



TRADITIONAL HEALING PRACTICES IN ZAMBOANGA CITY, PHILIPPINES

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ABSTRACT

In Zamboanga City, both affluent and poor individuals seek consultation from traditional healers. Thus, this study documented the different traditional healing practices in the city. The researchers utilized a qualitative research design using open ended interview. Purposive sampling was utilized in the selection of key informants who are traditional healers. Photos and voucher specimen was taken for documentation. There were three practices identified: subada (hilot), herbalism and sahuma (mangtatawas). In subada, the healer do massage on the affected body area using of coconut oil or commercial ointment. In herbalism, a total of 16 medicinal plants were recorded. Leaves are the common part of the plants being used and the common method is decoction. In sahuma, the healer uses tawas, kemenyan, candle and blessed palm. The image that will form will be interpreted by the healer.

KEYWORDS: *Traditional Healing, Methods, Subada, Herbalism, Sahuma*

INTRODUCTION

Traditional healing is an important and integral in the health system of all countries of the world [1]. World Health Organization reported that 80% of the ailing population in developing countries relies on traditional healing as their first aid to treat the illness [2]. Traditional healing pertains to the health practices, approaches, knowledge and beliefs associated in healing and wellness using ceremonies; plant, animal or mineral – based medicines; therapies or physical techniques [3].

The different traditional healing practices can be traced back in 14,000 centuries B.C., until Chinese, Graeco-Arabic and western countries start using traditional medicines. Thus, healing practices is considered to be the oldest form structure healing, which is practiced with basic set of beliefs [4]. In the Philippines, traditional healing was first documented in 16th century during the Spanish colonization. Thus, it can be said that traditional healing practices is part of

the Philippine society and culture. The traditional healers during those periods are the babaylan or shamans [5].

With the introduction of hospitals, improvement of technology, production of healthcare professionals and western medicines, traditional healing practices begin to fade. Nonetheless, since the healthcare system of the Philippines is underdeveloped, many Filipinos especially those of low socioeconomic consult their medical problems to traditional healers.

Traditional healers use different healing practices. For instance in Cebu, Berdon et al. [6] documented the following traditional healing practices: use of “himolso” (pulse-checking), “palakaw” (petition), “pasubay” (determining what causes the sickness and its possible means of healing), “pangalap” (searching) of medicinal plants for “palina” (fumigation), “tayhop” (gentle-blowing), “tutho” (saliva-blowing), “tuob” (boiling), “orasyon” (mystical prayers), “hilot” (massage), and “barang” (sorcery). To



perform these practices, traditional healers use their knowledge which they acquire from their ancestors [7]. Having traditional knowledge is significant in the daily life of every individual around the world [8]. Thus, documenting the traditional knowledge from key informants especially on healing is essential.

Zamboanga City which is located in the southernmost tip of Zamboanga Peninsula in the Philippines has a diverse community and rich in culture. It is a first class and highly urbanized city, since it is the commercial and industrial centre of the region. It is considered as the third largest city with a total land area of 142,099.99 hectares or 1,420.99 square kilometres and the sixth – most populous city with a total population of 862 thousand people as reported by Philippine Statistics Authority [11].

In this city, it was observed that both affluent and poor Zamboangueno will seek an advice from traditional healers. In some informal interviews, some patients opted to visit traditional healers because they recovered from their medical problems after the consultation. Thus, this study aims to document the different traditional healing practices performed by traditional healers in Zamboanga City.

METHODS

Research Design

To obtain the necessary data for this study, the researchers utilized qualitative research design. Purposive sampling were employed for the selection of key informants. Key informants were traditional healers from selected barangays in Zamboanga City. A total of three (3) key informants decided to participate in the study.

Collection of Data

The primary instrument in this study is the use of open ended interview where questions are translated in local dialect. More so, photos were taken on different plants for documentation. Identification of these plants were facilitated using the voucher specimen collected such as leaves, stem or fruits.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

There are different methods used in the Philippine traditional healing. In this study, the key informants revealed three different methods. These are

1. Subada (Hilot); 2. Herbalism; and 3. Sahuma (Mangatawas).

Subada (Hilot)

In this method, the traditional healer will determine the areas of skeletal misalignment (*baldao*) or energy imbalances (*pasmo*) in the body through wrist pulse. Then, the traditional healer will massage the affected body part using coconut oil or commercial ointment. After which, the patient is advised not to drink cold water nor to take a bath for one day. In addition, the patient will be asked to make *hampul*. *Hampul* is the wrapping of cloth in the affected body part with leaves of tangan – tangan (tuba - tuba) for overnight. After recovery, the patient is advised to take an aromatic bath with sampalok leaves decoction. This kind of practices were also documented in Ilocos community [10], however there some practices that differs. For instance, the use of crashed ginger instead of tangan – tangan leaves in making *hampul* and the use of bamboo leaves decoction instead of sampalok leaves for aromatic bath after recovery.

Herbalism

In this method, the traditional healers are advising their patients to use medicinal plants. The administration of medicinal plants could be in external or internal. In this study, the methods were grouped into five:

- I. boiling of plant samples (leaves, roots or stem) then drink the decoction.
- II. boiling of plant samples (leaves, roots or stem) then used for bathing.
- III. wrapping of plants with cloth directly to the affected areas
- IV. pounding or crushing of plants.
- V. chewing

Table 1 shows the different medicinal plants used by the traditional healers, its scientific and local name, the illness to be treated and what method is applied.



Table 1. Medicinal Plants Used by the Traditional Healers

Medicinal Plants	Name	Parts of the Plant Used	Illness to be Treated	Procedure
	Scientific Name: <i>Moringa oleifera</i> Common Name: Malunggay	Leaves	Fever	I
			Wounds	IV
	Scientific Name: <i>Peperomia pellucida</i> Common Name: Sinaw-sinaw/ Pansit pansitan	Leaves	Arthritis, Kidney Problem, Fever	I
		Leaves and Stem	Wounds	IV
	Scientific Name: <i>Jatropha curcas</i> Common Name: Tangan - Tangan/ Tuba - Tuba	Leaves	Muscle Pain, Flatulence	III
	Scientific Name: <i>Vitex negundo</i> L. Common Name: Lagundi	Leaves	Cough, Fever	I
	Scientific Name: <i>Coeus blumei</i> benth. Common Name: Mayana	Leaves	Swell	III
	Scientific Name: <i>Costus igneus</i> Common Name: Insulin Plant	Leaves	High Sugar	V



	Scientific Name: <i>Allium sativum</i> Common Name: Bawang	Cloves	Toothache, Wounds	IV
	Scientific Name: <i>Anona muricata</i> Linn. Common Name: Guyabano	Leaves	Arthritis, Inflammation of respiratory tract	I
			Body pain or Swelling	III
	Scientific Name: <i>Tamarindus indica</i> Linn. Common Name: Sampalok	Leaves	Fever, Puerperium	II
	Scientific Name: <i>Syzygium cumini</i> Common Name: Lomboy	Bark	Intestinal inflammation	I



	<p>Scientific Name: <i>Mangifera indica</i> Linn.</p> <p>Common Name: Mangga</p>	<p>Young Leaves</p>	<p>Cough</p>	<p>I</p>
	<p>Scientific Name: <i>Averrhoa bilimbi</i></p> <p>Common Name: Kamias</p>	<p>Fruits</p>	<p>Cough</p>	<p>I</p>
	<p>Scientific Name: <i>Aloe barbadensis</i></p> <p>Common Name: Aloe vera</p>	<p>Leaves</p>	<p>Baldness, Dandruff</p>	<p>IV</p>
	<p>Scientific Name: <i>Andrographis paniculata</i></p> <p>Common Name: Serpentina</p>	<p>Leaves with Stem</p>	<p>Stomachache</p>	<p>I</p>
	<p>Scientific Name: <i>Hibiscus rosa- sinensis</i> Linn.</p> <p>Common Name: Gumamela</p>	<p>Flower Buds</p>	<p>Boils</p>	<p>IV</p>
	<p>Scientific Name: <i>Sandoricum koetjape</i> (Burm.f.) Merr.</p> <p>Common Name: Santol</p>	<p>Leaves</p>	<p>Swelling</p>	<p>III</p>



There were a total of 16 plants identified in the study, of which 3 were part of the 10 medicinal plants endorsed by DOH [11]. These plants are bawang, lagundi and pansit pansitan. More so, from the reviewed published studies the use of duhat bark, gumamela flower buds, kamias fruit, sampalok leaves and serpentine leaves to treat a particular illness is not recorded.

The most common part of the plants being used for treatment is the leaves. This findings coincide with the study of Pizon et al. [12], Fiscal [13] and Agapin [14]. The leaves are the most abundant part of plants that can be easily collected and regenerate [15]. More so, phytochemicals such as alkaloids, tannins, coumarines, flavonoids, essential oils and inulins are manufactured and stored in leaves [16].

The common method in preparing these plants to treat the identified illnesses is decoction. Decoction is the process of boiling plant sample (leaves, stem, fruit or roots) with water to extract water soluble compounds. The patient will intake the decoction. This findings coincide with Pizon et al. [12], Fiscal [13] and Agapin [14].

Zamboanga City as an urbanized city, indeed it is difficult to look for these plants within the 7 km radius. Thus, the government, educational and health institutions should propagate these plants due to their medicinal potentials.

Sahuma (Mangtatawas)

The common method for this practice is the use of tawas (alum), kemenyan (incense), candle from burial and blessed palm. These ingredients will be placed in a container with burning charcoal. The healer will place the container in front of the sick person, while doing some gestures and silently praying. Image formation from alum will determine if you were disturbed by some elements. If the image formed is black, it denotes dark elements. The Sahuma is being done 3 to 4 times. This method is different from pangtatawas of Ilocos Community. Relon [10] revealed that the traditional healer are using lighted candle and basin with half full water. The candle drips on the basin, until an image is form.

CONCLUSION

There were three traditional healing methods documented in this study. These are subada (hilot), herbalism and sahuma (mangtatawas). In subada, the healer do massage on the affected body area using of coconut oil or commercial ointment. In herbalism, a total of 16 medicinal plants were recorded. Leaves are the common part of the plants being used and the common method is decoction. In sahuma, the healer

uses tawas, kemenyan, candle and blessed palm. The image that will form will be interpreted by the healer.

Limitation of the Study

The researchers acknowledge the following limitations of this study: 1.) limited number of key informants and 2.) must include the demographic profile of the key informants. Nonetheless, phase II might be carried if time will warrant.

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