



An Ethnocultural Study on the Medical Practices of ‘Magtatambal’ in Tagkawayan, Quezon

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Abstract: ‘Magtatambal’ is a faith healer who specializes in curing animal bites. They have preserved medical cultures and practices in Tagkawayan, Quezon. This study used an ethnocultural type of qualitative research by utilizing interviews and observation. The subjects of the study were composed of three ‘magtatambal’: (1) ‘magtatambal’ in Barangay Aliji, (2) ‘magtatambal’ in Barangay Bamban, and (3) ‘magtatambal’ in Barangay Sta. Cecilia, Tagkawayan, Quezon. They were purposively selected because of their differences in the method of treating animal bites and are specifically identified as experienced ‘magtatambal’. In the light of the findings, the researchers found out that ‘magtatambal’ 1 performs her medical practices by saying a Latin prayer, blowing air, and patting the body part bitten of the patient. ‘Magtatambal’ 2 performs her medical practices by washing the wound caused by the animal fangs using the ‘tambal’ (alcohol) and letting the victim drink one shot of the ‘tambal’. Lastly, ‘magtatambal’ 3 conducts theirs by putting a boiled ‘bolo’ (bamboo stalk) to the wound that will extract the venom from the victim’s body. The subjects encountered difficulty in handling patients who are already experiencing the effect of the venom. Passing the knowledge and the procedure is the subjects’ way to preserve their practices.

Key Words: ‘bolo’; ‘Magtatambal’; ‘tambal’; medical practices; ethnocultural

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Humans have traditionally relied on nature to meet their essential needs, such as food, clothes, medicines, and natural healing remedies. Before, there were no high establishments, modern medical equipment, and further knowledge about medicine. It is impressive how diseased people are still able to survive without the things mentioned. Only traditional healing methods such as herbal ingestion, local incision, and prayers are given to its patients. The said procedures are done using traditional healing methods or sometimes termed as faith healing.

Faith healing is a method of medication in which a believer seeks divine intervention through praying to reconcile a particular ailment or condition. Since time immemorial, faith healing has been used by believers who adhere to different religions to heal diseases. Faith healers are the ones who conduct faith healing. Other than that, they have the ability to cure patients despite lacking the proper study from medicine. Usually, their knowledge came from their ancestors or was learned from their experiences.

A ‘magtatambal’ is a faith healer that can be

found in Tagkawayan, Quezon. They specialized in treating snakebites, rabies, and other poisonous animal bites. They only differ from the methods on how they treat their patients. The availability of this medical practice helped save the lives of many people. However, due to the modernization of medicine, faith healing is slowly fading, and much more to vanish if it will not be preserved. If people forget about this culture, it will be lost over time.

Snakebite is a serious medical, social, and economic problem in many parts of the world, especially in tropical and subtropical countries, home to most of the world's dangerous snakes and have limited access to treatment. In Vietnam, the majority of traditional healers inherited their family businesses and learned healing skills and expertise from their forefathers and foremothers. Also, the affordable treatment cost compared to modern medicine is one of the factors for local people to use their service continuously.

According to Peprah et al. (2018), in their research entitled “Religion and Health: exploration of attitudes and health perceptions of faith healing users in urban Ghana,” faith healers served as the first port of call for disease curing and prevention for most users. Consumers of faith healing perceived their health status to be good due to the perceived



effectiveness of faith healing to cure health problems.

Traditional healers, however, are often neglected and left out from rabies prevention and control plans. Mental Floss UK (2018) stated the “cut and suck” method was discredited a few decades ago because research proved it to be counterproductive. They said that venom spreads to the victim’s system quickly, so there is no hope of sucking out a sufficient volume to make any difference as it can only increase the risk of infections.

The researchers pursue this study to explore their medical practices, to learn from their perspectives, and to understand their way of healing. This study will help determine the reliability of the said medical practices. Also, the study would help preserve the knowledge and culture of ‘pagtatambal’.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The study would like to investigate the medical practices of ‘Magtatambal’ in Tagkawayan, Quezon. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the medical practices of the ‘Magtatambal’ in:
 - 1.1. Barangay Aliji, Tagkawayan, Quezon
 - 1.2. Barangay Bamban, Tagkawayan, Quezon, and
 - 1.3. Barangay Sta. Cecilia, Tagkawayan, Quezon?
2. What are the challenges encountered by the ‘Magtatambal’?
3. How do the ‘Magtatambal’ preserve their medical practices?

1.3. Significance of the Study

The study is beneficial to the faith healers to help them be recognized and preserve their culture and knowledge about treating patients. It would inform the community about alternative and natural processes used by the ‘magtatambal’. In addition, this study will give them enough information to understand better the traditions and cultures which their ancestors use. Also, the study might be helpful to the researchers pursuing similar studies as they can use this as a reference or guide.

1.4. Scope and Delimitation

The study focused on the medical practices of ‘magtatambal’ in Tagkawayan, Quezon. The study was conducted in Barangay Aliji, Bamban, and Sta. Cecilia. Each barangay inherent one ‘magtatambal’ who differs from one another by their medical practices. In connection, this study would determine the culture in doing the medical practice of the ‘magtatambal’ and help preserve it by giving value to

the practice and introducing it to the people.

1.5. Conceptual Framework

The researchers would like to study the ethnocultural about the medical practices of ‘magtatambal’ in Tagkawayan, Quezon.

In input, the researchers would gather the data from the selected ‘magtatambal’ in Tagkawayan, Quezon.

In process, the researchers would analyze, observe, and conduct an interview.

The output of the study is the medical practices in curing animal bites of ‘magtatambal’ in Tagkawayan, Quezon.

1.6. Definition of Terms

The following terms were conceptually and operationally defined:

Bolo is a bamboo stalk in Tagalog. This is one of the materials used in ‘pagtatambal’.

Medical practice is the practice of medicine by a group of physicians who share their premises and other resources. In this study, it is the term used for the medical process of the ‘magtatambal’ which is passed down from generation to generation.

Pagtatambal is the practice and culture of treating animal bites without the use of modern medical apparatus. Tambahal is the term that defines the main tool or equipment used by the ‘magtatambal’ to perform their medical practices.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study used an ethnographic type of qualitative research by utilizing interviews and observation. The findings of the study were based on the researchers’ observation and gathering of the information about the medical practices of the selected ‘magtatambal’ in the different barangays of Tagkawayan, Quezon. The researchers conducted the study in Barangay Aliji, Bamban, and Sta. Cecilia. An interview protocol was prepared to gather sufficient data for the study. Also, the researchers observed the actual medical practices of the ‘magtatambal’. The subjects of the study were composed of three ‘magtatambal’ in the selected barangays: one in Barangay Aliji, one in Barangay Bamban, and one in Barangay Sta. Cecilia. They were chosen purposively because of their differences in their medical practices, as well as their ability to articulate and describe their Ethnoculture.



3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Medical Practices Performed by the 'Magtatambal'

Subject	Answer	Code
Magtatambal A	"Ano...nilalapatan ng Latin [prayer]. Ano lang...hihipan yung mismong kinagatan. Hihip 'saka yung tapik lang siya." =	Praying Latin, blowing, and patting.
Magtatambal B	"Ayun...hinuhugason ko ng tambal 'yung kinagatan bago patinumin ko [tambal]. Wala akong dasal". =	Pouring the wound. Drink 'tambal'.
Magtatambal C	"Magpapakulo ako ng tubig... 'pag tulong kulo na saka ko laang 'yung kawayan yung bolo...bago ipakapit dun sa ano... 'pag wala namang sugat at medyo tuyo na inamihan [hinihiwaan] ko na para may masipsipan. Yung blade." =	'Bolo'

Table 1 shows how the 'magtatambal' perform their medical practices. The subjects uttered that they perform their healing by: (1) praying Latin, blowing, and patting the area of the victim's wound; (2) pouring the liquor ('tambal') on the victim's wound for it to be cleaned, then, letting the patient drink a shot of 'tambal'; and lastly, (3) slitting a small piece of skin near the wound caused by the animal's bite and putting the boiled 'bolo' on the wound to sip the venom or rabies.

Mental Floss UK (2018) stated that venom spreads to the victim's system quickly, so there is no hope of sucking out a sufficient volume to make any difference. It can only increase the risk of infections.

Table 2. Tools and Equipment used in the Medical Practices

Subject	Answer	Code
Magtatamba 1A	"Latin [prayer] lang more on Latin...libro 'yun na isinalin sa 'kin. Ahh...galing pa 'yun sa ninuno ng...(pause)...kung bago ilang salin na ako kay ama...sa...tatay ni ama...tapos...siguro mga pang ano na ako eh pang...(pause)...pang-anim or pito. Bigay lang talaga 'yun...kasi 'yun... 'yun talaga naman ay dapat ay pansarili...kaso zyempre 'yung mga nakakaalam...kung bago sinasabi nang sinasabi kaya kung bago dumami 'yung mga nagpapagamot na rin. 'Pag ano lang, pagka Mshah na Araw, ainal, na."	Latin prayers
Magtatamba 1B	"Tambal, oo 'yun laang. Ay bigay din laang yun sa amin...nilalagyan ko ulit ng alak...alak lang ang panlagay ko. Wala." =	Tambal
Magtatamba 1C	"Oo, bolo tapos pakulo ng tubig... bulak tapos, oo... 'baka blade." =	Bolo, boiled water, cotton, and blade

Table 2 presents the tools and equipment used by the 'magtatambal' in their medical practice. The first 'magtatambal' said that she only uses prayer, which is composed of Latin words. The last two subjects stated that they used alcoholic beverages and a 'bolo' boiled in water, cotton, and blade.

The Latin language is mostly used in faith healing from then until now as it possesses powerful entities used as a medium for communicating with spirits to seek guidance for faith healing. Using 'bolo' boiled in water removes unwanted bacteria that can affect the wound of the patient, and using alcohol is believed to be a good first aid for snakebite to dissolve the venom.

The use of alcohol to dissolve venom is questioned as it can affect the circulation of blood and the lymphatic system and can make the venom climb to the brain faster, leading to death. However, Hall (2018) supported that the use of alcohol can dissolve venom.

Table 3. Summary of the Subjects' Answers in the Interview

Questions	Summary of Answers
1. Where did you obtain your knowledge? Did you study the process of treating animal bites? How long? Did someone give you the process?	It was inherited from their great grandfather, husband, and taught by her mother-in-law.
2. Do you also prescribe medicine, either herbal or chemical, after you treat your patient? If yes, what are those?	They do not prescribe any medicine except for Amoxicillin (antibiotics).
3. Do you perform rituals?	One of the 'magtatambal' performs a ritual and offers prayers during Holy Week while others do not.
4. Have you experienced treating other animal bites? If yes, what are those?	They all treat animal bites, including dogs, cats, and rats.
5. How would you know if the venom or rabies are extracted? What are the signs?	The venom has been extracted from the body if the victim's body is no longer numb, something watery and sticky came out, and the 'bolo' or 'tambal' was placed on the victim's body twice.
6. What are the problems you encounter?	They experience difficulty in handling patients who are already experiencing the effect of the venom.

Table 3 shows the summary of the subject's answers in the interview. Their medical practices are mostly inherited and taught by their relatives and they only prescribe Amoxicillin (antibiotics). Only one of them performs a ritual, but they all treat other animal bites, including dogs, cats, and rats. The indicator that the venom is fully extracted is when the patient's body is no longer numb, a liquid substance came out, and the 'tambal' was placed twice on the affected area. The 'magtatambal' finds the treatment challenging if the patient is already suffering from the effects of the venom.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In the light of the findings, the researchers found out that 'Magtatambal' 1 performs her medical practice by saying a Latin prayer, blowing air, and patting the body part bitten of the patient. 'Magtatambal' 2 performs her medical practice by washing the wound caused by the animal fangs using the 'tambal' (alcohol) and letting the victim drink one shot of the 'tambal'. Lastly, 'Magtatambal' 3 conducts theirs by putting a boiled 'bolo' (bamboo stalk) to the wound that will extract the venom from the victim's body. They usually encounter difficulty in handling patients who are already suffering from the effects of the venom. Passing the knowledge and the procedure is the subjects' way to preserve their healing. Knowing and understanding these medical practices helps in appreciating the knowledge and culture of Filipinos. This is an important part of history that defines who Filipinos are, and this traces back to the strong belief in the faith of the Filipinos.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The researchers would like to acknowledge and praise, first and foremost, our Almighty God for



giving us physical, mental, and emotional strength and knowledge.

The researchers warmly thank their parents for their spiritual, moral, and financial support and Mr. Samboy D. Niala and Ms. Cherry S. Ona for their critical comments and support.

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