amu an medisina na gingagamit, sugad sip-on, ubo, Neozep.” (When treating fever, I use efficascent oil. For treating colds, I use Neozep.) - Respondent 2

Seminar/Training. Respondent 2 stated that aside from using alcamporado and Efficascent oil along with other medicine, the respondent also attended seminars focusing on hilot.

“Nagseminar man ako dida ha sentro, nagseminar kami kay purupanhilot man ako, damu an akon ginbaruan.” (I participated in a seminar organized by the local health center.) - Respondent 2

Increased Demand for Services. Respondents 1, 2, 3, and 5 stated that there is an increased number of people seeking for their services, with many people lining up daily.

“Damo man it napakanhi ngan nagbabalik-balik nganhi nga mga taga higrayo nga lugar.” (People would travel from far places just to avail my services.) - Respondent 1

“Hesus, mas durudamu ngani yana ... danay dinhi ha akon magpilapila intawon kay ako man ira ginbibiling.” (Folk healing is now more popular than it was in the past. People would be waiting in line for me.) - Respondent 2

“Nagtikadamo an napakadi haak pagtambal. Damo an napila kada adlaw.” (I am seeing an increase in the number of persons seeking treatment from me. Every day, there would be a queue of people.) - Respondent 5

Based on the responses above, respondents show integration of modern practices such as the use of *gatas-gatas* (asthma weed) and products such as Efficascent oil and Neozep as well as participation in seminars and training which has introduced new knowledge and techniques to the practitioners as they continue to provide folk healing practices like *hilot*. There are still many people seeking for *hilot* and line up daily even from nearby areas or from other barangays.

V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The study examined the practices of traditional healers in Burauen, Leyte, focusing on five healers aged 49-79 years old. These healers, who lived in various barangays, were recognized for their knowledge and skills in healing. The healers' journey into folk medicine began at a young age, with some starting at a young age and others later. They treat a wide range of physical and spiritual illnesses. Physical conditions they addressed included minor issues like fever, migraines, and muscle pains, as well as more severe conditions like cancer, appendicitis, and infertility. Spiritual illnesses, such as those caused by supernatural beings or evil spirits, were also treated. The participants used traditional Filipino practices like *hilot* (massage therapy) to realign bones, relieve pain, and improve fertility. They used massages, herbal remedies, and prayers, with faith playing a significant role in the healing process. They also attended seminars and training sessions to improve their knowledge and skills. Over time, some practitioners began to adopt modern practices, such as the use of modern medicines like Neozep and Efficascent Oil. The traditional healers observed changes in their work over the years. The participants also observed that the demand for their services has increased, with more people from neighboring barangays and towns seeking their help. This study shows how traditional healers play a vital role in the community, balancing their traditional methods with modern approaches and keeping their healing practices relevant and meaningful for the people they serve.

CONCLUSIONS

This study highlights the folk healing practices of traditional doctors in Burauen, Leyte. All participants have over a decade of experience in the field, and their journey into traditional healing often began with a significant life event that inspired them to pursue the practice. The study reveals that these healers acquired their skills through various means, including attending training and seminars, divine intervention, inherent abilities, and familial influence.

The illnesses treated are categorized into two: physical and spiritual. Physical illnesses are conditions typically addressed by modern doctors, while spiritual illnesses are believed to be caused by supernatural entities. Notably, all participants are *hilots*, traditional healers skilled in massage and other techniques. Most of them employ a range of healing methods, such as using medicinal plants, massage techniques, rituals, and prayers. Faith plays a crucial role in the healing process, underscoring the deep cultural roots of their practices.

While traditional healers share many commonalities, they also exhibit differences. Some healers are unable to treat individuals with whom they share close ties, while others may differ in their sincerity, with a few being perceived as exploitative. Furthermore, many healers observe specific days for their practices, though some can perform healing at any time. Despite the advancements in Western medicine, the demand for traditional healing continues to grow, with an increasing number of patients seeking their services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study discovered folk healing strategies of traditional doctors in Burauen, Leyte. The findings revealed variation on the techniques utilized by folk healers in diagnosing and treating natural and supernatural illnesses. As the study progressed, a few areas surfaced as suggested points for future studies. To preserve the knowledge of traditional healing systems, it is recommended to develop a comprehensive archive or database to document the folk healing practices, remedies, and techniques used by traditional doctors in Burauen. With the integration of modern medicine in the healing process of traditional doctors, it is also recommended to encourage dialogue and possible collaboration between traditional healers and modern healthcare providers, particularly in a municipality like Burauen. Since the current study only explored healing strategies of traditional doctors in Burauen, Leyte, future researchers can expand the study to include folk healing practices in other municipalities of Leyte to identify commonalities in the methods, beliefs, or plants used. Further research can also focus on the sociocultural dynamics that shape folk healing practices particularly on the role of gender and age in the practice of folk healing.

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