

# **Exploring Traditional Health Practices and Indigenous Well-being: A Qualitative Study of Healing Practices Among the Lumad and Mananambal in Siayan, Zamboanga**

Hannah Joy S. Batucan, J.H. Cerilles State College, Philippines  
Allen Day S. Mori, J.H. Cerilles State College, Philippines

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## **Abstract**

This study looks at traditional health practices and their place in indigenous well-being. It focuses on traditional healers within the Lumad and Mananambal communities of Siayan, Zamboanga del Norte. A qualitative phenomenological design was employed for this research, in order to study the lived experience, beliefs, and rituals among traditional healers, thereby highlighting the spiritual, cultural, and ecological dimensions of healing. Data were obtained by using in-depth interviews and participant observations, which allowed for detailed narratives from healers and community members regarding their practices and significance to individual and collective well-being. Findings indicate that traditional healing practices of the Lumad and Mananambal have deep spiritual, ecological, and communal roots. Healers perceive health as being in harmony with the material, emotional, and spiritual worlds, or call upon ancestral spirits and use plant medicines obtained sustainably from their environment. The healing practices are not only therapeutic but also a means of reproducing and reifying traditional and cultural identity and interpersonal relationships. In the same vein, however, one can mention the problems of cultural marginalization, ecological degradation, and the conflict between medical epistemologies. A basic theme seen in this research is the need to preserve and integrate indigenous healing practices into broader health systems because of their potential to foster holistic well-being and cultural sustainability. Such policies call for protecting indigenous knowledge respecting the environmental and sociopolitical pressures affecting these communities.

*Keywords:* traditional health practice, indigenous people, lumad

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## **Introduction**

How do we continue to protect life and health the way our forefathers and mothers did? Indigenous people typically fare worse in health outcomes, disability, and general quality of life compared to the rest. Women are more vulnerable because they lack education opportunities, economic capabilities and are relatively more exposed to natural disasters. Still, indigenous women have to assume a great responsibility for the overall well-being of their families and communities (Baird & Batty, 2022).

Integration with traditional medicine and indigenous knowledge systems supports agency and culture. Preserved generationally, these practices provide a sustainable platform for health and wellness. They support the Sustainable Development Goals, especially in providing access to affordable drugs and health care among indigenous communities.

This paper examines the significance of traditional health practices in the indigenous community and evaluates its role in well-being. It seeks to answer the question:

- What is the essence of the Traditional Health Practices and Indigenous Well-being of the Lumad and Mananambal in Siayan, Zamboanga del Norte

## **Literature Review**

The traditional knowledge of ethnomedicine of indigenous communities, such as the Lumad and Mananambal, includes local plants used in the treatment of snake bites and other infections. Long-term sustainability of medicinal plant resources ensures continued biodiversity conservation through these practices. The relationship highlighted above encapsulates the harmony that exists between traditional healing practices and environmental stewardship (Bourgeois & Argueta, 2020). In addition, spiritual and cultural aspects are also important in healing. For example, rituals carried out by the Mananambal of Siquijor focus on community identity and respect for nature (Baguio, 2020). Such practices not only maintain health knowledge but also strengthen the spiritual and ecological bonds within indigenous groups.

Generally, although some traditional healers team up with contemporary health care systems, the confluence of traditional healing practices with non-traditional medicine faces barriers. These practices, though proven to work, like curing venomous bites (Zhou & Javadi, 2022), are not widely accepted because they remain untested by biomedicine and from research. In addition, the colonization of their health systems has led to a loss of recognition and support. Efforts by global health bodies, including the WHO, aim to revitalize and integrate these practices into broader health frameworks, emphasizing culturally sensitive policies and training indigenous health workers (Hughson, 2019).

The preservation of traditional health practices is also tied to sustainability and climate adaptation. Indigenous knowledge contributes to forest conservation, with programs like reforestation in Siquijor helping protect “forest pharmacies” essential for healing (Mabalayan & De Guzman, 2022). Nevertheless, threats from deforestation and habitat loss, especially within Lumad domains, have affected the availability of medicinal plants. Such conservation efforts as the National Greening Program pursue their goals in this regard (Bali & Amio, 2020).

Moreover, the context of healing practices incorporates gender issues, where female custodians exist within health knowledge and are primarily in charge of childbirth and spiritual care, ensuring its intergenerational transmission (Mendez, 2021).

The global acceptance of traditional medicine and the ethical concerns surrounding the commodification of indigenous knowledge need to be addressed by respectful partnerships that respect intellectual property rights. Policies aiming at integrating indigenous health systems into modern healthcare protect cultural heritage while promoting safety and accessibility (Johnson, 2022; WHO, 2021). Future research must, therefore, center on addressing issues of ethics in collaboration, cross-disciplinary validation, and policies that support integration that is equitable in nature into global approaches towards healthcare.

### **Research Question**

This research questions the following: How do the Lumad and Mananambal describe their most significant experiences as regards Traditional Health Practices and Indigenous Well-being?

### **Objectives**

- Discovery of the basic but essential substance of the traditional health practices and indigenous well-being experienced by the Lumad and Mananambal in Siayan.
- Examination of the cultural, spiritual, and practical dimensions embedded in these practices.
- Find themes from participants' lived experiences and make recommendations to help maintain such practices.

### **Methods**

**Design:** The study uses a qualitative, phenomenological approach to explore perceptions and lived experiences of traditional healing.

**Participants:** Ten individuals were selected: five Lumad (Subanen) and five Mananambal with extensive traditional healing experience.

**Data Collection:** Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured guide, translated into Subanen when necessary. Open-ended questions explored medicinal plant use, rituals, and community roles of healers.

**Data Analysis:** Colaizzi's method guided analysis. Key statements were extracted, meanings were formulated, and themes were identified. Findings were verified with participants.

### **Results**

#### **Descriptive Findings**

The descriptive findings reveal that both Lumad and Mananambal of Siayan, Zamboanga del Norte rely heavily on traditional healing practices which are well grounded in their culture belief and spirituality. The healing practices comprise tuob (herbal steam inhalation), hilot (massage therapy), and medicinal plants used- these three being effective and sustainable,

especially for places difficult to access where even modern health care has not yet arrived. Common herbs used include lagundi for respiratory problems, guava leaves for healing wounds, and sinaw-sinaw for kidney-related diseases, which are prepared through boiling, pounding, and steaming processes to extract their medicinal properties. These are also passed on through generations to ensure cultural continuity while reinforcing community identity.

The health and spirituality relations did have strong relations according to the findings of the indigenous healing systems. Pasubay or healing rituals are a part of this holistic approach, healing the body, emotions, and spirits. The remedies range from herbs to spiritual rituals and include hilot massage techniques, exemplifying the Lumad and Mananambal belief in treatment-holistic approaches. These are practices that seek relief from respiratory and joint aches, fractures, and kidney disorders, besides offering them a way to balance body, mind, and spirit.

There is the integration of Lumad with Mananambal practices because they frequently use the same medicinal plants with similar techniques for healing. This simply means that they share an indigenous knowledge system that transcends multiple lines of community. For example, the above communities employ herbs like lagundi and guava leaves, among others, for relief from respiratory conditions and digestive difficulties, and musculoskeletal pain. Besides, traditional healing systems are a form of useful methods but also become an aspect of supporting cultural roots through ceremonies that have been integrated and transcended through generations.

The study further established sustainability in these practices. Since most of the medicinal plants are readily available, their use is economical and environmentally sound. The practices keep in line with the people's conservation efforts regarding their natural resources, just like the forest-based medicinal plants that have remained in use over time due to controlled harvesting techniques. The use of such traditional methods also means the issue of preserving traditional knowledge, coupled with efforts to integrate indigenous knowledge into broader frameworks of healthcare provision.

In summary, the health practices of the Lumad and Mananambal are vital to their cultural identity, ecological sustainability, and community well-being. Their healing methods, aside from serving the purposes of physical health care, reinforce their spiritual and cultural connection to the environment. The findings of this research emphasize preserving these practices and ensuring that they gain recognition and integration into modern health systems.

## **Themes Identified**

*Traditional Healing Practices:* Herbal medicine, hilot, and steam inhalation or tuob are the most common traditional healing practices of the Lumad and Mananambal. These are drawn deeply from their beliefs; they are logical, eco-friendly remedies used to cure any kind of ailments. Most of the people use lagundi and guava leaves as remedies to any sicknesses, such as respiratory conditions, wounds, and muscle pains.

*Cultural and Spiritual Significance:* Healing practices have spirituality rather than healing in them. Rituals such as pasubay, which form a ritual with herbs, are at the heart of cultural ideas on health. Such practices come as indispensable components of preserving harmony and balance within the individual and for the collective good of the community. These deep

linkages of health to cultural identity stand enhanced through such passed-on practices from generation to generation.

*Sustainability and Environmental Contact:* The use of indigenous, natural medicines shows a strong relationship with the environment. Healing systems among native people are highly sustainable because herbs and plants are obtained in such ways that there is always supply. Ecological conservation is also enhanced and promoted by these healing systems, like all others in society. The use of locally available flora for medicinal use is evidence of ecological knowledge integrated into these traditions.

### **Supporting Quotations**

*Traditional Healing Practices:* Herbal remedies, massage techniques like hilot, and steam inhalation (tuob) are considered in Lumad and Mananambal healing practices to address various dimensions of health-from the physical to the spiritual aspect. These processes can be very practical and sustainable alternatives to modern medicine, especially for remote locations. Remedies such as lagundi and guava leaves are some of the most common used for ailments like respiratory problems, wounds, and muscle pain.

*Cultural and Spiritual Significance:* Healing practices are not only therapeutic but also fulfill spiritual purposes. The combination of practices such as pasubay through rituals and herbal remedies points to the relationship between health and spirituality. In the view of medicine men, such rituals must be performed to achieve balance and harmony in individuals and within the community. It is these very healing practices that further strengthen the culture-health relationship. As they are passed from generation to generation, their importance goes forward for health.

*Link to the Environment through Sustainability:* The use of locale-specific, natural remedies indicates a strong link to the environment. Indigenous healing practices emphasize sustainability, whereby herbs and plants are harvested in a manner that ensures their future availability. Such traditions are also ecological preservation practices, and in these communities, they fit into broader conservation policies. Such emphasis on locale-specific plants to be used for medicinal purposes points out the ecological knowledge present within these traditions.

## **Discussion**

### **Insight From Findings**

#### ***Traditional Health Practices as a Main Healthcare Provider***

The findings strongly suggest that traditional health practices are essential to the Lumad and Mananambal, especially the reliance on tuob and hilot as main healthcare providers, especially considering no ample modern medical centers are available. They become the fundamental source of health care, relatively inexpensive and accessible in addressing such diseases as respiratory problems, muscle ache, and infection. This dovetails with international research on aboriginal health, which indicates a significant relationship to traditional practices in healthcare for people in rural settings. Thus, especially in indigenous settings, similar herbal and manual therapies have been part of studies within these contexts that indicate practical, accessible solutions where conventional healthcare is lacking.

This reliance on traditional practices demonstrates that healthcare is inherently adaptable, where knowledge of local resources and community-based techniques can effectively meet the healthcare needs of isolated populations. The participants' stories confirm that these practices have stood the test of time, showing resilience and adaptability that suggests their effectiveness.

### ***Cultural and Spiritual Dimensions in Healing Practices***

Deeply spiritual in character, one of the most profound discoveries about traditional health practices is that they are highly spiritual in character. Pasubay rituals and invocations reveal how the Lumad and Mananambal community incorporates spirituality into healing, as the two command blessings from deities and respect for nature's spirit. This blending of culture and spirituality indicates that curing is not only a physical measure but rather a measure to treat both emotional and spiritual requirements, which is a holistic health principle.

Such an integration of spirituality into health practices can be seen as a form of cultural resilience, as these practices continue to thrive amidst modernization efforts and represent the strength of indigenous beliefs in preserving health and cultural identity. Rituals are held intact and spirit guides invoked in the process, upholding the values of respect for the environment that sustains their natural pharmacy and community harmony that strengthens social bonds. This aspect opens possibilities of understanding health from a holistic perspective, as such practices translate that physical wellbeing is closely related to emotional, social, and even spiritual wellbeing.

### ***Economic Access and Viability***

The accessibility and affordability of such traditional healing methods have major socioeconomic advantages in these aspects for the Lumad and Mananambal communities, so that they may, through available means of their natural environment, be able to dispel health issues without the financial pressures of conventional medical remedy. For example, tuob needs only herbs and boiling water, while hilot requires only simple tools and herbal oils from locally found herbs. The practices are sustainable, as they depend solely on the individuals involved and do not need secure external supplies, which makes one not dependent on external healthcare facilities.

This also accords with global health recommendations by bodies like WHO, which embrace traditional medicine as complementary to modern health-care systems. In resource-limited settings, indigenous practices thus provide a sustainable model of health care that diminishes the formal health care systems' burden through effective treatment at low or no cost.

### **Comparison With Prior Studies**

#### ***Holistic Nature of Traditional Health Practices***

The holistic approach identified in the Lumad and Mananambal communities - integrating physical, spiritual, and emotional well-being - reflects themes common in indigenous health studies globally. Other similar findings have been observed by Dela Cruz and Santos (2020) and Oledan (2017) in studies conducted with Filipino indigenous groups where, in the Lumad and Mananambal perspectives, health is not only the absence of illness but also a form of stability, considering spiritual and emotional health. These studies before this one, including

Bottorff et al. (2011), were always a focus on how such views of holistic health perspectives are always much more crucial for addressing indigenous populations' diverse needs, in which traditional healing provides more than just physical care but strengthens social and spiritual harmony within the community.

In contrast, Western models of healthcare, which might have health compartmentalized into physical health, spiritual health, and emotional well-being, an overall framework evidenced in the Lumad and Mananambal practices, aligns closely with calls to integrate mental, physical, and spiritual health into healthcare models that would better serve culturally diverse populations. This more expansive understanding of well-being implies that such timeless practices are, by extension, subordinated to mainstream healthcare, particularly in culturally rich contexts.

### ***Spiritual and Cultural Dimensions of Healing***

These ancient practices, of course thus resonate spiritually with the perspectives given in research on indigenous health practices in the Philippines and other regions. For example, Oledan (2017) states that a consultation with a spirit guide, rituals, and use of amulets characterize traditional Filipino healing practices, all leading toward the view of health and spirituality as worldwide interconnectivities. These are also featured in the Mananambal practice of Siquijor, who regards spiritual rituals as part and parcel of the healing process (Baguio, 2020).

That the Lumad and Mananambals invoke spiritualism in their practice reflects international research that elucidates how belief systems played a giant part in the indigenous people's health system, by giving psychosocial support to and enforcing cultural cohesion. How spiritualism gives the conceptual aspect of therapy towards the furthering of resilience and more meaning in the healing process is an idea integrative health disciplines increasingly value.

### ***Economic Reach and Sustainability of Traditional Healing Practices***

Several economic advantages have been found with traditional practices, as identified in this study and earlier research. These are accessible practices with readily available natural resources that make the practices very sustainable and not expensive to communities in remote areas. Traditional healing practices have been traditionally valuable in impoverished communities economically and socio-economically because they are inexpensive and accessed easily. Furthermore, Mabalayan and De Guzman (2022) indicate how sustainable use of plants like lagundi and sinaw-sinaw will add to the preservation of the environment while continuing to give health care beyond the reaches of formal medical facilities.

These results support the suggestion that indigenous practices are low-cost and contribute to local biodiversity conservation. Together, the Lumad and Mananambal practices illustrate an autarkic healthcare approach anchored on ecological knowledge, which could be impactful for sustainable healthcare systems, particularly in resource-constrained, rural settings.

### ***Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer and Cultural Identity***

The findings of the present study reveal that health practices of the Lumad and Mananambal are heavily embedded in the realm of culture and are passed on from generation to

generation, a factor seen in other studies concerning the indigenous health systems practiced by Filipinos. Indeed, healing knowledge passed down from one generation of elders to another is very important as shown in Bengwayan (2020) and Mendez (2021). These practices represent a very significant key to preserving cultural identity and continuity. In the case of the Lumad and the Mananambal, such practices also represent a key aspect of social cohesion; they fortify interrelations within communities and ensure that cultural knowledge is passed on to the next generations.

Compared to other research studies like that of Hughson (2019), which is how modernization impacts indigenous practices, there is still a preservation of culture by the Lumad and Mananambal communities with respect to what is happening to them. The collective approach in knowledge fosters well-being for its community members and impacts on their level of cultural pride. Such practices depict their involvement in an indigenous health system, which also depicts identity, continuity, and contention with external influence and modernization.

### ***Environmental and Social Issues***

Similar to most other research on indigenous health practices, this paper details the depletion of medicinal plants because of the on-going process of deforestation and land conversion as it affects the Lumad and Mananambal. Studies similarly natured were also found in Bali and Amio (2020), who identified how environmental degradation affects the sustainability of indigenous health practices in the Philippines. This will pose a great threat through the loss of habitats, and this use of medicinal plants will further threaten the traditional health resources.

This finding is supported by the wider indigenous knowledge systems literature that calls for concerted conservation efforts in protecting such essential natural resources. According to Baguio (2020) and Mabalayan and De Guzman (2022), the preservation of Indigenous Traditional Health Practices and biodiversity coupled with it results from environmental protection. Enjoining the indigenous communities in the conservation effort through conserving the environment and the cultural heritage of traditional medicine together would be an important way.

### ***Potential Integration With Modern Health Care***

The common thread that came out in indigenous health studies is that their applications could indeed find their way into the modern systems of health care; and this is what the present study supports, by underlining the importance of culture-sensitive health care. Previous studies, including a few done by Zhou and Javadi (2022), demonstrated that indigenous knowledge may fill in the gap when it comes to the application of modern medicine—especially to the marginalized. The deep understanding of their communities and resources among the Lumad and Mananambal healers makes them valuable partners with public health initiatives across culturally diverse settings. This, however, implies mutual respect and a policy framework that accounts for the work of traditional healers. That aside, it is interesting that findings in this study resonate with the recommendations from WHO and other scholars such as Hughson (2019), who recommend inclusive healthcare policies whereby traditional practices shall be embraced as complementary yet not competing health systems. Prudent regard by modern healthcare providers for traditional healers will enhance healthcare outcomes in understudied communities through culturally responsive care that bridges existing healthcare disparities.



## **Implications for Practice**

The findings of the study call for the promotion of holistic health approaches by combining spiritual and emotional well-being with physical health in health care. This should apply to all health professionals, but these models will be especially important in culturally diverse or rural areas. Such areas include cultural competency training for the health workforce, which would promote respect and appreciation of spiritual practices as healing interventions that may make health environments more inclusive and effective.

**Promote Holistic Health:** Include spiritual and emotional aspects in care, especially in diverse and rural settings.

**Acknowledge Traditional Healers:** Recognize them as key health providers and integrate them into the healthcare system.

**Preserve Knowledge:** Support intergenerational transfer through community education and documentation.

**Conserve Resources:** Partner with communities for conservation and sustainable harvesting of medicinal plants.

**Improve Rural Access:** Use mobile clinics and hybrid systems to enhance healthcare reach.

## **Limitations**

**Low generalization:** Since it can be only applied to the culture and environment of the Lumad and Mananambal, the generalization level may be low and the least applicable to most other indigenous or rural groups.

**Qualitative Bias:** These are findings based on qualitative information, such as interviews that will perpetuate the bias and not represent the experience or practices of larger groups.

**Not Tracked Long-Term Outcomes:** The study did not follow the long-term outcomes of health users in traditional health versus those using modern medicine.

**Partially Ineffective Approach on Environmental Degradation:** Though the research talks about the effect of environmental degradation on the availability of medicinal plants, it fails to describe their deep ecological effects or measures of conservation strategy.

**On Limitation:** The study only discussed the possibility of interconnection between the system of modern health care and the system of traditional medicine but did not mention any sort of challenge or barrier toward such integration.

**Narrow discussion on Socioeconomic Factors:** The study showed that socioeconomical access to such traditional practices yet failed to discuss broader socioeconomics factors that may influence healthcare choices.

**Healer Focus:** The study is fundamentally based on the perspective of the traditional healers, out of the views of people who would prefer to go for modern medical care.

**Cultural Homogenization Assumption:** The study assumes a degree of cultural homogenization within communities that likely will smoothen out health care practices and beliefs.

**Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer:** The study provides some evidence of knowledge transfer, but the paper does not take seriously any mechanisms or issues that emerged among the younger generations.

**Impact of Modernization:** The study did not look deeper into how modernization or external pressures affect traditional health practices in communities.

## **Future Directions**

### ***Expand to Other Communities***

More indigenous and rural communities would have to be included in the future study so that findings can be generalized to a much larger extent.

Comparative studies would open more scope as such research can provide understanding regarding traditional health practices and diversity and commonalities in such practices.

### ***Future Studies***

Future studies should combine clinical effectiveness and prevalence in traditional health practices with more quantitative methods, such as surveys or randomized controlled trials. This would reinforce qualitative insights with empirical evidence and build a stronger understanding of these practices.

### ***Monitor Long-Term Health Outcomes***

Investigations about long-term health effects should be carried out on the patients who rely only on traditional health practices. For instance, recovery rates, general health and well-being can be compared between both the groups with traditional healthcare systems and modern healthcare systems.

### ***Environmental and Ecological Impacts-Carry Studies***

The effects of environmental degradation like deforestation and climatic changes should also be measured regarding the availability of medicinal plants. It is to be ascertained whether these conservation methods are sustainable, as they mix or do not mix with the practice of traditional health care systems.

### ***Integration Into Modern Medicine***

Discuss practical barriers and challenges of incorporating traditional healing practice in a modern health system. This includes models of collaboration and the policy framework that could lead to mutual respect from traditional healers and doctors and other providers.

### ***Discuss Socioeconomic Factors***

Future research may further explore the linkages of broader-scale socioeconomic factors-poverty, education, and migration-that influence health decisions and the viability of alternative health practices. That would provide a greater picture of the factors affecting access to healthcare and health practices in the countryside and other underserved communities.

### ***Evaluate Inter-generational Transmission of Knowledge***

Investigate the mechanism and challenges associated with the transmission of traditional health knowledge to the next generations. Awareness of how such things as modernization, migration, or a shift in education may affect the transmission can help preserve and adapt traditional healing practices.

### ***Analyzing the Role of Modernization***

Globalization and other extrinsic strains on indigenous health practices are the other topics that should be explored in future research. This may be achieved by ascertaining the rate at which the current younger generation takes or resists change in or about traditional health practices regarding these changes.

### ***Develop Culturally Sensitive Health Policies***

Traditional practices will find places in the formal setting of healthcare in most rural or resource-poor settings while developing healthcare policies. Some frameworks to be established can help make it easy for modern service providers and traditional healers to collaborate.

### ***Explore the Role of Technology***

Investigation of what domain of role technology might be used as a way of keeping and communicating the indigenous, learned health knowledge. It can be of great help record and share the traditional healing practices of the indigenous peoples through electronic means, for keeping and sharing.

## **Conclusion**

In the Lumad and Mananambal communities, these practices remain strongly alive, mainly for those not able to access modern health facilities. Although they are neither in any profession nor hold any formal degree, hilot and tuob can reach out to most common issues in health matters to embrace a holistic approach in health in harmony with all its physical, spiritual, and emotional aspects. These results indicate these communities maintain resiliency and flexibility relying on low-cost, sustainable indigenous healing methods rooted deep into cultural practices. Major gaps identified in this course of study include the lack of long-term health outcomes, relatively little exploration of the effect of environmental factors, and difficulty in integration with modern healthcare systems. These gaps should be covered in future research by using quantitative methods and discussing the impacts of the degradation of the environment on medicinal resources, as well as how the integration into the broader health care systems can work. The paper calls for increased recognition towards the

importance of traditional medicine towards cultural preservation and sustainable health care and urges policies that respect and incorporate indigenous health systems into mainstream health care models.

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