



## Ethnocultural Analysis on Different Practices of the Bihog Tribe (Agta) on Childbearing

Khriselle Estrope and Nathan Abram Faith Moreno  
*Tagkawayan National High School, Tagkawayan, Quezon*

Samboy D. Niala  
*Tagkawayan National High School, Tagkawayan, Quezon*

**Abstract:** Bihog Tribe (Agta) has different beliefs and cultural practices in childbearing. They have their traditional medicines, ceremonies, coping mechanisms, and food eaten during the pregnancy period, labor, and postpartum. The study used an ethnographic type of research in qualitative approach. Interview protocol was utilized to gather information about their culture and beliefs. The subjects consisted of three mothers and a midwife, with a total of four that were purposively selected. The study was conducted in Sitio Mapatong, Brgy. Sto. Tomas, Tagkawayan, Quezon. The answers from the interviews and discussions proved that their culture and traditions were effective enough to allow childbearing to happen without medical interventions. Moreover, they used medicinal herbs such as 'lagundi', ginger, and 'paminat' (a phytomedicine in the form of rind used to avoid relapsing). 'Pasuob' or smoke ritual was also done to drive 'Danyar' (evil spirits) away. It is also taboo to walk around the tribe for it might attract Danyar and to let pregnant women eat bread because the fetus might grow larger inside the womb that could cause difficulty in labor. On the other hand, the Local Government Unit (LGU) provided help and support to the tribe, including prenatal care, medical supplies, and free check-ups without disturbing the tribe's traditions.

**Key Words:** Aeta; Bihog tribe; childbearing; prenatal; labor; postpartum

### 1. INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. Background of the Study

Childbearing is one of the most challenging phenomena in a woman's body, and it is in need of utmost care. The birth of a child can be such a happy time, especially when the little one is in good health. Women give birth to their children with the help of doctors, nurses, and midwives in hospitals and birthing centers nowadays. Local Government Units (LGUs) are now mandated by the government to upgrade birthing facilities.

Before, most women gave birth at their homes because of being distant from hospitals and birthing centers or lack of fortune in finance. This caused the high maternal mortality rate in our country, which is why in 2008, the country passed the Maternal, Newborn and Child Health and Nutrition Strategy policy, dubbed as the "No Home Birthing Policy." Statistics show that 208 mothers of 100,000 live births die due to childbirth and complications. The goal was to reduce the country's high rate of maternal mortality to 52, according to the article of Bacani (2020). On the contrary, ethnic groups from different corners of the Philippines still perform their childbirths at home, not only because of their

remoteness and lack of finance but also because they want to preserve their culture and traditions. One of these tribes is the Agta or Bihog, who resides in Sitio Mapatong, Brgy. Sto. Tomas, Tagkawayan, Quezon.

The Bihog Tribe has small nose, dark brown eyes, and brown skin. They are the Aetas in Province of Quezon. Being an ethnic group, the Bihog Tribe has unusual ways of living, culture, and tradition. Their daily living and practices are culturally diverse from standard society.

Furthermore, Withers and Lim (2018) claimed in their study that cultural beliefs can influence women's use of formal maternal health care services. The traditional beliefs and practices in pregnancy are prevalent in Asia, mostly in tribes that reside in remote areas. Their fear of institutional birth is women's fear of unnecessary medical interventions.

Moreover, Matsubara et al. (2013) stated in their study that women's satisfaction is an important indicator of the quality of care during childbirth. A good environment in the surroundings of a pregnant woman, such as a warm home and good health facility, can increase positive effects in her pregnancy and childbearing. In contrast, an unsatisfying childbearing experience can cause postpartum mental disorder to the mother, which, in a way, agrees with ethnic mothers not wanting the medicine industry to



interfere in their pregnancy and childbirth. Their culture may be more satisfying for them than the modern medical interventions.

Therefore, the researchers would like to determine the beliefs and cultural practices of the Bihog Tribe on childbearing in Sitio Mapatong, Brgy. Sto. Tomas, Tagkawayan, Quezon.

### 1.2. Statement of the Problem

The study aimed to investigate the different childbearing practices performed by the Bihog Tribe. The study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the traditional practices done by the Bihog Tribe in Sitio Mapatong, Brgy. Sto. Tomas, Tagkawayan, Quezon during:

#### 1.1. Prenatal

- 1.1.1. Medicine,
- 1.1.2. Ceremony, and
- 1.1.3. Food eaten?

#### 1.2. Labor

- 1.2.1. Medicine,
- 1.2.2. Ceremony, and
- 1.2.3. Food eaten?

#### 1.3. Postpartum

- 1.3.1. Medicine,
- 1.3.2. Ceremony, and
- 1.3.2. Food eaten?

2. What are the struggles and challenges encountered of an Agta woman during pregnancy and childbirth?
3. What are their coping mechanisms?
4. How does the Agta midwife perform midwifery guardianship?
- 5.

### 1.3. Significance of the Study

The study is beneficial to the Bihog Tribe (Agta) because it would help them let society and the government know about their experiences regarding childbearing and would motivate the government to provide support and help without disregarding their culture and traditions. Medical practitioners would also be informed about how the tribe performs their procedures on childbearing and will help them distinguish the differences between the modern medical practices and the traditional practices of the tribe. Also, the study might be helpful to the researchers pursuing similar studies that can be beneficial to the Agta.

### 1.4. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

The researchers conducted this study by means of following this method represented inside the conceptual framework, which are the input, the process, and the output.

The input of the study focuses on the

objectives or research where the researchers identified the childbearing practices, challenges encountered, and coping mechanisms of Agta women in childbearing.

The process shows how the researchers collect the data regarding the different childbearing practices of the tribe through interviews, reading articles, and data gathering. Also, the researchers participated in the IPs environment.

Lastly, the output of the study is the identified childbearing practices of the Bihog Tribe (Agta). Furthermore, an action plan or community-based research that focuses on the access to the health care system of IPs is recommended.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The researchers used an ethnographic type of research by utilizing interviews and discussions to gather data and information about their culture. It was a qualitative approach that focused on investigating and describing the culture and traditions regarding childbearing present in the tribe. The ethnographic design was utilized because the research paper's objective is to determine their culture and traditions through observations and participation in the tribe's environment. The study was conducted in Sitio Mapatong, Brgy. Sto. Tomas, Tagkawayan, Quezon. The location was in an isolated area where the researchers walked for almost three hours. The participants of the study were composed of three Agta mothers and one Agta midwife, a total of four, who could answer the questions from the interview protocol and could provide data regarding the different practices of the Bihog Tribe (Agta) on childbearing. The interview questions were prepared and developed by gathering related literature and were answered by the subjects as the researchers asked the questions. Permission was also sought to do audio recording and video recording, likewise given assurance regarding the confidentiality of the data. The responses were then transcribed and coded for interpretation.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Agta Mothers as the Subjects

Table 1. Herbal Medicines and Decoctions

Subject	Answers	Codes
Mother A	"Halaman sa ubo, Lagundi, oregano."	'Lagundi' and oregano leaves
Mother B	"Nainom ng luya para mawala yung lamig sa katawan."	Turmeric tea for body cold.
Mother C	"Yung katas ng paminat, iniinom para hindi mabinat hangga't di nauubos kahit araw-araw."	'Paminat' extract is used to avoid relapsing.

Table 1 shows the herbal medicines and decoctions that the pregnant women in their tribe drink. 'Lagundi', turmeric tea, and oregano leaves



were used as remedies for coughs and colds. Tea from ‘Paminat’, a rind that can be found in the forests and rivers near their tribe, was taken to avoid relapsing from the tiresome pregnancy stage.

Affirmatively, the study of Lamxay et al. (2011) stated that ethnic groups usually use medicinal plants in recovery during pregnancy, postpartum, and infant health care.

Table 2. Beliefs and Traditions Regarding Pregnancy and Childbearing

Subject	Answers	Codes
Mother A	"Bawal maglakad kung saan-saan kapag buntis. Bawal kami sa kalaan baka maamoy ng mga taong di nakikita."	Walking around was forbidden
Mother B	"Bawal kami ng tinapay kasi lalaki yung bata sa tiyan, mahihirapan ilabas."	Bread was restricted
Mother C	"Kapag ang buntis ay nagdadala ng mabigat, hindi mahihirapan sa panganganak kaya nagkakatod ako noon."	Carrying heavy objects can help in easy and comfortable delivery.

Table 2 shows beliefs and traditions regarding pregnancy and childbearing acknowledged in their tribe. They believe that pregnant women should not walk around the tribe and forests because ‘Danyar’ (evil spirits) might smell them and bother them. Bread might also result in the growth of the baby before it even comes out of the womb, so it is considered a forbidden food. Lastly, they believe that carrying heavy objects helps in making their labor and delivery a lot easier.

Table 3. Cultural Practices during Childbearing

Subject	Answers	Codes
Mother A	"Pag nahihirapan ilabas [bata], pinapasukan kami. Hinihilot kapag nairi na para mapadali yung paglabas [bata]."	Smoke ritual and caressing of stomach are done for easier delivery.
Mother B	"Sinusuob saka hinihilot para mabilis lumabas yung bata."	Smoke ritual or ‘Pasuob’ and caressing of stomach are performed.
Mother C	"Pag kami ay nanganganak na, sinusuob kami, tapos yung tiyan pinupunasan."	‘Pasuob’ and caressing of stomach are performed.

Table 3 shows their cultural practices during childbearing. A smoke ritual or ‘Pasuob’ was performed. Caressing of the stomach was also practiced for the baby to come out easily.

They believed that ‘Pasuob’ is necessary to be performed during pregnancy and labor to prevent ‘Danyar’ or evil spirits from bothering the mother and child. Almost parallel to the study of Grey (2016), Aetas of Mt. Pinatubo also has a cultural act where they burn rubbers outside the woman’s house to drive evil spirits away.

### 3.2 Agta Midwife as the Subject

Table 4. Ceremonies during Labor and Delivery

Informant	Responses	Corresponding Code
Agta Midwife	"Nagpapasuob. 'Pag naman pwede na maligo na 'yung bagong panganak, kinukuhanan ko lang ng pampaligo. Lukban, saka 'yang anonang, at sambong."	Smoke ritual or ‘Pasuob’ and caressing of stomach for the fetus to come out of the womb easily  Postpartum mother can take a bath when she is allowed to with grapefruit, ‘anonang’, and ‘sambong’.

Table 4 shows the ceremonies during labor and delivery or childbearing that they perform. They have a smoke ritual or ‘Pasuob’ where they surround the woman’s body with smoke. She also caresses the woman’s stomach so that the infant can exit through the woman’s vagina easily.

The answers of the subject were derived from her knowledge and experiences regarding midwifery guardianship. The subject answered ‘Pasuob’ and caressing of stomach since these activities were done during their labor and delivery. She also said that grapefruit, ‘anonang’, and ‘sambong’ are essentials for postpartum mothers when taking a bath.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

The Bihog Tribe has a lot of unusual cultures and traditions regarding childbearing, which is affirmed in the study of Grey (2016). However, the study revealed different cultural practices on driving away evil spirits which might disturb the woman and child. Grey stated that Aeta from Mt. Pinatubo burned rubber outside the house of the pregnant woman while the Agta from Sitio Mapatong, Brgy. Sto Tomas, Tagkawayan, Quezon performed ‘Pasuob’ using ‘tawas’, incense, and ‘kamanyang’, or sometimes ‘balete’. Pregnant women are also not allowed to walk around the tribe to avoid ‘Danyar’ (evil spirits) as part of prenatal care. Thus, the Bihog Tribe used turmeric and Paminat as herbal medicines and implemented food orders, which include restrictions from eating bread and cassava during prenatal, childbearing, and postpartum. The postpartum mother can also wash her body, only when she is allowed to, with grapefruit, ‘anonang’, and ‘sambong’.

The Agta women feared hospitals which made them stick to their usual traditions that might lead to some challenges and struggles such as no proper monitoring, health problems, or worse, death, because of lacking health care assistance. This conclusion affirmed what Withers and Lim (2018) have stated. They stated that one of the barriers to institutional birth is the women’s fear of unnecessary medical interventions.

The Agta women coped with the struggles they have encountered by continuing to follow and to



believe the traditions and cultures they have in their tribe. They were also given assistance which affirmed to Matsubara et al. (2013), wherein he stated that satisfaction and a good environment can increase positive effects in the childbearing experience of the mother.

The Agta midwife was taught by her mother, a former tribe midwife, about midwifery guardianship. Her knowledge and professionalism were beneficial to the women of the tribe. She performed midwifery guardianship based on her knowledge about their culture.

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