

Indigenous Practices of Maternal and Child Health Care Among the Manobo-Matigsalug Tribe in Sitio Simsimon, Barangay Kalagangan, Valencia , Bukidnon

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ABSTRACT

The study was conducted to document the native knowledge, beliefs and practices on maternal and child health care along the areas of pregnancy, dietary systems, birthing, feeding, baptismal rituals, illnesses and discipline among the Manobo-Matigsalug Tribe in Sitio Simsimon, Barangay Kalagangan, Valencia, Bukidnon. A few scholars have done studies about the tribe but no one has thoroughly conducted a thorough one along these issues.

This study is ethnographic in design. The manner of presentation is descriptive and narrative. The gathering and interpretations of the data were obtained from actual fieldwork. Key informant and in depth interview, participant observation and photography were triangulated in this research. Participants were the traditional healers, tribal leaders, mothers and children. A total of seven months was allocated in the conduct of this endeavor.

The Manobo-Matigsalug pregnant women observe several taboos in order to protect the infants' lives and health. They have the Babaylan, their birth attendant who also serves as their consultant. The children's health in the womb depends on how the mothers take care of themselves, hence, they must be free from worries and stressful activities. To be assured of the babies' good health, the choice of food is a very important factor to be observed. When a mother finally gives birth, the whole community knows. The relatives wait outside in order to see and welcome the newly born baby who is considered as the center of care and affection.

The Manobo-Matigsalug mothers need adequate knowledge in hygiene and nutrition to improve their maternal and child health care. The local government should support the tribe in developing the uses of herbal plants in their area. The tribe needs information on the results of this study and be guided in the improvement of their traditional life. Further studies about other tribal groups in Mindanao are also encouraged.

Keywords: Indigenous practices; maternal and child health care; Manobo-Matigsalug

INTRODUCTION

The use of indigenous knowledge and practices is more popular in the remote communities where there are no health facilities. These traditional beliefs and customs are typical religious acts which are usually related to health care, child rearing, nutrition and safety.^[1] They are means of sanctification and putting things in their proper places. They provide individuals and groups with a way to mediate transition points in the human life cycle and other changes of status.^[2]

The focus of the study is the Manobo-Matigsalug Tribe in Sitio Simsimon, Barangay Kalagangan, Valencia, San Fernando, Bukidnon. The Matigsalugs are generally known as "people of the rivers". They are a distinct sub-group of the indigenous peoples within the Manobo group. They are small in stature with dark brown complexion and curly hair.

This research provides an adequate description of the maternal and child health care patterns among the tribal women and children who are considered as the most vulnerable groups in our society.. It yields information and concepts which may serve as bases for the preparation of a sound child development by the parents in the locality. This may also generate enthusiasm and interest on the part of the government, non-government organizations, people's organizations, religious institutions, and funding agencies which may inspire them to extend assistance in order to standardize the quality of everyday life of the tribe. It may also be a good reference material for teachers and students who are studying Filipino culture. Moreover, this may draw enough interest to other researchers who are making studies on the ethnographic patterns of lifestyles of other tribal people.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study aims to examine and document the indigenous practices on maternal and child health care among the Manobo-Matigsalug tribe in Sitio Simsimon, Barangay Kalagangan, Valencia, Bukidnon. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the geographic and socio-cultural profile of Sitio Simsimon?
2. What are the indigenous practices on maternal health care among the Manobo Matigsalugs with respect to:
 - a. pregnancy preparations;
 - b. dietary system; and
 - c. birthing?
3. What are the indigenous practices on child health care among the Manobo-Matigsalugs in terms of:
 - a. feeding;

- b. baptismal rituals;
- c. Illnesses; and
- d. Discipline?

RESULTS

Geographical and Socio-Cultural Profile of Sitio Simsimon

Topographically, Sitio Simsimon is a mountainous and rolling terrain in Barangay Kalagangan, San Fernando, Bukidnon. The place is surrounded by rivers and the soil is so fertile which is potentially capable to produce food for the people. The *beuhan* (rivers) and *bubungan* (mountains) which surround the tribal community witness how the inhabitants fight and survive the so called cultural and ecological disasters. Rainfall is more pronounced from June to October. Apparently because of the place's altitude, the climate is moderately cold even during daylight.

Presently, Sitio Simsimon is composed of 13 *baoy*s (houses) with 20 households. Houses are constructed close to one another. The house is a one-room affair. The receiving room is also a multipurpose room. The reckoning of relatives is bilateral, meaning recognition of relationship through both parents. They are strictly exogamous (marrying a woman from outside the community). They practice matrilocal residency, and the extended type of family where each house is usually shared by two families with four to six members.

Historically, this community was once a victim of illegal loggers. The inhuman and savage logging operation in the area resulted to the destruction of the environment which forced the people in the tribal community to transfer to the upland areas trying to secure the remaining numbers of their natural treasures.

The ethno-history of the tribe originates from the accounts of the typical indigenous people of Bukidnon. They are identified into two tribal origins namely the Bukidnons and the Manobos. The Bukidnons have slight built bodies, slanting eyelets, relatively high noses and medium brown to light skin. They speak *binukid*, which is distinctively with up and down tone. The Manobos have small bodies, dark skin, curly hair and broad to flat noses. The Bukidnons live in the flatlands of the Bukidnon plateau. They already adopt Christian ways and utilize modern technology while the Manobos live in the mountains and do not want to mingle with the Christians and other people. They speak a quaint archaic language of their own which cannot be understood by the lowland Bukidnons and other ethnic groups in the province.

The Manobo-Matigsalug settlement in Sitio Simsimon is relatively compact. They have their own leader called *igbuyag* (chieftain) who is gifted with wisdom and knowledge of traditional lore and mythology. He is elected by the people through the

recognition of his capacity to settle disputes, help in the payment of indemnity, and defend the people from enemies. The position of chieftainship can be passed on to offsprings.

The Indigenous Practices on Maternal Health Care

Pregnancy. Generally, the Manobo-Matigsalug woman is not so concerned about observing the cycle of her menstruation. She can easily determine if she is pregnant when her monthly menstruation stops and her belly begins to swell. Expectant mothers turn to the *babaylan* (traditional birth attendant) for care before, during and after giving birth. They follow her advice to ensure the safe delivery of their babies.

The Manobo-Matigsalugs believe in bad spirits like the *busaw*, who likes to kill infants; the *saping*, a human skeleton; the *bakbakoy/wakwak*, who craves to suck the blood of the baby inside the mother's womb; the *kikik*, a flying little creature; the *balbal*, a monkey-like creature who has the ability to change its image; and the *inkanto*, who lives in the *balite* tree together with the *busaw*. These spirits are believed to do harm to the mother and the baby.

Dietary system. Many beliefs and practices on eating are considered very important during pregnancy and lactation period. The foods that mothers consume are alleged to have effects on the ease or difficulty in delivering children. Some affect the quality of the mother's milk. Mothers are advised to eat fresh fruits and nutritious food in order to produce milk for the baby. They believe that they should not eat the inner meat of an animal because it is not good for the health of the baby. They should not eat shrimps and eel because these can cause delay in the delivery. They should not eat cassava to avoid giving birth to a small baby with a big stomach. The *babaylan*, their tribal healer, is consulted regarding the diet of the mother and the giving of supplementary food to the child.

Birthing. At childbirth, the *babaylan* ties birth charm herbs, stones, and other items given to her by the spirit guardian, around the mother's waist. When the baby comes out, she cuts the umbilical cord of the child by using a small knife or blade known as *ilab*. The cord is wrapped in an old mat and buried under the stairs of the house. News about the birth spreads very fast even to other neighboring tribal communities. The relatives wait outside the house in order to see and welcome the newly born baby.

The Indigenous Practices on Child Health Care

Feeding. Customarily, the Manobo-Matigsalug mothers practice breast feeding. They allow their babies' to take the first yellowish milk called colostrum which medically contains an immunizing effect on the infants. After one month, the babies are given ampalaya juice to clean the intestines from the blackish waste matter. Mothers eat

kapayas (green papaya), malungay leaves, and leaves of *binggala* (camote tops) to increase the supply and flow of their milk. Weaning is usually done in order for the mother to devote time to do farm works. Normally, the child is weaned at the age of one. In some cases especially on the youngest child, a nursing mother allows the child to breastfeed even up to the age of five or six years or until the child refuses to suck the mother's breast. Mothers who have insufficient milk practice mixed feeding. The water from boiled rice is an alternative food supplement in feeding their infants. They prepare *atelug* (egg), *binggala* (cassava), and *akasile* (sweet potato) for the children's solid food.

Baptismal rituals. Culturally, the Manobo-Matigsalugs declare the birth of their children to the immediate relatives in the community. There is no festivity to celebrate it. The family just simply prepares some hot soup for the mother and the tribal healer. Unlike the Christian folks in the lowland, they do not practice baptism. After the birth, the parents name the child. The name may be taken from the name of a tree, a river, a mountain, or even from their dead ancestors.

There are three ways in which a Matigsalug child is considered a member of the community. These are the *gunting* (circumcision), the *pangutob* (tattoo), and the *mamá* (chewing betel nut). The child is circumcised at the age of two years. This is done through the use of a *bignos* or *ilab* (small knife). *Payaw* (herbal plant) is applied in order to stop the bleeding. If the wound is still unhealed, a fresh *bungabunga* leaf (another herbal plant) or guava leaf is chewed either by the father or the child and spits it on the wounded area. Any kind of wound can be actually cured by these herbs.

The *pangutub* (tattoo) is applied on the principal parts of the body like the arms, legs, breasts and backs. Pricking needles, sharpened bamboo sticks and thorns of vines and trees are used in tattooing. The *tigpangutob* uses a *gupos* (small blade) to slice slowly the skin of the child's body, making geometric designs. *Uling* (torch coal) is applied in order to see the beauty. A person with many tattoos shows a sign of bravery.

The children are also taught to practice chewing the betel nut which is traditionally known as *mamá*. This customary practice is introduced to children when they reach the age of five years. Chewing *mama* is actually a symbol of socialization. It is a sign of beauty and part of the protection and preservation of their teeth.

Illnesses. The Manobo-Matigsalugs diagnose illnesses as caused by the evil spirits or angry dead ancestors. To cure a sickness, a thanksgiving ritual called *panubad* is performed by the *babaylan* (tribal healer) who chants to the *busaw* (spirit) requesting for the cure of the ill person. Some herbal plants for healing are identified. These plants are among those which are recorded by the University of the Philippines, Los Baños as medicinal plants. Among them are *handamay* (*ageratum conyzoides*), *sibaw* (*eclipta alba*)

lawig (*Cyperus stenophyllus*), *kalagpangi* (*Casuarina equisetifolia*), *hagonoi* (*Wedelia biflora*), and *malaboaya/gabon* (*Blumera balsamifera*).

Discipline. The Manobo-Matigsalug parents generally love their children to the extent of spoiling them. The parents are very lenient. They seldom whip their children even when they commit mistakes. Some parents however, discipline their children by invoking punishment from their gods. Children are also taught to share food with others. They behave as they are told by their parents. They are non-violent and they never fight back with them. Love and obedience for parents and reverence for the elders are well emphasized. They are taught to value honesty in dealing with other people. They are trained to work even in their young age. Cleanliness, however, does not concern them.

CONCLUSIONS

Just like other tribes, the Manobo-Matigsalugs have been distressed by people whose concern are for their personal whims and caprices giving pain and troubles to these brothers of ours due to the magnitude of destruction to their original state and the primary cause has been the discriminate legal and illegal logging in the past. This problem has caused many to leave their abode.

The Manobo-Matigsalugs possess certain indigenous practices which are typically their own. They also have those which have similarities with others. These are handed down from generation to generation. These include their concern for mothers and children regarding their health.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The government must be serious in protecting our forests and mountains not only because they are vital to our ecological balance but also because they are the abode of our indigenous people. The preservation of their culture and practices must be a top priority. The government has a big role in this endeavor.

Manobo-Matigsalug mothers should be provided with adequate knowledge to improve their maternal and child health care. They should be taught personal hygiene and nutrition to maintain good health. These indigenous people including their children should be educated on how to maintain sanitation and proper means of waste disposal.

Further studies about this group and other tribal groups in Mindanao should be encouraged and done.

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