

Folk Healing Practices and Christian Faith Among Selected Residents of Ternate, Cavite, Philippines

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Abstract

This paper aims to know the experiences of the selected Christian residents of San Juan, Ternate, Cavite in consulting folk healers and to examine the awareness of the participants in their church's stance on folk healing practices. Folk healing was a huge part of Filipino culture long before the Colonial period. Folk healers or also known as Albularyos serve as spiritual and medicinal figures in the Philippines, especially in the provinces where there is poverty. This paper uses a Qualitative method through structured interviews to answer the research questions. Using Purposive sampling technique, 8 participants from Ternate, Cavite who are devoted Christians were carefully selected to be the perfect respondents of this study. Interestingly, all of the respondents are not informed about the church's stance on folk healing, most of them are regular church attendees and also visit folk healers regularly. This paper offers recommendations to help the church disseminate her teachings without discrimination.

Keywords: Folk Healing Practices, Albularyo, Christian Faith, Folk Christians



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INTRODUCTION

The Folk Healers or also known in Cavite as the Albularyos play an important role in the health care of most Filipinos living in provinces. According to Apostol and Baet (2007), Albularyo is only a type of Folk healer in the Philippines. There are other types of Folk healer such as the Manghihiilot or chiropractor, the medico or the pharmacist, the Diviners who are divided into three the mangluluop, the manghihila and the mangtatawas. The mangluluop mainly uses kalanghuga, it is a kind of freshwater or saltwater shell, salt, it is used to weaken the supernatural spirits, benditang palaspas, it is piece of blessed palm leaves from Palm Sunday, charcoal made from a coconut shell, a coconut midrib and a tin plate. The manghihila is mainly similar to the manghihiilot who serves as a chiropractor and massage therapist to the community. The mangtatawas is a type of folk healer who uses candles and basin with water to diagnose his patients (Apostol & Baet, 2007, p.7). In addition, As defined by Saydoven (2009), "Traditional medicine also known as indigenous health knowledge and practices include approaches, knowledge and beliefs incorporating plants, animal and /or mineral based medicines, spiritual therapies, manual techniques and exercises, applied singularly or in combination to maintain well-being, as well as treat, diagnose or prevent illness". However, in Ternate from the province of Cavite, the general term for any folk healer is "Albularyo" whether he/she is a manghihiilot, mangluluop, or mangtatawas. For the residents of Ternate, the Albularyo is a 'general practitioner' of any form of folk healing. Historically speaking, before Spanish colonization, Folk medicine already existed. The term Albularyo or Albulario came from a Spanish word Herbolario which means Herbalist or someone who uses herbs for medical purposes.

Based on the study of Cabatbat et al. (2017), they concluded that Filipinos truly believe in the supernatural power of the folk healers, their respondents also believe that these healers are

divine instruments of God to help them with their diseases. From this study, it can be concluded that the Albuaryos or Folk healers in the Philippines play an important role not just cultural and healthcare but also with their faith. According to Abad et al. (2014) there are seven common Filipino cultural beliefs about the cause of disease: namamana (hereditary), lihi, sumpa (curse), gaba, pasma, namaligno (enchanted), and kaloob ng Diyos. Two of these common causes of disease are related to superstitious beliefs such as sumpa or cursing and namaligno or being enchanted or played by mythical creatures. The Folk healers or the Albuaryos are the traditional doctors who have the knowledge to cure or give remedy to these types of supernatural diseases. According to the study of Cerio (2020), there are six common origins of Folk healing practices mainly; inherited or learned from parents and relatives, learned from traditional folk healing practitioners, attended formal training, self discovery and experiences, dreams and prophetic claims and lastly by possessions. Based on the study of Cerio (2020) where 100 folk healers were interviewed, 38 of them claimed that they can practice folk healing because they learned it from their parents or relatives who are also folk healers. Surprisingly, 25 folk healers claimed that they learned folk healing from self-discovery and experiences. 16 of them claimed that they dreamt of it and it inspired them to be folk healers, while there are 12 folk healers who claimed that they experienced possessions that turned them to be folk healers.

Interestingly, the Philippines is a Catholic-dominant country, but the clear dissemination of the Church's teachings is not implemented especially in the provinces. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church 22117; "All practices of magic or sorcery, by which one attempts to tame occult powers, so as to place them at one's service and have a supernatural power over others – even if this were for the sake of restoring their health – are gravely contrary to the virtue of religion. These practices are even more to be condemned when accompanied by the intention of harming someone, or when they have recourse to the intervention of demons. Wearing charms is also reprehensible. Spiritism often implies divination or magical practices; the Church for her part warns the faithful against it. Recourse to so-called traditional cures does not justify either the invocation of evil powers or the exploitation of another's credulity." This paper aims to know the experiences of the selected residents of the research locale when consulting a folk healer and also its effects on their faith as baptized Christians. This study most importantly aims to examine the awareness of the respondents in the Church's stance in Folk healing practices.

RESEARCH METHODS

This paper used a Qualitative method using Descriptive-Phenomenological design where structured interviews were employed. The researcher examined the experiences of the respondents in consulting folk healers. This study evaluated the faith of the respondents and most importantly how aware they are about their church's stance on folk healing practices. To understand the experiences of the participants who consult folk healers, the researcher selected 8 participants who regularly consult the observed faith healers; they were interviewed by the researcher. The structured interview questions were crafted to know their experiences in consulting a folk healer and also to know if it has an effect with their Christian faith. The participants are from different Christian denominations, but most of them are from Iglesia Filipina Independiente or also known as Aglipayan Church. Most of the respondents are regular church attendees of Saint John the Baptist Parish in San Juan, Ternate, Cavite. To protect the identity of the participants, the researcher assured them that they will be anonymous and their responses will be kept confidential. The researcher carefully selected them using purposive sampling techniques, the participants must be in a legal age to participate and also they must

be regular church attendees of their local church or were regular attendees. The interviews were done face to face, the researcher asked the permissions of the selected respondents to record the interview using his phone. After the interviews, the researcher transcribed them and analyzed the data gathered.

RESULTS RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Interview with the Participants

Structured Interview Questions

1. Do you have a strong belief in your religion?
2. Have you experienced consulting a traditional folk healer?
3. For what purpose do you visit a folk healer?
4. How strong is your belief in folk healers that you consult?
5. Do you trust the healing practices of the folk healers?
6. As a Christian, do you think it is wrong to consult folk healers, especially regarding illnesses related to spirituality and curses?
7. Has anyone from your church ever told you about the Church's stance on visiting folk healers?
8. If you find out that the Church believes that folk healing practices are against Church's teachings, would you stop visiting a folk healer?

Question 1: Do you have a strong belief in your religion?

Participant 1: "Yes, I firmly believe in my religion."

Participant 2: "Yes, of course, I have a strong belief in my religion."

Participant 3: "I do not attend church regularly lately, but, I have a strong belief in my religion."

Participant 4: "Yes, I believe in my religion and my church."

Participant 5: "Yes, I believe the teachings of my church."

Participant 6: "I believe in my religion, of course."

Participant 7: "Yes, I have a strong faith in Saint John the Baptist."

Participant 8: "Lately, I do not go to church regularly but I still keep my faith to my religion."

This finding shows that all the participants have strong belief in their religions and churches. Most of them answered with confidence and conviction that they have a strong faith in their churches and their teachings. Even though Participants 3 and 8 answered that they do not attend their churches regularly like they used to before, they still keep their strong faith. This finding implies that all the respondents have strong religiosity. Before the Spanish colonization, the Philippines was dominated by Paganism and Animism when folk healing was a huge part of the religious belief of pre-colonial Philippines. Filipinos used to worship the sun, moon, mountains and other celestial bodies. Filipinos are known for being religious, in fact, according to Miller (n.d), the Philippines is the only Christian nation country in Asia, 86% of its population is Roman Catholic, while there is 4% Muslim minority living in the island of Mindanao.

Question 2: Have you experienced consulting a traditional folk healer?

Participant 1: "Yes, I experienced it many times."

Participant 2: "Yes, of course, I experienced it many times."

Participant 3: "Yes, I experienced it."

Participant 4: "Yes, of course, many times, especially for chiropractic purposes (hilot)."

Participant 5: "Of course, many times."

Participant 6: "Yes, I experienced it recently for the first time."

Participant 7: "Yes, so many times."

Participant 8: "Yes, of course, many times."

Based on this finding, all the participants experienced visiting a folk healer. Most of them answered that they have consulted their preferred folk healers so many times that they cannot even count. This data implies that most participants are regular patients of local folk healers. However, it can be noticed that Participant 6 has a different answer. She elaborated that she visited a folk healer in Ternate for the first time recently. According to Rondilla et al. (2021), Folk healing or also known as Folk medicine is a traditional practice and beliefs that reflect the Philippine's cultural heritage. Folk healers apply unique and traditional medicinal techniques that differ from the conventional western practices of medicine. According to Rondilla et al. (2021), Filipinos often consult folk healers due to lack of income and resources to go to doctors. Albularyos charge low fees or donations in exchange for treatment.

Question 3: For what purpose do you visit a folk healer?

Participant 1: I visit my folk healer often especially when I have a cough and fever.

Participant 2: I visit a folk healer if I feel safe because of bati (Supernatural diseases).

Participant 3: I only visit a folk healer when I have unusual and severe diseases like for example infected wounds, I do not usually go to folk healer for simple cough and fever.

Participant 4: I visit a folk healer when I have muscle pain and for chiropractic purposes.

Participant 5: I visit a folk healer when I have a cold and fever.

Participant 6: I went to a folk healer for the first time when I had a skin disease that swells so bad.

Participant 7: I visit a folk healer when I feel that something is wrong in my body.

Participant 8: I visit a folk healer when I have headache, cold and fever.

This finding shows that the majority of the participants visit a folk healer for common diseases such as cold, muscle and bone pain, cough and fever instead of consulting a doctor. While Participant 2 answered that she only visits a folk healer when she feels that her disease is not natural but supernatural. Participant 3 shows a different answer, he said that he only visits a folk healer for severe disease such as infected wounds and the like. Many Filipinos up until now still consult folk healers rather than consulting a physician. According to Labastida (2016), one of the common reasons is because folk healers are accessible, they live with them that is why many Filipinos living in the provinces rely more on folk healers rather than health professionals. Due to inaccessibility of healthcare in the provinces, Filipinos learned to trust folk healing practices as the primary source of treatment.

Question 4: How strong is your belief in folk healers that you consult?

Participant 1: I have a very strong belief in folk healers.

Participant 2: I have a strong belief in folk healers.

Participant 3: I have a strong belief in them since they already proved themselves to me.

Participant 4: I have a strong belief in folk healers, I trust them more than I trust my doctor.

Participant 5: I have a strong faith in folk healers.

Participant 6: I have a very strong belief in the folk healer that healed me.

Participant 7: I have a strong faith in them.

Participant 8: I have a very strong faith in the folk healers.

Based on this result, all the participants show strong belief in folk healers. Participant 3 answered that he has strong belief in folk healers because they have proven themselves to him, while Participant 4 that she trusts her folk healer more than she trusts doctors. According to Rebuya et al. (2020), despite the advancement of technology in the Philippines, in the Bicol region, many individuals still keep their strong belief in folk healers or parabulong in their own dialect. For the record, the Bicol region has the highest number of catholic followers than other regions in the Philippines. That is why, it is interesting to know that most of the Filipinos living in the modern world still have faith in folk healing practices.

Question 5: Do you trust the healing practices of the folk healers?

Participant 1: Yes, I trust their healing practices without any doubt.

Participant 2: Yes, I trust their healing practices.

Participant 3: Yes, of course, I trust their practices, they are proven.

Participant 4: Yes, I trust their healing practices.

Participant 5: Of course, I trust their practices.

Participant 6: Yes, I strongly trust his practices, I got healed instantly from my skin disease.

Participant 7: Yes, I trust their practices so much, especially the last folk healer that I visited, I got healed from his power.

Participant 8: Yes, I strongly trust their practices, I grew up consulting them (folk healers) before visiting a doctor.

These findings show that all participants trust the healing practices of their folk healers without a doubt. They indicated that folk healing practices healed them. Participant 7 believed that her folk healer has a power to heal, while Participant 6 showed amazement for being healed instantly from her severe skin diseases. Based on Participant 8, she grew up consulting folk healers before visiting doctors. According to the study of Cerio (2020), the folk healing in the Partido District, Camarines Sur is divided into different practices; the Herbalists who use local herbs and plants to treat diseases, the Druggists who use animals and plants products to treat diseases, the Hydrologists who use water and steam to treat diseases, the Physiotherapists who use to practice massage and muscle and joint therapy with the use of light and heat, the Traditional Birth Attendants or also known as Hilot who help to deliver infant, the Faith healers who use religious beliefs to treat diseases, the Bone settlers who treat bone fractures, the Animal Bite Healers who treat dog bite, cat bite and even snake bites, the Skin-disease healers who treat skin diseases such as fungus, itching and even wounds and lastly home remedy healers who treat using simple materials and tools from the household. These are the common types of folk healing practices utilized by the folk healers in the Bicol region.

Question 6: As a Christian-believing individual, do you think it is spiritually wrong to consult folk healers, especially regarding illnesses related to spirituals and curses?

Participant 1: No, I do not think it is wrong.

Participant 2: No, it is not wrong to consult them.

Participant 3: No, I think it is fine to consult the folk healers, because I go to them for personal reasons.

Participant 4: It is not wrong to consult them.

Participant 5: For me, it is fine to consult them.

Participant 6: No, it is not wrong to consult them, as a matter of fact, I became proud after my experience.

Participant 7: No, I do not think that consulting them is wrong.

Participant 8: No, it is fine to go to them, actually, as a christian I go to them with prayers.

Based on the results of Question 6, participants shared a common theme; they all disagree that consulting folk healers is spiritually wrong as a Christian. Participant 3 emphasized that as a Christian he visits folk healers for personal reasons, while Participant 8 elaborated that she visits them but she makes sure that she prays before the consultation. According to the study of Berdon (2016), many participants show their disagreement with the Folk healing for the reason that many of their practices are associated with sorcery, witchcraft, cults and even satanism. In other words, Folk healing practices are mostly against the teachings of the Church, especially Roman Catholicism. In the Philippines, many folk healers admit that they can heal and curse, with this, folk healers are not healers but also practitioners of black magic. In the province of Cebu, sorcery is a known knowledge for most folk healers, surprisingly, many of them are active Christian believers who consult saints in practicing sorcery and witchcraft (Relon, 2018).

Question 7: Has anyone from your church ever told you about the Church's stance on visiting folk healers?

Participant 1: No one ever told me.

Participant 2: No one.

Participant 3: No one ever told me.

Participant 4: No one told me.

Participant 5: No one ever told me even our Parish Priest.

Participant 6: No one ever told me.

Participant 7: No one told me yet.

Participant 8: No one ever told me.

Surprisingly, this finding finds out that all the participants are not informed by the stances of their churches about visiting folk healers. All of them down for one answer that "No one ever told them". Participant 5 even answered that even her parish priest did not tell her about her church's stance on consulting folk healers. The Roman Catholic Church is clear about consulting folk healers, According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church 2216 (CCC 2216); "All forms of divination are to be rejected: recourse to Satan or demons, conjuring up the dead or other practices falsely supposed to 'unveil' the future. Consulting horoscopes, astrology, palm reading, interpretation of omens and lots, the phenomena of clairvoyance, and recourse to mediums all conceal a desire for power over time, history, and, in the last analysis, other human beings, as well as a wish to conciliate hidden powers. They contradict the honor, respect, and loving fear that we owe to God alone.". With these statements from the Catechism of the Catholic Church, it clearly prohibits consultation to folk healers especially those who use sorcery and black magic. However, it shows based on the data gathered that all the participants are not informed about the church's stance on folk healing practices.

Question 8: If you find out that the Church believes that folk healing practices are against Church's teachings, would you stop visiting a folk healer?

Participant 1: No, I will not stop, I know my folk healer will heal me.

Participant 2: No, I will continue consulting folk healers when I am sick.

Participant 3: I do not know, it depends on what I will discover.

Participant 4: No, I will not stop visiting a folk healer.

Participant 5: If ever our Parish priest asked me to stop visiting a folk healer, I will not listen to him, I used to go to them when I am sick, I cannot stop it.

Participant 6: No, I will not stop, I will continue to visit my folk healer when I get sick.

Participant 7: No, I will not stop.

Participant 8: No, I will not stop, I believe the church cannot stop us from visiting folk healers, because we are free to decide.

This finding shows the strong belief of the participants in folk healing that even if they will find out that folk healing practices are against church's teachings, based on their answers, they will still visit folk healers. Interestingly, Participant 5 answered that even her Parish priest asked her to stop consulting her folk healer, she will not listen for the reason that folk healing practices are part of her culture and she cannot stop it. This finding can be explained with the study of Labasida (2016) where he concluded that the active existence of Folk healing practices even in the 21st century is due to the marriage of Catholicism and Paganism. Folk healing is a part of religious practices of the Filipinos before the Spanish colonization. In the Philippines, the paganistic practices were not totally erased by the Catholic Church, that is why some Catholic practices are with a touch of paganism or folk traditions. It can be noticed that many catholic churches are not banning the folk vendors selling charms, amulets, talismans, and many other materials related to folk healing to be sold outside their churches. With this, it can be concluded that there is a harmony between the Catholic church and the folk traditions.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this study, this paper concludes that All the participants have strong faith in folk healing practices. Since folk healing was a huge part of Filipino culture before Spanish colonization, folk healers are still trusted by the Filipinos living in the provinces. The majority of the participants consult folk healers regularly. Based on the answers of most of the participants, folk healers are not a substitute for doctors, as a matter of fact, they believe that they should consult folk healers before consulting a doctor. In addition, it can be concluded that all the participants who are christians believe that there is nothing wrong in consulting folk healers. For the participants, folk healing practices do not compromise their Christian faith. It can also be noticed that all the participants are not informed about the Church's stance in folk healing practices. No one in their churches ever taught them about the stands of the Church in folk healers and their spiritual practices. Lastly, it can be noticed that all the participants show a strong stand in folk healing practices. Based on the answers of the participants in the last question, if they find out that folk healing practices are against Church's teachings, they will not stop consulting folk healers. With these results, it can be concluded that the participants in Ternate, Cavite have strong belief in folk healers and their practices. It can also be noted that Folk healing traditions are still alive even in the 21st century. When it comes to Christian faith, the participants show that they do not think that consulting folk healers regularly compromise their faith as Christians.

Based on the conclusions of this study, it can be recommended that the church of Saint John the Baptist Parish should conduct seminars regarding the theological and spiritual stance of the church on folk healing practices. However, since folk healing is part of the Ternate's culture, the speaker's approach should be intercultural and apologetical. The church should emphasize the faith in a light and respectful manner. Since an apologetical approach will be used, the speaker should only defend the church's stance without any prejudice against folk healers and their practices. The church leaders especially the priests should practice apologetics. The priests should be open in discussing the church's stance on folk healing practices, they must educate the parishioners on the possible effects of consulting folk healers spiritually. As theologians, it is their responsibility to explain the faith to their parishioners. The catechists are the hands of the church to spread her teachings. While the catechists should help

the priests in spreading the church's stance on folk healing practices. The catechists should encourage the parishioners to practice the faith correctly in accordance with the teachings of the church. The researcher wholeheartedly thanked all the participants for their honesty and willingness to participate in this study and to Granby Colleges of Science and Technology for the endless support.

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