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Ancestral Heritage in Traditional Medicine Among Coastal Communities in Indonesia: Spiritual Practices and Modern Integration

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| Received : January 22, 2025 | ABSTRACT: This study examines the ancestral heritage in |
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| Accepted : April 9, 2025 | traditional medicine practices among coastal communities in |
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| rubisited . July 51, 2025 | knowledge and spiritual beliefs passed down through generations, these practices involve the use of natural resources, particularly |
| | medicinal plants, alongside rituals and prayers that balance the |
| | spiritual and physical realms. Using a literature review method, this |
| Citation: Ahsan, Z, R., Samnuzulsari, T., Niko, | study identifies, analyzes, and synthesizes relevant research to gain a deeper understanding of traditional medicine, with data sourced |
| N. (2025). Ancestral Heritage in Traditional | from leading academic databases such as Scopus, focusing on |
| Medicine Among Coastal Communities in | English-language publications from 1988 to 2024. The findings |
| Indonesia: Spiritual Practices and Modern Integration. Ilomata International Journal of | reveal that traditional medicine extends beyond physical healing, emphasizing harmony between humans, nature, and spiritual forces. |
| Social Science, 6(3), 846-867. | Despite the influence of modern medical practices, traditional |
| https://doi.org/10.61194/ijss.v6i3.1670 | healing remains integral to healthcare, offering alternative |
| | approaches to various health concerns. The study underscores the importance of preserving traditional knowledge through systematic |
| | documentation and scientific inquiry while highlighting the |
| | potential for integrating traditional and modern medicine to |
| | develop a more holistic healthcare approach. By deepening the understanding of the cultural and health values inherent in |
| | traditional healing, this study promotes its sustainability amid |
| | globalization. |
| | Keywords: Coastal Community; Indigenous Knowledge; |
| | Traditional Healing; Ancestral Heritage |
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INTRODUCTION

Traditional healing is a globally evolving phenomenon that encompasses various approaches, such as herbal remedies, acupuncture, and traditional therapies, with Indonesia being no exception. In Indonesia, traditional medicine plays a vital role in public healthcare services and holds significant potential for further development. The government has demonstrated serious commitment to supporting and advancing traditional medicine, as reflected in its policies and initiatives (Niko, 2021).

From a legal perspective, traditional medicine in Indonesia is governed by Law No. 36 of 2009 on Health, particularly Article 1, Clause 16. This provision defines traditional health services as treatments and care utilizing methods and materials grounded in experience and skills passed down through generations. Such practices are expected to be accountable and implemented in accordance with societal norms (Arieta et al., 2022).

Indonesia's healthcare sector has shown significant progress over the years, particularly in the field of medicine, driven by advancements in science, technology, and economic factors. However, the high costs of modern healthcare services present challenges for low-income communities, who often turn to traditional or alternative medicine as a more accessible option. In contrast, individuals with greater financial means tend to prefer modern healthcare services to address their medical needs (Putu et al., 2021).

Traditional medicine represents a form of local wisdom that characterizes a nation, enabling it to absorb and adapt to external cultural influences while preserving its original identity (Wahyuni et al., 2023). In this context, traditional medicine reflects a community's ability to uphold traditional values amidst the pressures of modernization.

In urban settings, traditional medicine is often regarded as an alternative treatment approach. On the other hand, modern medicine is deeply reliant on cutting-edge technology and pharmaceutical treatments that have undergone rigorous research and clinical testing. In contrast, traditional or alternative medicine does not require high-tech equipment; rather, it utilizes particular methods and techniques. The remedies typically consist of herbal mixtures derived from local plants, including leaves, roots, fruits, and tree bark, all harvested from the local environment. This form of healing is an ancestral tradition passed down through generations (Purnama et al., 2016).

Traditional medicine serves as a manifestation of local wisdom, particularly through the use of native flora and fauna to support health and well-being. This practice reflects a deep understanding of the natural environment and its medicinal potential, passed down through generations. By relying on locally available resources, indigenous healing systems not only preserve cultural heritage but also contribute to sustainable healthcare practices. Such knowledge underscores the interconnectedness between human health and ecological balance within traditional medical systems. This practice highlights the sustainability of knowledge passed down through generations, where natural resources are managed responsibly to ensure the well-being and health of the community (Purnama et al., 2016.).

The rich diversity of Indigenous communities in Indonesia has made the country one of the few that continues to preserve traditional medicinal practices (Niko et al., 2024). Various regions across Indonesia maintain distinct healing traditions that have been sustained over generations. One notable example is Pengudang Village, where traditional medicine is highlighted as a crucial alternative in supporting public health.

During the era of the Riau-Lingga Sultanate, spices played a significant role not only as culinary ingredients but also as elements of traditional medicine. These spices, derived from aromatic plants such as flowers, fruits, bark, stems, and seeds, offer a range of health benefits. Based on their origin, spices are categorized into four main groups: stems, flowers, seeds, and fruits. Even today, these spices continue to be utilized in traditional healing practices, particularly in the Riau Archipelago (Swastiwi et al., 2022).

The Kepulauan Riau, which consists of numerous small islands along its coastal areas, faces challenges in accessing healthcare services (Sarita, Rahma, et al., 2023). Previous studies indicate

that Penyengat Island has limited healthcare facilities, such as the scarcity of health centers, forcing its residents to travel to Tanjungpinang for medical services (Ahsan et al., 2023). A similar situation is observed in Pengudang Village, which faces comparable healthcare access limitations as those on Penyengat Island. In Pengudang Village, a coastal area with lower economic conditions, the local population tends to favor traditional medicine over modern healthcare options. Due to the limited availability of modern medical facilities and services, traditional healing methods provide a more accessible and preferred alternative for the villagers.

Like in Pengudang Village, Bintan Regency, Kepulauan Riau Province, Indonesua the community still faces limited access to healthcare, with the distance from modern medical facilities being considerable and sparse. As a result, the residents of this area rely primarily on traditional medicine as their main solution for maintaining health. The knowledge of medicinal plants and herbal remedies has been passed down through generations. Local healers, often regarded as wise or respected individuals, continue to play a significant role in healing practices, utilizing techniques such as massage, herbal concoctions, and the use of gamat oil. In Pengudang Village, traditional medicine is favored, as the community views it as a valuable cultural heritage that has been handed down through generations.

Amid the rapid advancement of science and modern technology, indigenous wisdom—passed down through generations and deeply rooted in spiritual values—continues to play a crucial role in healthcare practices and everyday life within these communities. This tradition not only serves as a reflection of cultural identity but also presents a holistic alternative to conventional healing approaches.

On one hand, improved access to modern healthcare facilities offers opportunities for integration, potentially enriching existing medical systems. On the other hand, social and economic shifts exert pressure that often marginalizes the ancestral values underpinning these practices. This raises critical questions about how such traditions can be preserved while simultaneously adapting to contemporary demands.

The intersection of spiritual healing and modern medical approaches constitutes the central focus of this study. By exploring the processes of integration, this research aims to identify both the enabling and inhibiting factors that influence the preservation of ancestral healing traditions within the healthcare landscape.

METHOD

TThis study adopts a literature review method to explore ancestral heritage in traditional medicine practices among coastal communities in Indonesia. The approach aims to identify, analyze, and synthesize relevant literature to achieve an in-depth understanding of the research topic. Data collection was conducted through searches of reputable academic databases, particularly Scopus, using the keyword "traditional medicine," focusing on English-language publications spanning from 1988 to 2024, with criteria or limitations set on the type of manuscript, specifically requiring it to be an article and open access.

Inclusion criteria were applied to ensure only relevant literature was considered, specifically studies addressing traditional medicine with a focus on ancestral heritage elements, including beliefs, practices, and the use of local resources. Conversely, irrelevant articles, such as those focusing solely on modern medicine or unrelated to the context of coastal communities, were excluded from analysis.

Once the data was collected, it was visualized using the R-Studio Package to generate valid graphical representations. Subsequently, a qualitative analysis was performed using a thematic approach, involving in-depth reading to identify key themes such as the role of spiritual beliefs in healing, the utilization of local medicinal plants, and the challenges of preserving traditional practices in a rapidly changing era. The analysis also examined the integration of traditional and modern medicine within coastal communities, as well as the resulting cultural and health implications.

To ensure the validity of findings, the selected literature underwent critical review, and data interpretations were independently verified by researchers to minimize bias (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2014). To ensure the validity of the data in this study, source triangulation was employed. This approach involved all researchers as data collectors in the literature review process, allowing for a diverse range of perspectives to be incorporated. The results of this review were compiled into a narrative format to provide a comprehensive overview of the relationship between ancestral heritage and traditional medicine practices. This method not only offers theoretical insights but also highlights areas for further research, particularly in efforts to preserve this valuable traditional knowledge in the face of globalization.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Despite technological advancements and shifting societal trends, traditional medicine continues to play a vital role in healthcare. Rather than being entirely replaced, it often functions alongside modern medical practices, creating a complementary system of care. This coexistence is particularly evident in remote or isolated regions, such as small islands, where limited access to modern healthcare facilities necessitates the continued reliance on traditional healing methods. Such integration highlights the enduring relevance of indigenous medical knowledge in contemporary health systems. In such contexts, traditional medicine serves as a primary alternative, playing a crucial role in supporting public health systems.

Research on indigenous knowledge continues to evolve, reflecting the dynamic nature of this field. Our bibliometric analysis conducted on the Scopus database using the search keywords "indigenous AND healing" for the period 1988–2024 identified 840 published documents. Thematic analysis reveals that studies on indigenous knowledge and health maintenance have become a significant area of discussion, as evidenced by the increasing number of publications between 2015-2024 (see Figure 1). However, according to the Scopus database, Indonesia has a limited number of publications on the topic of indigenous healing (see Figure 2).



Figure 1. Documents by Year Analysis of Indigenous healing



Figure 2. Documents by Country or Territory Analysis of Indigenous healing





As visualized in Figure 3, topics such as "non-human wound healing" and "human female" are categorized as major themes, highlighting their centrality and development within the field. However, less attention has been given to how local knowledge can be integrated into traditional medicine. This gap is evident in Figure 3, where topics like "indigenous people medicinal plant" are placed in the quadrant of emerging themes, reflecting its status as an underexplored research area.



Figure 3. Thematic Map in Bibliometric Analysis of indigenous healing

Source: Bibliometric Analysis by the Authors using R-Studio

As depicted in Figure 4, research on traditional medicine documented in the Scopus database remains concentrated in countries such as the Philippines, Australia, Canada, Bangladesh, the UK, and Ethiopia. These studies primarily focus on topics related to "indigenous healing," although the overall volume remains relatively limited. Research conducted within the Indonesian context holds substantial potential to enhance the existing literature on traditional medicine, especially by providing insights from the perspective of coastal communities. By focusing on these communities, such studies can offer a nuanced understanding of how traditional healing practices are maintained, adapted, and integrated within contemporary healthcare systems. This contribution is particularly valuable in addressing gaps in global discussions on indigenous medicine, emphasizing the unique socio-cultural and environmental factors shaping its practice in coastal regions.

Figure 4. Sankey Diagram of Three-Field Analysis on Bibliometric Study of Indigenous healing



Source: Bibliometric Analysis by the Authors using R-Studio





Source: Bibliometric Analysis by the Authors using R-Studio

The Co-occurrence Network Analysis (Figure 5) illustrates the relationships between keywords that frequently appear together in the literature. This analysis highlights that topics such as "human," "female," and "male" exhibit high centrality, indicating that these are core themes within the research discourse. Additionally, subthemes like "oceanic ancestry," "Pacific Islander," and "health services indigenous" emerge as closely related, reflecting the research focus on the intersection of public health and indigenous beliefs. This keyword network mirrors the complexity and diversity of perspectives in traditional medicine, where physical health, spirituality, and sustainability are interconnected.

The analysis identifies several underexplored research areas, including the integration of indigenous healing practices with modern medical systems and the impact of globalization on their sustainability. The relatively infrequent appearance of terms such as "health care policy" and "medicinal plant" suggests gaps in the literature that warrant further investigation. Additionally, the findings highlight the necessity of interdisciplinary perspectives, emphasizing the intersection of health sciences, anthropology, and ecology in comprehensively understanding traditional medicine. Addressing these gaps through a multidisciplinary approach could provide deeper insights into the evolving role of traditional healing in contemporary healthcare systems. The Scopus database shows that studies on indigenous healing are more prevalent in the fields of medicine and social science (see Figure 6).



Figure 6. Documents by Subject Area Analysis of Indigenous healing

Documents by subject area



This study's findings indicate that traditional healing practices continue to thrive as a cultural heritage within Indonesia's coastal communities. Traditional medicine plays a crucial role in Indonesian society, particularly among coastal populations. These healing practices are deeply embedded in local customs and reflect the enduring significance of indigenous knowledge. Their persistence highlights the reliance of coastal communities on traditional medical systems despite modern healthcare advancements.

Despite being somewhat marginalized by the influence of modern medicine, as evidenced by the limited number of research publications indexed in the Scopus database, traditional medicine continues to serve as the primary healthcare system for communities in remote and coastal areas. In these regions, traditional medicine not only addresses physical ailments but also embodies a spiritual and ecological connection to the natural environment.

Based on the literature, traditional medicine practices among coastal communities are inseparable from their understanding of their surrounding environment (the sea). Coastal communities perceive nature as a living entity with inherent powers, making the maintenance of balance with nature a crucial aspect of the healing process. For instance, some indigenous groups, such as the Dayak, believe that illness can arise from violations of natural norms, such as overexploitation of natural resources or disrespecting guardian spirits of <u>nature (Groot et al., 2011; Niko, 2019; Niko et al., 2024).</u>

The use of natural materials for healing, such as plants turned into spices, is also viewed as a means of restoring the relationship between humans and nature (Astutik et al., 2019; Sembiring et al., n.d.; Swastiwi et al., 2024). Practices like bathing in seawater or using sea sand in treatment are grounded in the belief that these natural elements can cleanse the body of negative energy or toxins. In this regard, traditional medicine in coastal areas is not only concerned with physical healing but also with restoring the human connection to the environment (Haque et al., 2018; Hoare, 1993; Tapias Torrado, 2022).

From the literature review, a prominent aspect of traditional medicine practices in coastal communities is its spiritual dimension. Traditional healing often involves ceremonies or rituals aimed at restoring the patient's spiritual balance (Fransiska et al., n.d.; Yasir et al., 2022). Coastal communities, historically influenced by animistic beliefs, hold that illness can be caused by disturbances from spirits or supernatural entities. In such cases, traditional healing is not solely focused on natural remedies but also incorporates spiritual approaches involving shamans or traditional healers, using prayers and incantations (Connor, 2000; Kusumawardhani et al., 2016; Rosales & Gepty, 2022; van den Scott, 2017).

Shamans, often regarded as intermediaries between the human and spiritual realms, play a significant role in these healing practices. They not only address physical ailments but also assist patients in restoring lost spiritual connections. Rituals conducted by shamans may include the use of mantras, incense burning, or calling upon ancestral spirits. In many instances, healing is considered successful when the patient achieves inner peace and regains balance in their relationship with both the natural world and the surrounding community (Haque et al., 2018; Lesmana et al., 2018; Yuan et al., 2016).

Amid the rapid wave of globalization, traditional medicine worldwide faces significant challenges. The erosion of indigenous knowledge, linked to the diminishing spaces for indigenous communities as their lands are replaced by modern buildings, extractive plantations, and mining operations, has become a concern (Desa et al., 2022; Permana, 2009; Rosales & Gepty, 2022; Thomford et al., 2018). The influence of modern medicine, driven by science and technology, has led many younger generations to abandon traditional healing practices (Mansye et al., n.d.). However, there is a growing trend to revive these ancestral traditions, driven by increasing interest in more natural forms of treatment.

Globalization has brought about major changes in how communities access healthcare. Many coastal communities are now familiar with modern medical technologies, which allow for quicker and more accessible treatments (Elsera et al., 2023; Rona et al., 2020; Saprianto et al., n.d.). On the other hand, there is also a resurgence of interest in traditional medicine as a countermeasure against the use of chemical drugs, which are often seen as harmful to long-term health (Liu et al., 2024). In some cases, traditional and modern medicine are being integrated, with many individuals opting for conventional medical treatments while also relying on herbal or spiritual healing as complementary therapies (Syafitri et al., 2024).

Advancements in medical technology and greater access to modern healthcare services have often led to a decline in the use of traditional healing practices passed down through generations. However, Indigenous communities that continue to rely on traditional healing methods do not abandon these practices entirely. Instead, they adapt by integrating traditional knowledge with modern medical science. For instance, some traditional healers have begun adopting evidencebased approaches to explain the efficacy of herbal remedies or alternative therapies. Additionally, many communities have taken steps to document their local knowledge in written or digital formats, ensuring its preservation amid the forces of modernization.

Beyond integration with medical science, communities also sustain traditional healing practices by reinforcing the cultural and spiritual values embedded within them. Traditional healing is often more than just a means of addressing physical ailments; it is deeply intertwined with cultural identity and collective beliefs. As a result, rituals and healing practices are frequently revitalized through cultural festivals or community events that affirm the significance of ancestral heritage. In some regions, governments and local organizations play a crucial role in safeguarding these traditions by granting legal recognition to traditional healers and supporting research on the efficacy of traditional medicine. This process of adaptation demonstrates that while modernization presents challenges, communities continue to find ways to maintain and revitalize traditional healing practices.

CONCLUSION

Traditional medicine among coastal communities represents a rich ancestral heritage encompassing ecological, spiritual, and cultural knowledge. This practice serves not only as a method for treating physical ailments but also as a means of restoring the spiritual connection between humans and nature. To date, there is a lack of Indonesian academic publications discussing indigenous healing in databases such as Scopus. As a result, the challenge of publishing works on local topics like traditional medicine remains highly relevant to coastal communities, both as an alternative form of healthcare and as a cultural heritage that must be preserved. Therefore, traditional medicine can continue to provide benefits to coastal communities in Indonesia and globally.

This study finds that traditional healing practices among coastal communities serve not only as a means of physical treatment but also as an ancestral heritage deeply embedded with spiritual and social values. These practices are often intertwined with religious rituals, beliefs in natural forces, and the close relationship between traditional healers and their communities. While modernization and expanded access to conventional healthcare have led to a decline in these traditional practices, communities in Indonesia continue to demonstrate adaptive resilience.

The findings highlight the significance of health policies and cultural preservation efforts, as integrating traditional medicine with modern healthcare systems presents opportunities for a more holistic approach, particularly in coastal areas with limited access to medical facilities. However, this study is constrained by its reliance on literature as the primary source of analysis and the lack of empirical measurement of the effectiveness of traditional healing methods. Future research could explore how younger generations within coastal communities perceive and sustain these

healing traditions amid rapid social change. Additionally, further studies on the role of public policy and government interventions in supporting these practices would provide valuable insights for their long-term sustainability.

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