

Use of Traditional Medicine For Self-Medication in the Community of Bulutellue Village, Sinjai Regency

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the practice of self-medication using traditional medicine among the community of Bulutellue Village, Sinjai, through a medical anthropology perspective. Employing a qualitative approach with ethnographic methods, data were gathered through participant observation and in-depth interviews with local residents and traditional figures. The findings reveal that the use of herbal concoctions is not merely an effort for physical healing, but a form of preserving indigenous knowledge passed down through generations. The community perceives health as a balance between humans and nature, where the selection of medicinal plants is deeply influenced by cultural beliefs and local biodiversity. This self-medication behavior reflects a folk medicine system that persists amidst the currents of medical modernization. The study concludes that socio-cultural factors and ancestral symbolic capital are the primary drivers for the community's preference for traditional remedies over modern pharmacy for minor health complaints, reinforcing their collective cultural identity.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi praktik swamedikasi menggunakan obat tradisional pada masyarakat Desa Bulutellue, Sinjai, melalui perspektif antropologi kesehatan. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif dan metode etnografi, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipatif dan wawancara mendalam terhadap warga lokal serta tokoh adat. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penggunaan ramuan herbal bukan sekadar upaya penyembuhan fisik, melainkan bentuk pelestarian pengetahuan lokal (indigenous knowledge) yang diwariskan secara turun-temurun. Masyarakat Desa Bulutellue memandang kesehatan sebagai keseimbangan antara manusia dan alam, di mana pemilihan tanaman obat dipengaruhi oleh kepercayaan budaya dan ketersediaan hayati di lingkungan sekitar. Perilaku swamedikasi ini mencerminkan sistem medis rakyat (folk medicine) yang tetap bertahan di tengah arus modernisasi medis. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa faktor sosial-budaya dan modal simbolis leluhur menjadi pendorong utama masyarakat lebih memilih pengobatan tradisional dibandingkan farmasi modern untuk keluhan kesehatan ringan, menegaskan identitas budaya kolektif mereka.

Keywords

Indegenous knowledge; Self-medication; Traditional medicine

1. Pendahuluan

Health is an optimal state for every person, both physically, spiritually, and socially. In the modern era, which demands everyone to be active and achieve, health is undoubtedly paramount. Without a healthy body and mind, a person cannot live a normal life, so every human being strives to maintain their health. The health of individuals, families, and communities depends on their own actions. When someone is ill, they naturally seek alternatives, treat or ignore their illness, and decide who will treat them. These actions vary from individual to individual, ranging from choosing modern or traditional medicine, seeking medical help, to self-medicating (Fajar, 2022).

When I had a cold, one of my neighbors suggested several types of medicinal plants for me to consume. According to her experience, these plants were very effective in curing colds. She acquired knowledge of these medicinal plants from her parents. The transformation of this knowledge of traditional medicinal plants was transmitted through oral culture. For simple communities, oral culture plays a significant role in building knowledge, from morals to health. If we ask a specific question, why are medicinal plants effective in curing colds? Or at least relieve a cold? Almost everyone who uses traditional medicine around me can't provide a definitive and detailed answer. The details of medicinal plants and diseases are not fully understood in traditional societies. This is due to the lack of a comprehensive and specific health system like that found in modern society (Anugrah et al., 2023).

However, despite this limited knowledge, the use of traditional medicine persists in society. Many factors influence this behavior. This will be the main topic of my research. The use of traditional medicine for self-medication is not solely influenced by a community's economic conditions; it is also related to culture. This link between ecology and culture is the focus of medical anthropology studies. Some symptoms of illness unknown in the community's knowledge are often attributed to demonic possession or possession. One example of a case I encountered involved a man with epilepsy. His family believed the patient was possessed by a demonic possession (Hastuti et al., 2021). Therefore, he was taken to a traditional healer (*sanro*) for unique treatment. Traditional plant-based medicines have so far only been used to treat relatively mild physical ailments whose symptoms are culturally recognized. More serious symptoms are considered to be the influence of evil spirits or jinns. Instead of treating them as physical ailments, they are taken to a doctor or hospital. They still believe in supernatural forces as the cause of illness, and the way to treat them is to take the patient to a traditional healer (*sanro*), who can communicate with the supernatural (Tamrin & Indarwati, 2024).

So far, according to my research, there has been no research into the methods of prehistoric and post-historic peoples in the Indonesian archipelago, in classifying medicinal plants. This is certainly crucial, given the diversity of traditional medicinal plant knowledge in Indonesia. Although not specifically linked, the discovery of a human fossil in South Kalimantan provides evidence that humans have been performing amputations since 31,000 years ago. This discovery was published in the journal *Nature*. The discovery of this amputee fossil shows us that the humans who inhabited the Indonesian archipelago 31,000 years ago had developed quite sophisticated medical techniques. This is evident in the precision with which the leg was cut off from the skull. The journal states that this human lived 10 years after the amputation. This indicates that they were familiar with antibiotics, allowing the patient to survive the post-operative recovery period (Putri et al., 2022).

From this, it's not an exaggeration to assume that knowledge of traditional medicinal plants has been developed by our people for tens of thousands of years. Of course, this knowledge isn't shared by every individual within a community. Rather, only certain individuals with specific skills possess this knowledge, and they are consistently trusted by their

community members. We commonly refer to them by various terms such as panrita, sandro, dukun, or shaman. In addition to acting as doctors for their communities, they often also lead religious ceremonies (Rahmawati et al., 2024).

Today, knowledge of traditional medicinal plants or traditional pharmacology is almost universal. Advances in information technology have significantly accelerated the flow of information about medicinal plants. We can easily find pharmacological research on traditional medicinal plants belonging to specific communities (Dahniar et al., 2023). Jared Diamond wrote about his experience studying the lifestyle of a tribe in Papua (Maturbongs et al., 2024). He explained that the local tribe's traditional pharmacological knowledge was acquired through trial and error. Unlike modern pharmaceutical experiments conducted with sophisticated equipment and scientific procedures, trial and error in traditional communities involves consuming a product first to determine its effectiveness (Kameswari, 2023).

Knowledge of medicinal plants in traditional societies has been studied by Western ethnobotanists, and Western pharmaceutical companies have extracted these medicines. However, Diamond asserts that "the overall effectiveness of traditional medical knowledge tends to be limited (Ubay & Fitmawati, 2024)." Diseases such as epilepsy, malaria, and smallpox cannot be treated with these traditional medicines. Self-medication, also known as swamedikasi, is generally used to address common complaints or minor illnesses. Treatment generally uses drugs that are relatively safe for self-medication. An important consideration in self-medication is that the medication must be safe and effective. A drug that is safe for most people may not be safe for some, and it can also be dangerous if used incorrectly.

Indonesia has one of the world's top five richest plant resources. Plants are the raw materials used in herbal medicines. Based on the history of plant use, herbal medicines can be classified into traditional and non-traditional herbal medicines. Traditional Indonesian herbal medicines, known as "traditional medicines," contain plants with medicinal properties that have been used for generations and constitute Indonesia's cultural heritage. Traditional medicinal plants are natural ingredients traditionally used for treatment based on experience (Rosidin & Hilalayah, 2022). The diversity of medicinal plants can support the availability of ready-to-use traditional medicines. Traditional medicines are still widely used as an alternative in society, demonstrating that people still recognize the efficacy of traditional medicine. People who use traditional medicines consider them safer, even safer than chemical drugs, as well as cheaper and more readily available.

The use of traditional medicines for self-treatment has been preserved by the community itself. The community's ability to self-medicate, recognize disease symptoms, and maintain health needs to be improved to maintain health. Traditional medicine holds significant potential for this, as it is already well-known by the community and is already part of the community's socio-cultural fabric. Every family always pays attention to health. They will pay attention to things like where to check their health, but in the Bulutellue Village community of Sinjai Regency, which was the research location, generally when suffering from illnesses, they tend to still choose to treat themselves for reasons such as mild illness, cost savings, and time savings. Self-medication in the Bulutellue Village community uses traditional medicines derived from plants with medicinal properties that are prepared by themselves and are generally grown near the house, for example, cat's whiskers leaves, guava, galangal, and many others (Togatorop et al., 2023).

Because this traditional medicine has been passed down through generations by families or information from other people who have experienced similar illnesses and have used the medicine, this community is already convinced of the efficacy of this traditional medicine, and the side effects are more plant-friendly than factory-processed medicines. Likewise, researchers' observations when observing social phenomena that occur in the community of Bulutellue Village, Bulupoddo District, for example, if someone has diarrhea, guava leaves are used as medicine, processed by pounding them, then squeezing them with water and drinking them. Another phenomenon that is also seen is when someone with

a relatively good level of education also tends to choose to treat themselves with traditional medicine rather than choosing more modern treatments. This community's thinking and knowledge is what makes people prefer to use traditional medicine for self-treatment rather than immediately going to a community health center or hospital as long as they can still be cured with these traditional medicines, even though if seen from the distance of the health center is only about ± 3.1 km which is certainly not too far from the research location. Based on the above, researchers are interested in conducting research on the use of traditional medicine for self-treatment in the community of Bulutellue Village, Sinjai Regency.

2. Research Method

The type of research used in this study is qualitative. Qualitative research is a specific link in the study of social relationships related to the facts of the plurality of the life world (Rahman, 2022). This method is applied to observe and understand the subjects and objects of research, including people and institutions, based on the facts that appear as they are (Ikbar, 2012). All characteristics or factors that show variation are divided into three types based on their function: cause, connecting, and effect variables. Causal variables can be divided into independent variables, moderators, and random controls (Suhartono, 2000).

From the two opinions above, it can be concluded that qualitative descriptive research focuses more on phenomena, events, behaviors, and attitudes, while qualitative research is more directed towards social research (Komara, 2014). Specific descriptions are necessary in the research. The researcher's reason for using a descriptive approach (Ahmadin, 2022) is because the researcher will be directly conducting research on the use of traditional medicine for self-medication in Bulutellue Village, Bulupoddo Subdistrict, Sinjai Regency. This research variable is a single variable examining the use of traditional medicine for self-medication in the Bulutellue Village community, Bulupoddo Subdistrict, Sinjai Regency. This study uses a descriptive approach, the research design is designed to describe how the Use of Traditional Medicine for Self-medication in the Bulutellue Village Community, Sinjai Regency. This aims to provide knowledge to the community. Researchers will also describe the facts found in the field in a broad manner so that they will describe the findings in the field, both regarding individuals, circumstances, symptoms and certain conditions. As the definition of descriptive research is a type of research related to efforts to answer current problems and explain them based on the data found. Therefore, it is related to ongoing problems (Ahmadin, 2013).

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Traditional Medicine and Treatment in Bulutellue Village

Illness, with its associated pain and suffering, is a predictable biological condition and a pervasive cultural phenomenon. Every living creature experiences and will inevitably experience illness caused by external and internal conditions. Illness is considered a cultural phenomenon because the perception of illness is not universal, but rather based on the skills and knowledge unique to each community. This perception of illness determines how illness is handled or treated within a society. This is what leads to the diversity of medical treatments worldwide.

The presence of disease in the human body requires cultural adaptation to cure it. In this regard, humans develop knowledge about medicines and treatments. In traditional societies, this knowledge is usually passed down orally and passed down from generation to generation. Furthermore, the preservation of this knowledge about medicines and treatments is carried out through direct practice. Medicine is any substance, whether chemical or herbal, that, in

appropriate doses, affects plant organs and prevents them from functioning normally. If we use these drugs in excessive doses, they can become undesirable poisons or at least cause undesirable symptoms of poisoning. Conversely, if we use drugs in too small doses, they can pose a risk of immunity to the disease. In general, people don't understand that drugs, besides curing diseases, also have side effects that are detrimental to health. The dangers associated with drugs often arise from drug abuse, such as taking too much medication too often and carelessly, or taking the wrong dosage .

Traditional medicine is a substance or mixture of ingredients consisting of plant, animal, mineral, galenic preparations, or mixtures of these ingredients that have been used for treatment for generations and can be applied according to prevailing societal norms. Traditional medicine was originally known as herbal concoctions, and today, herbal medicine is still believed to be an effective remedy for various ailments and has even been developed into modern industry. Knowledge of medicinal plants varies across regions. This knowledge is usually passed down through generations, and often only a small percentage of the population knows the various types of medicinal plants.

Traditional medicine is a treatment developed by traditional communities using medicines available locally, such as plants and minerals. Traditional medicine is characterized by a personalistic causality in the illness suffered. Personalistic in the sense that illness is caused by agents who intentionally inflict illness on their victims (black magic). It is often considered primitive, unscientific, outdated, and so on, but this assumption is somewhat misleading regarding the use of traditional medicine. Because traditional medicine is meticulously prepared, for example, in measuring a type of medicinal plant, the composition is not limited to a handful, a spoonful, or a single segment. Instead, measurements down to milligrams are used for a given composition .

Today, many people still use medicinal plants for their own treatment. Treatment with plants or natural ingredients is based on the concept of totality. The active ingredients are complex, but the therapeutic effect is not targeted at a specific part of the body. Rather, it is a treatment that affects the entire body. Using medicinal plants or healing plants has several goals: maintaining health, promoting a longer life and increasing productivity, curing illness, and alleviating suffering due to the lack of a cure.

The development of natural medicines is not a simple or easy task, as it encompasses a wide range of complex issues. Therefore, development must be carried out in stages and systematically. The development of natural medicines is carried out by encouraging the development of phytotherapy drugs, namely medicines derived from natural ingredients, particularly plant-based ingredients, with clearly defined benefits and made from raw materials, whether in the form of simple herbal remedies or galenic preparations, that meet minimum requirements, thus ensuring uniformity of active components, safety, and efficacy.

Law No. 36 of 2009 states that traditional medicines are substances or concoctions consisting of plant, animal, mineral, galenic preparations, or mixtures of these ingredients that have been used for treatment for generations based on experience and can be applied as a norm in society. The use of traditional medicines in Indonesia is part of the nation's culture and has been widely utilized by the community for centuries. However, their effectiveness and safety are generally not fully supported by adequate research.

Traditional medicine has been known for centuries and has been practiced long before modern medicine became available. To this day, people still recognize and utilize traditional health services and their medicines. In line with the World Health Organization's declaration to improve and equitably distribute health services to the public, traditional medicine needs to be utilized and developed optimally to be more effective and efficient.

3.2. Self-medication in Bulutellue Village Community

Self-medication, or swamedication, is the act of selecting and using medicines, both traditional and modern, to treat self-recognized illnesses or symptoms, even certain chronic illnesses previously diagnosed by a doctor. People have become more proactive in taking responsibility for their own and their families' health. There is a perceived need for clear and precise education regarding the safe use of over-the-counter medications for self-medication.

The optimal benefits of self-medication are achieved when its use is rational. One advantage of self-medication is that the medicines for the illness are often readily available in the medicine cabinet or from medicinal plants grown by the family. Furthermore, for people living in remote villages where there are no medical practices, self-medication saves significant time traveling to the city to visit a doctor.

Self-medication makes a significant contribution to health care, but if not performed correctly, it can lead to undesirable consequences, such as the failure to heal or the emergence of new illnesses due to side effects of the medications used. Safe, effective, and affordable self-medication requires experience and skills. The public absolutely needs information from clear and reliable sources so that medication needs can be determined based on rational reasoning. Drug classes that can be used for self-medication include over-the-counter (OTC), restricted over-the-counter (OTC), and pharmacy-prescribed drugs, as follows (Widjayanti, 1998):

- a. Over-the-counter (OTC) drugs are drugs sold freely on the market and can be purchased without a doctor's prescription. The distinctive mark on the packaging and label of over-the-counter drugs is a green circle with a black border. An example of a drug in this class is paracetamol.
- b. Restricted over-the-counter (OTC) drugs are drugs that are actually prescription drugs but can still be sold or purchased freely without a doctor's prescription and are accompanied by warning signs. The distinctive mark on the packaging and label of over-the-counter (OTC) drugs is a blue circle with a black border.
- c. Prescription Drugs are prescription drugs that pharmacists can dispense to patients without a prescription. Pharmacists serving patients requiring these drugs are required (Ministry of Health Number 347/Menkes/SK/VII/1990): (1) To comply with the provisions and limitations of each type of drug per patient as specified in the Prescription Drugs for the Pharmacist. (2) To record the patient and the drugs dispensed. (3) To provide information including dosage and usage instructions, contraindications, side effects, and other matters that patients should be aware of.

In addition to using synthetic drugs, self-medication efforts are also carried out using traditional medicines. Indonesia is known as one of the countries with a high number of traditional medicine users. The reason for the high use of traditional medicines in Indonesia is the assumption that traditional medicines are safe for consumption because they are derived from plants. What most people overlook is information related to the toxicity of drug interactions and the side effects of traditional medicines.

The use of traditional medicine in self-medication efforts has not been well documented. This is likely due to a lack of communication between health workers and the public. The use of traditional medicine increases the number of medications the public must consume and increases the incidence of polypharmacy. Self-medication can be harmful to health if not followed properly, if medication is chosen incorrectly, or if medication is misused due to incomplete information in drug advertisements. The potential for interactions between traditional medicines and other drugs and their effects on specific patient conditions necessitates providing information on the correct use of traditional medicines to patients and the public. Furthermore, public education is needed to avoid side effects from traditional medicine use .

The advantages of self-medication include safety when used according to instructions (side effects can be predicted), spontaneous recovery without intervention from health professionals, relatively lower drug costs compared to healthcare

services, time savings due to avoiding the need for healthcare facilities or professionals, satisfaction from participating in the healthcare system, avoiding embarrassment or stress from exposing certain body parts to healthcare professionals, and helping the government address the limited number of healthcare professionals in the community. Meanwhile, the disadvantages of self-medication include, drugs can be harmful to health if not used according to the rules, wasting money and time if the wrong drug is used, there is a small possibility of unwanted drug reactions, for example sensitivity, side effects or resistance, use of the wrong drug due to a wrong diagnosis and the choice of drug is influenced by past experience of using drugs and the social environment.

5. Conclusion

Human behavior is influenced by its environment, both physical and sociocultural. Human behavior is the result of all kinds of experiences and interactions with the environment, manifested in the form of knowledge, attitudes, and actions. In other words, behavior is an individual's reaction to stimuli originating from both outside and within the individual. Health behavior can be defined as a form of experience and interaction between an individual and their environment, specifically concerning knowledge, attitudes about health, and health-related actions. To implement a health behavior change approach, health workers must understand the various sociocultural backgrounds of the community in question. Therefore, health workers must master anthropology, particularly health anthropology.

The usefulness of anthropology for health sciences lies in three main categories. First, anthropology provides a clear way to view society as a whole, as well as its individual members. Anthropology uses a holistic, or systems, approach, where researchers consistently ask how all parts of the system fit together and how the system works. The "distinctive way" of anthropology also emphasizes the importance of cultural relativism in considering different ways, namely the need to interpret original forms in the cultural context in which they exist, rather than judging them.

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