
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Tandok: A Traditional Healing Practice in a Rural Area

John Rey C. Cuaterno¹ ✉ and Victoria A. Gepty, PhD²

¹ College of Teacher Education, Aklan State University, Banga, Aklan, Philippines 5601

² Associate Professor, College of Teacher Education, Aklan State University, Banga, Aklan, Philippines 5601

Corresponding Author: John Rey C. Cuaterno, **E-mail:** johnreycuaterno07@gmail.com; Victoria A. Gepty, PhD E-mail: aguilarvictoria71@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This qualitative ethnographic study explores Tandok, a traditional healing practice involving the use of an animal horn, typically from a carabao (water buffalo) or a cow to extract perceived toxins or impurities from the body. It is actively used in rural communities of the Philippines, particularly in Balete, Aklan. Rooted in indigenous beliefs and passed down through generations, tandok persists as a culturally embedded health practice amidst limited access to modern medical care. Through participant observation and in-depth interviews with a local manugtandok (healer) and community members who availed the practice, the study investigates the cultural, economic, and social significance of tandok. The study documented its techniques, rituals, and materials, highlighting its perceived effectiveness in treating conditions such as animal bites, fatigue, muscle pain, and fevers. Findings reveal that decisions to use/avail tandok are influenced by community trust, accessibility, affordability, and positive personal and familial experiences. The study underscores the importance of acknowledging traditional practices in health education and public policy, particularly in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas. It also opens avenues for integrating local healers into community health frameworks and preserving intangible cultural heritage.

KEYWORDS

Tandok; Traditional Healing Practice; Rural Area

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1. Introduction

In the heart of rural Philippines, nestled among verdant landscapes and timeworn traditions, lies an age-old healing practice known as *Tandok*. The *Tandok* is a traditional healing practice observed in certain rural communities of the Philippines. It involves using an animal horn, typically from a carabao (water buffalo) or a cow, to extract perceived toxins or impurities from the body. This method is most commonly applied to wounds caused by animal bites, including those suspected of being rabid. According to World Health Organization (2024), Rabies remains a serious public health concern in more than 150 countries and territories, particularly in Asia and Africa. It is a viral, zoonotic, and neglected tropical disease that causes tens of thousands of deaths each year, with children under the age of 15 accounting for 40% of cases. Nearly all human rabies infections about 99% are caused by dog bites or scratches.

According to Sosa (2016), *Tandok* involves using a water buffalo's horn to create suction on the skin, believed to draw out impurities and toxins from the body. This practice is often used to treat wounds caused by animal bites, aiming to remove venom, rabies, and tetanus. *Tandok*, also referred to as "*hilot sa tandok*", involves the use of a water buffalo horn to create a suction effect on the skin, believed to draw out impurities and toxins from the body. This practice is often accompanied by prayers and rituals, reflecting the intertwined nature of spirituality and health in Filipino culture. According to Sosa (2016), it has been a treatment practice among people living in Marinduque, where it is believed to originate. Aside from removing *rabies*, *tandok* is also used to remove harmful substances, such as toxins, venom, muscle spasms, and colds resulting from fever; from the body (Sosa, 2016). The preference for *Tandok* over modern medical treatments among rural Filipinos can be attributed to several interlinked factors.

The resilience of *Tandok* as a prevalent healing practice can be attributed to various factors, including economic constraints, geographical barriers, and strong cultural beliefs.

For generations, this traditional method has been an integral part of the health and wellness culture in rural areas, and this offers an alternative and often complementary approach to modern medicine. It is one means of treatment used by people, especially for animal bites that possibly be affected by rabies (Sosa, 2016). *Tandok* is more than a healing technique, rather, it embodies the deep-rooted beliefs, cultural heritage, and communal spirit of the Filipino people. The cultural significance of *Tandok* extends beyond its medicinal benefits.

As emphasized by Reyes (2017), adapted from Sosa III (2016), *Tandok* is deeply intertwined with the spiritual and communal aspects of rural life. The practice often involves rituals, prayers, and the use of natural elements, reflecting the community's belief in the interconnectedness of body, mind, and spirit. Reyes' ethnographic study notes that *Tandok* sessions are communal events where stories, beliefs, and cultural values are shared, reinforcing social cohesion and cultural identity.

In many rural communities, the high cost of medical treatments and vaccines, coupled with the inaccessibility and unavailability of healthcare facilities, makes traditional methods like *Tandok* more appealing. Oftentimes, patients need to travel long distances in order to avail of the treatment, and patients need to be early just to avail of the treatment. Moreover, the cultural significance of this practice, reinforced by the trust placed in traditional healers, further solidifies its role in the health and wellness of rural populations. Deeply integrated beliefs and perceptions are difficult to change, especially when the beliefs are deeply rooted in the prior generation and supplemented with the testimonies of people who have availed of and experienced *Tandok* treatment. Additionally, the scarcity of healthcare professionals in remote areas further perpetuates the reliance on traditional healers. This is supported by the results of the study conducted by Sosa (2016), whose findings show that *Tandok* and *Tawak* were the most prevalent non-medical-related alternatives for managing animal bites; thereby, 165 preferred *Tandok* over 90 who sought medical care from medical facilities. Furthermore, the same study revealed that six out of every ten people who experienced animal bites specifically opted for non-medical alternatives rather than consulting a medical facility for vaccines.

Although some existing studies on *tandok* provide an overview of the traditional healing practice, there still remain a limited number of studies specifically on its practices. Previous discussions commonly associate *tandok* with the treatment of or prevention of rabies, leaving other reported uses of the practice less explored. This limited local documentation creates a gap in understanding how *tandok* is practiced, understood, and maintained within the community. Therefore, this study seeks to explore *tandok* as an ethnomedicinal practice, focusing on its beliefs, practices, uses, and its importance to the community.

Furthermore, this study aims to investigate and understand the cultural significance of *Tandok* within the communities that practice it, including the perceptions of the practitioner and beneficiaries of the said treatment about the belief associated with *tandok*; the rituals used in performing the treatment; the materials used; how the practice is performed; as well as its historical, social, and cultural significance.

1.1 Statement of the problem

Traditional healing practices like *tandok* have been integral to the cultural heritage and healthcare systems of rural Filipino communities for generations. Despite the proliferation of modern medical advancements, *tandok* continues to be widely practiced and trusted for its perceived efficacy. This study aims to address the following key questions:

1. What is *Tandok* and its belief?
2. What are the rituals in *Tandok*?
3. What are the materials used in *Tandok*?
4. How is *Tandok* performed?
5. What is the significance of *Tandok*?

1.2 Significance of the study

The significance of this study lies in its exploration and documentation of *Tandok*, an age-old healing practice that is deeply embedded in the cultural heritage of rural Filipino communities. This research holds both academic and practical value, as it contributes to the understanding and preservation of traditional knowledge systems that are at risk of being overshadowed by modern medical practices. This study on *Tandok: A Traditional Healing Practice in Rural Places* holds relevance for various individuals and institutions in the Philippines:

Rural Filipino Communities - It affirms the cultural roots of *tandok* while promoting informed health decisions, especially in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas where traditional healing remains a trusted practice.

Traditional Healers (*Manugtandok*)- By documenting their knowledge and practices, the study gives recognition to their role in community health and cultural preservation, potentially opening paths for dialogue with formal health sectors.

Barangay Health Workers and Rural Health Units– Insights from the study can guide more culturally sensitive health education and outreach strategies that respect, rather than contradict, existing belief systems.

Department of Health (DOH)– The research supports the development of public health programs that consider indigenous knowledge, particularly in areas such as rabies prevention, wound care, and early intervention practices.

Future Researchers– This study serves as a valuable reference for those interested in exploring traditional healing, cultural practices, and rural health behavior in the Philippines, contributing to the growing body of knowledge on ethnomedicine and local belief systems.

Educators and Students– The study provides locally relevant material for health education, *Araling Panlipunan*, and social science instruction, highlighting the intersection of culture and medicine in the Philippines.

Local Government Units (LGUs)– Findings can support the creation of localized health and heritage programs that integrate traditional practices within broader development goals.

National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA)– This study aligns with the NCCA's mission to preserve and promote Philippine cultural heritage. It provides documentation that can support the safeguarding of indigenous knowledge systems like *tandok*, recognizing them as part of the country's intangible cultural heritage.

1.3 Scope and limitations

This study focuses on the traditional healing practice of *tandok* in rural Filipino communities. The research delves into the historical origins and cultural significance of *tandok*, exploring its role in shaping the communal and spiritual life of rural Filipinos. It examines the specific techniques involved in *tandok*, including the use of water buffalo horns and accompanying prayers and rituals, and investigates the perceptions of both practitioners and beneficiaries as to its efficacy and relevance in contemporary health and wellness practices. The study also compares *tandok* with modern medical practices, highlighting its complementary role and the reasons for its sustained popularity in rural areas. The study was conducted over 4–6 months to ensure adequate time for data collection, community immersion, and observation of *tandok* practices in their natural context. This duration allowed the researchers to build rapport with participants, validate responses through follow-up interactions, and capture a more accurate and culturally grounded understanding of the traditional healing process.

However, the study has several limitations. The findings may be specific to the regions and communities studied, and may not be suitable to other places where *tandok* is practiced differently. In relation to this, this research was conducted in the municipality of Balete, Aklan, where the *Manugtandok* or practitioner resides. Limited documentation and empirical research on *tandok* made it challenging to gather extensive data, so the study relies heavily on qualitative data from interviews and participant observations. Additionally, the study's findings are based on the subjective experiences and perceptions of the participants, which varied widely and were influenced by personal beliefs and biases. Finally, the study focuses on current practices and perceptions of *tandok*, with limited historical data available for comparison over time.

1.4 Theoretical framework

To understand the context of *Tandok* as a traditional healing practice in rural communities, it is crucial to investigate theories that elucidate the cultural, social, and health factors influencing the practice of *Tandok*. These theories will offer significant insights into the mechanisms behind the adoption and persistence of *Tandok* as a healing method. Understanding these theories helps to highlight potential avenues for support and integration with modern healthcare, as well as the challenges faced by communities that rely on traditional healing practices like *Tandok*.

In this context, the (1) Health Belief Model of Rosenstock et.al. (1996), (2) Social Cognitive Theory of Bandura (1986), and (3) Cultural Relativity Theory of Boas (1920) were used as a guide for this study.

1.5 Health Belief Model (hbm)

Developed by Rosenstock and others (1966), the HBM explores how individual beliefs and perceptions influence health behaviors and decide to act based on the value individuals place on a particular goal and the likelihood that actions taken toward that goal will be successful in achieving the goal. It can help us understand how rural Filipinos perceive *Tandok's* efficacy and its role in their healthcare decisions. This model is particularly useful in examining how rural Filipinos perceive the efficacy of *Tandok*, a traditional healing practice that involves using an animal horn to extract perceived toxins or impurities from the body.

In the context of rural Filipino communities, the continued use of *tandok* a traditional healing practice involving the use of animal horns to extract "toxins" from wounds can be better understood through this framework. Many individuals in these areas may perceive *tandok* as an effective and accessible remedy for animal bites, shaped by cultural beliefs, past experiences, and trust in local healers. If people believe that *tandok* is more familiar, affordable, or effective than biomedical treatments, they are more likely to choose it. By applying the HBM, public health programs can identify these belief patterns and design culturally sensitive interventions that acknowledge traditional practices while promoting evidence-based medical care, such as timely rabies post-exposure prophylaxis.

1.6 Social Cognitive Theory (sct)

Proposed by Albert Bandura (1986), SCT emphasizes the role of observational learning, social experiences, and reciprocal determinism in behavior. It proposes that human behavior is the product of the interaction between personal factors,

environmental influences, and behavioral patterns. He emphasized the role of observational learning, social experience, and reciprocal determinism in human behavior, suggesting that people are both influenced by and actively influence their environments. This theory can be used to understand how *tandok* is learned, practiced, and sustained within communities.

This framework helps explain how *tandok*, a traditional healing practice in rural areas of the Philippines, is learned, maintained, and passed down through generations. Community members often observe elders or local healers performing *tandok*, reinforcing the belief in its effectiveness through repeated social validation and cultural narratives. Environmental factors such as limited access to healthcare, economic constraints, and strong community trust in traditional knowledge further support the practice. As individuals observe others benefiting, or appearing to benefit from *tandok*, their personal beliefs and behaviors are shaped to support its continued use. By applying SCT, public health programs can better understand how deeply ingrained practices like *tandok* persist and design interventions that leverage social modeling and trusted community influencers to promote safer and evidence-based health practices.

1.7 Cultural Relativity Theory

This theory, proposed by Franz Boas (1920), emphasizes understanding cultural practices within their own contexts. It claims that ethical practices differ among cultures, and what is considered right in one culture may be considered wrong in another. It allows for a deeper appreciation of *tandok*'s significance and resilience within Filipino culture, recognizing the value of traditional practices.

Applied to the practice of *tandok*, this perspective allows for a deeper appreciation of its significance in rural Filipino communities. *Tandok*, often performed by local healers using animal horns to extract perceived toxins, is more than just a treatment method, it also reflects deep-rooted beliefs, communal trust, and cultural identity. While modern medicine may view *tandok* as unscientific or unsafe, Cultural Relativity Theory reminds us to approach such practices with cultural sensitivity rather than outright rejection. Recognizing the value and resilience of *tandok* within its cultural context can foster respectful dialogue and inform more inclusive health education strategies that honor tradition while promoting safe and effective medical care.

2. Literature review

This chapter will focus on these discussions: (1) *Tandok* and Its Belief, (2) Rituals performed in *Tandok*, (3) Materials used in Performing *Tandok*, (4) Steps in Performing *Tandok*, (5) Significance of *Tandok* in terms of (a) Historical; (b) Social; and (C) Cultural, and (6) Synthesis

2.1 *Tandok* and its belief

Tandok is a traditional Filipino healing method that involves the use of suction where typically through a carabao horn, glass like *ventossa cup*, or bamboo tube; to extract what is believed to be "bad air" (*hangin*) or toxins from the body. This practice is deeply rooted in the cultural beliefs of rural communities and is primarily used to treat ailments such as colds, body pains, fever, fatigue, and even animal bites. The healer, known as a *manugtandok*, is often a respected community elder with inherited or experiential knowledge of folk medicine.

Tandok is a traditional healing practice commonly used in rural areas of the Philippines, particularly in regions like Marinduque, Bicol, and other provinces where access to modern healthcare facilities is limited. The practice is primarily used for the treatment of animal bites, especially those from dogs, which carry a high risk of rabies. The belief underlying *tandok* is rooted in the community's cultural understanding of health, which blends physical, spiritual, and social factors. In essence, *tandok* is seen as a way to remove harmful substances, such as toxins, venom, or even rabies, from the body (Sosa, 2016; Bolata, 2022). Similarly, according to Francisco (2015), *tandok* is not only a therapeutic practice but also a reflection of indigenous knowledge systems that emphasize harmony between the body and nature. The method exemplifies how rural Filipinos conceptualize illness and healing which often links physical ailments to environmental imbalances or spiritual disturbances. Lunasco (2024), through the Cultural Mapping of Panay and Guimaras, documented *Tandok* as a traditional healing practice in Barangay Napnud, Leganes, Iloilo. The practice is primarily used for animal bites and involves the use of carabao or deer horn, coconut oil, and herbs. The procedure is performed through repeated horn application and wound cleansing based on the belief that the horn draws out toxins or venom. The documentation further indicates that the practice has been transmitted across generations and still continues to persist.

The procedure is performed by traditional healers called *magtatandok*, who are often regarded as trusted figures in the community. The practice is deeply intertwined with local spirituality, where it is believed that illness or injury results not only from physical causes but also from spiritual or mystical forces. Thus, the healing process through *tandok* is seen as a way to expel harmful "bad air" (*masamang hangin*) or toxins from the body. This belief is consistent with traditional Filipino notions of health, where balance in both the body and the spirit is crucial for well-being (Francas, 2025). Furthermore, contrary to popular belief that *tandok* is used to treat dog bites, Ahmed et al. (2008) reported that many snakebite victims initially seek assistance from traditional healers, contributing to the underreporting of snakebite cases in formal health facilities. These findings show that the role of traditional healers as an initial source of treatment to snakebite victims is still continuing.

Despite its widespread use in rural communities, *tandok* remains highly controversial. While many people in these communities strongly believe in its effectiveness, especially due to its low cost and accessibility, medical professionals have raised concerns about its safety and efficacy. The practice is not scientifically proven to treat rabies or any venomous bite, and health authorities warn against relying on it as a substitute for modern medical treatment, such as rabies vaccines (Beasley et al., 2022)

2.2 Rituals performed in Tandok

Tandok is not merely a physical procedure but also a spiritual practice that incorporates rituals designed to enhance the healing process. Healers often perform a series of steps that involve prayers, chants, and invocations to spiritual beings. These rituals are thought to summon spiritual energies to cleanse the body of toxins and ensure the healing process is successful (Sosa, 2016). According to Francas (2025), these spiritual elements reflect the cultural and religious beliefs of the community, where health is seen as a balance between physical, emotional, and spiritual factors.

The healer's role extends beyond physical care; they also function as a mediator between the human and spiritual realms. Rituals may include the lighting of candles, chanting of prayers, or the use of incense or candles to purify the space. Although these are not often observed in most places, these actions are believed to enhance the effectiveness of the treatment by invoking protection from spirits and encouraging divine intervention in the healing process (Palmes & Miranda, 2021).

Moreover, the ritualistic nature of *tandok* helps to foster trust between the healer and the patient. Patients who seek out traditional healers for animal bite treatments often do so because they believe that the healer's connection to the spiritual realm enhances the likelihood of recovery. This trust is an essential part of the practice, as the rituals provide psychological reassurance that the treatment will work, even if the scientific basis for its effectiveness is not proven (Francas, 2025).

2.3 Materials used in performing Tandok

The materials used in *tandok* are deeply rooted in the traditional Filipino belief system and are selected for both their practical and symbolic significance. The primary tool used in the procedure is the carabao (water buffalo) horn, which is believed to possess the power to draw out toxins, venom, or bad air from the body. The horn is typically placed over the affected area, creating suction by the healer, who may also use their mouth or a modified device to draw out the harmful elements (Morata, 2011). Historical documentation of *tandok* can be traced to the work of Diego Bergaño, whose *Vocabulario de pampango en romance y diccionario de romance en pampango*, first published in 1732 and reprinted in 1860, forms part of the early written documentation of the Kapampangan language. The term *tanduk* is also discussed in contemporary documentation of Kapampangan traditional practices, where it is associated with traditional cupping or *ventosa*.

Other materials sometimes employed during *tandok* include herbal remedies like garlic, vinegar, or coconut oil, which are believed to have healing and purifying properties. These materials may be applied to the wound before the suction process begins (Francas, 2025). The use of garlic and vinegar, in particular, is common in Filipino folk medicine, where they are seen as powerful substances for purifying the body. Garlic is often associated with warding off evil spirits, while vinegar is believed to cleanse the body of impurities (Sosa, 2016).

In some regions, the material may vary, and other animal horns, such as those of goats or deer, may be used. These horns are also believed to have similar properties, though the carabao horn remains the most common (Sosa, 2014). The use of these materials, steeped in tradition, reflects a cultural system of knowledge passed down through generations.

2.4 Steps in performing Tandok

The practice of *tandok* involves several key steps that align with the healer's cultural knowledge and the community's belief system. After an animal bite, the healer first assesses the wound and prepares the necessary materials, including the horn, any herbal remedies, and possibly tools for making small incisions on the wound (Morata, 2011).

The first step typically involves creating a vacuum over the wound using the carabao horn or a similar material (in most cases, they use cupping methods such as *ventossa* cups). The healer may use their mouth or suction device to draw out the perceived toxins or venom. In some cases, minor incisions are made on the skin to facilitate bleeding, which is believed to help expel harmful elements from the body (Sosa, 2014). This technique is based on the belief that by inducing bleeding, the body is cleansed of the harmful substances that caused the illness, toxins, or injury.

Once the healer believes that all venom or toxins have been removed, the treatment is considered complete. In some instances, additional herbal concoctions may be applied to the wound, or the patient may be instructed to take certain herbal drinks or medications. The healer may also provide spiritual advice or blessings to ensure that the healing process continues smoothly (Palmes & Miranda, 2021).

However, health experts caution that this practice can be dangerous. The potential for infections such as tetanus, hepatitis, or further complications from untreated rabies or venomous bites is a significant risk. Delaying medical treatment in favor of *tandok* has led to numerous fatalities, as patients often do not seek timely vaccinations or medical care (Beasley et al., 2022; Garcia, 2014).

2.5 Historical significance of *Tandok*

The historical significance of *tandok* may be understood through its continuity as a traditional practice and its transmission across generations. Traditional healing practices provide evidence of how communities historically understood illness, health, nature, and healing before or alongside the increasing availability of formal biomedical services. The World Health Organization (2021) noted that traditional medicine has historical roots spanning generations and remains practiced in many communities. In the Philippines, this continuity demonstrates how traditional knowledge has adapted while remaining connected to earlier community experiences and beliefs.

The National Cultural Heritage Act of 2009 further recognizes practices, knowledge, skills, rituals, and expressions transmitted by communities as forms of intangible cultural heritage. Republic Act No. 10066 specifically includes traditional knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, social practices, rituals, and other community-based expressions within the scope of intangible cultural heritage. The law also emphasizes documenting and preserving traditional practices so their historical and cultural value can be maintained for future generations.

This perspective is particularly relevant to *tandok* because the practice may provide a window into the historical experiences of local communities. Through the accounts of practitioners and community members, researchers can examine how the practice was learned, how it was practiced in earlier periods, how it has changed, and how people understand its continuity in the present. The Cultural Mapping of Panay and Guimaras through Lunasco (2024) similarly documents traditional healing practices as part of the cultural assets of Western Visayas, emphasizing the importance of recording traditions and stories that have shaped regional identity.

The historical dimension is also reflected in other traditional healing traditions in Aklan. Mugal (2020), for example, examined *Pahilot*, a faith-healing tradition associated with the Ati-Atihan Festival in Kalibo, Aklan. The study found that the practice carries historical, religious, and cultural significance and demonstrates how healing traditions can become connected with broader community traditions and historical memory.

2.6 Social significance of *Tandok*

Traditional healing may also have an important social function because healing frequently occurs within relationships involving the healer, patient, family, and community. The choice to avail traditional treatment also depends on how other people perceive its effect to their health. Janzen (1978) demonstrated through the concept of medical pluralism that individuals may seek different forms of therapy when responding to illness. The choice of treatment may be influenced by how people understand the cause and nature of an illness, their previous experiences with treatment, social relationships, and the availability of different healing options. In relation to this, Crisol and Oledan (2017) found that Filipino *mananambals* perform functions that reflect the social and spiritual dimensions of Filipino culture. Their findings suggest that folk healing is embedded in community relationships rather than being limited to an individual healer treating an individual patient. The healer may become a trusted person whom community members approach for assistance, advice, or culturally familiar forms of healing. Similarly, Rondilla et al. (2021) conducted a phenomenological study to explore the lived experiences of individuals who sought folk medicine services in Quiapo, Manila. Findings showed that people's use of folk medicine was influenced by their beliefs about its effectiveness, previous experiences, family traditions, and information obtained from other people. Some participants also viewed folk medicine as a supplement to conventional healthcare rather than as an absolute replacement for it. These findings demonstrate that traditional healing practices are influenced by personal experiences, cultural knowledge, family traditions, and perceptions of healthcare.

In rural communities, traditional healing may also contribute to social accessibility. The WHO (2021) reports that traditional medicine continues to be used in many communities because it can be culturally acceptable, available, and affordable, particularly in remote or underserved areas. This does not necessarily mean that traditional healing replaces formal healthcare. Rather, it illustrates how communities may incorporate different forms of health knowledge according to their circumstances, beliefs, and experiences. Similarly, in a report of Estabilo (2022) showed that the reporting data and statements from the South Cotabato Integrated Provincial Health Office have documented cases in which rabies victims reportedly relied on traditional practices like *Tandok* instead of receiving rabies vaccination. The report further noted that some of the province's rabies fatalities had *tandok* as their only reported intervention.

The social role of traditional healers can also be observed in Aklan. Rosales and Gepty (2022) found that the *Ati* traditional healer in Numancia, Aklan had responsibilities extending into community rituals and healing practices. The healer's role was connected to community beliefs and relationships, demonstrating how traditional healing can contribute to social organization and collective identity.

Therefore, examining the social significance of *tandok* may involve understanding the relationships surrounding the practice. These may include relationships between the *manugtandok* and patients, family members, other community members, and succeeding generations. Such relationships may reveal how trust, reciprocity, shared experiences, and community support contribute to the continued recognition of *tandok* within the community.

2.7 Cultural significance of Tandok

Traditional healing practices are closely associated with cultural identity because they embody the beliefs, values, knowledge, and practices that communities transmit over time. The National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) explains that intangible cultural heritage includes tradition-based knowledge and practices that communities recognize as part of their cultural and social identity. Such knowledge may be transmitted through oral tradition, imitation, practice, and other forms of intergenerational learning.

In the Philippines, traditional healing represents one area where indigenous and local knowledge is expressed. NCCA documentation on indigenous knowledge systems and practices in healing in Capiz notes that traditional healing is deeply connected with local knowledge of medicinal plants, spiritual beliefs, and the surrounding environment. It also describes traditional healing in Panay as a practice that may incorporate indigenous beliefs alongside Christian influences, illustrating how healing traditions can change and incorporate elements from different cultural experiences over time.

The cultural value of traditional healing is likewise evident in contemporary cultural-mapping efforts. The Cultural Mapping of Panay and Guimaras through Lunasco (2024) identifies *tandok* as intangible cultural heritage and describes its transmission across generations and its continuing role in community identity. Such documentation suggests that the significance of a traditional practice is not determined solely by its therapeutic function. Its value may also lie in the knowledge, beliefs, objects, rituals, stories, and relationships associated with the practice.

Canet (2025) similarly emphasizes the relationship between traditional medicine and cultural heritage in the Philippines. The study argues that indigenous healing practices such as *hilot* and herbal medicine are important not only as forms of healthcare but also as cultural practices that require documentation and preservation amid modernization and changes in healthcare systems.

For the present study, the cultural significance of *tandok* can therefore be explored through the meanings that practitioners and community members attach to the practice. This includes examining beliefs about healing, the knowledge and skills involved, the objects or materials used, the role of the practitioner, the ways the practice is taught or inherited, and the community's perceptions of its place in local culture. Such an approach recognizes *tandok* as a lived cultural practice rather than merely a method of treating illness.

2.8 Synthesis

The reviewed literature shows that *tandok* is more than a traditional healing practice, as it carries interconnected historical, social, and cultural significance. Historically, it represents knowledge and practices passed down through generations. Socially, it strengthens relationships among the *manugtandok*, patients, families, and the community through trust and shared experiences. Culturally, *tandok* reflects local beliefs, rituals, knowledge, and traditions that contribute to community identity. However, limited literature specifically examines the historical, social, and cultural significance of *tandok* within the local community, creating a gap that this study seeks to address by exploring how practitioners and community members understand and give meaning to its continued practice.

3. Research method

3.1 Research design

This study used an ethnographic qualitative approach, which is best suited to exploring deeply rooted local cultural practices, beliefs, and traditional healing systems such as *tandok* in Balete, Aklan. Ethnography focuses on understanding the meanings and behaviors of people within their cultural context through immersion and close observation. In this study, the researcher aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of how *tandok* is practiced, the symbolic meanings behind its rituals and materials used, and its perceived significance historically, socially, and culturally. By engaging directly with the *Manugtandok* and community members, the researcher was able to document and interpret these practices in their natural setting, respecting indigenous perspectives and values. Ethnography is a qualitative research method primarily used in social sciences, that focuses on the systematic study of people and cultures through direct observation and interaction (Nicholas, 2021). Brewer (2004) defined ethnography as a style of research rather than a single method and uses a variety of techniques to collect data which are defined as the study of people in naturally occurring settings or “fields” by means of methods which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also the activities, to collect data systematically but without meaning being imposed on them externally.

Qualitative research design relies heavily on personal interviews to gather data based on the experiences of the participants and informants. In alignment with the ethnographic approach, this study employed participant observation, in-depth interviews, and data analysis to explore the traditional healing practice of *Tandok* in a rural context. Participant observation allowed the researcher to immerse in the natural setting where *Tandok* is practiced, providing firsthand insight into the rituals, tools, and healer-patient interactions. Through in-depth interviews with key informants, such as the *manugtandok* (traditional healer) and individuals who have undergone the healing procedure, rich and descriptive narratives were collected, capturing both emic (insider) perspectives and cultural meanings. Field notes and audio recordings supported the interviews and observations, ensuring accurate, detailed

documentation. The gathered data were analyzed thematically, focusing on recurring patterns, beliefs, and practices that define *tandok* as a culturally embedded health tradition. This method ensured a holistic understanding of the practice within its social and cultural context.

3.2 Locale of the study

This study was conducted at Barangay Cortes in the municipality of Balete, province of Aklan, Philippines. This location was chosen because the practitioner is a resident of it, and it's the place where the treatment was provided.

3.3 Participants

The participants of this study were six (6) individuals, including the practitioner and individuals that frequently avails *tandok* as a means of treatment for animal bite. The criteria of the researcher used for this study are the following:

Practitioner	Tandok-seekers/Attestors
1. Must be a resident of Balete, Aklan.	1. Must be a resident of Balete, Aklan.
2. Must have practiced tandok for 10 years or more.	2. Must have experienced or availed tandok three or more times.
3. Must possess deep knowledge in tandok healing practice	3. Must have an actual involvement and knowledge about tandok.

Table 1. Criteria for the selection of participants of the study.

All six participants were interviewed in the places where they are comfortable. Also, the researcher observed being a participant-observant during the conduct of the study to directly experience the practice.

Gie. Gie is the practitioner of *tandok* healing practice. She is 58 years old and a well-known practitioner of *tandok* in Balete, Aklan. As one of the leading figures in the field of *tandok*, her years of experience and deep-rooted knowledge have earned her great respect within the community. She learned the practice through oral transmission and apprenticeship under her elders, which reflects the traditional way of preserving indigenous healing knowledge. Over the decades, Gie has treated countless individuals for ailments believed to be caused by *pasma* (symptoms associated with sudden exposure to cold or water after physical exertion or sweating which is often associated with body pain, numbness, trembling, and weakness); and *bughat* (relapse or recurrence of an illness due to the sudden or premature resumption of activities after an illness), or animal bites, using her skills in suctioning with the carabao horn and applying local herbs. All the information gathered from the participants will be validated by the responses from other participants.

Lyn. Lyn is 60 years old and is one of those who regularly patronizes the *tandok* healing practice in Balete, Aklan. Over the years, she has consistently sought treatment from her trusted *manugtandok* (practitioner), believing strongly in the effectiveness of the traditional method. Lyn recalls that she was first brought to a *tandok* practitioner by her mother as a child, and since then, she has continued the practice into adulthood.

Chel. Chel is a 33-year-old resident of Balete, Aklan, who frequently seeks *tandok* as a form of treatment for various ailments. Despite her relatively younger age compared to other patronizers, she has developed a strong belief in the healing power of *tandok*, often turning to the traditional practice to relieve symptoms such as headaches, muscle pain, and fatigue.

Liv. Liv, 63 years old, is the sister-in-law of Gie, a well-known *tandok* practitioner in Balete, Aklan. Through years of close association with the practice, Liv has gained a deep understanding of the methods, rituals, and cultural beliefs that surround *tandok*. While she is not a practitioner herself, she has observed numerous healing sessions and has personally undergone *tandok* treatment on several occasions. Her firsthand experiences and constant exposure to the practice have shaped her strong belief in its effectiveness and cultural value, making her both a witness and a beneficiary of this indigenous healing tradition.

Mary. Mary is 57 years old and has personal experience with *tandok* treatment. She recalls turning to *tandok* during times of physical discomforts where she believed were caused by imbalances or "bad air" in the body. Her encounter with *tandok* left a strong impression, as she felt immediate relief after the session. Although she does not seek the treatment regularly, Mary holds a deep respect for the practice, recognizing its cultural importance and the skill of traditional healers.

Bel. Bel is a 50-year-old parent who has long relied on *tandok* as her primary form of treatment for various ailments. With years of personal experience, she has become a strong believer in the effectiveness of the practice. For Bel, *tandok* is more than just a healing method; it is a trusted remedy that she has turned to since childhood and a belief she passed down to her children. She shared that whether dealing with body pain, headaches, or fatigue, she always chooses *tandok* over modern medicine, finding comfort in its natural and non-invasive approach. Her continued use of the practice reflects a deep cultural connection and unwavering faith in its health benefits, passed down through generations.

3.4 Data collection

The data gathered in this study were collected through a semi-structured interview. The researcher prepared two separate questionnaires for the practitioners and the attestors, in which both questionnaires were divided into parts, namely: *Tandok* and its belief, Rituals in *Tandok*, Materials used in *Tandok*, Steps in Performing *Tandok*, and the significance of it. These questions served as a guide to gather the needed data, perceptions, and opinions of the participants in this study.

The data gathering process began with securing permission from the *Manugtandok* (traditional healer), who is considered a central and respected figure in the community. This was a vital step to ensure cultural sensitivity, ethical compliance, and community trust. Once permission was granted, the researcher proceeded with selecting participants using purposive and snowball sampling, targeting individuals with direct experience or knowledge related to the *Tandok* practice, primarily practitioners and rural dwellers who have undergone the healing ritual. Also, snowball sampling was utilized to identify possible participants based on referrals from identified participants using purposive sampling. All potential participants were formally informed about the purpose, scope, and ethical considerations of the study, including confidentiality and voluntary participation.

Subsequently, participants were asked to sign a written informed consent form, acknowledging their understanding and agreement to participate in the research. With ethical approval and participant consent secured, the data gathering commenced, involving semi-structured interviews, direct observation of *Tandok* sessions (when permitted), and the use of audio recordings and field notes for accuracy. The gathered data were then subjected to interpretation and thematic analysis, identifying common patterns and insights regarding the rituals, materials, practices, and perceived significance of *Tandok*.

To strengthen the credibility of the findings, validation was conducted through direct observation and detailed field notes, ensuring that the interpretations aligned with actual practices and community contexts. Finally, the results were compiled into a comprehensive report and disseminated appropriately, with respect to the local community's cultural norms.

To analyze the collected data, the researcher prepared and organized the collected data. Next, the researcher transcribed all the collected data gathered through writing in notes and the photos taken during the observation to have a complete grasp of the situation observed during the conduct of the observation. To answer the objectives of this study, the responses of the participants are organized in response to the connection of the question. Finally, the collected was interpreted and compared to the relevant literature.

3.5 Ethical considerations

In conducting this qualitative study on traditional healing practices such as *Tandok*, it is crucial to address several ethical considerations to ensure the research is conducted responsibly and respectfully. First and foremost, informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they fully understand the purpose, methods, potential risks, and benefits of the research, as well as their right to withdraw at any time without any consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by using pseudonyms or codes to refer to participants and securely storing any identifying information.

Respect for cultural practices is with utmost importance so the researcher followed local customs, traditions, and protocols to avoid causing cultural harm or disrespect as well as biases. It is essential to minimize harm and discomfort to participants, being sensitive to their emotional and psychological well-being, especially when discussing personal or potentially distressing experiences. Transparency and communication should be upheld throughout the research process, keeping participants informed about the study's progress and how the findings will be used, and sharing results in a way that is accessible and meaningful to the community.

The researcher ensured that participation were entirely voluntary, with no coercion or undue influence on participants. Additionally, the researcher considered how the study can benefit the community involved, such as by supporting the preservation and recognition of traditional healing practices or providing insights that could improve health outcomes within the community.

3.6 Data analysis

According to Creswell (2013), qualitative data analysis involves organizing and interpreting non-numerical data to identify meaningful patterns, themes, and categories. In this study, the data analysis followed a structured and rigorous process to ensure the credibility and depth of the findings.

In analyzing the data gathered in this study, Creswell's (2013) data analysis framework was used.

3.7 Step 1. preparing and organizing the data

The researcher organized the interview data, including audio recordings, transcripts, field notes, and other relevant materials. The interviews were transcribed and reviewed to ensure that the data were complete and ready for analysis.

3.8 Step 2. reading and memoing

The researcher read the transcripts several times to gain an overall understanding of the participants' experiences. Significant statements, ideas, and recurring expressions related to the research questions were noted.

3.9 Step 3. coding/classifying the data

The researcher identified significant statements and assigned codes that represent their meaning. Coding was conducted systematically across the interview transcripts. The researcher repeatedly reviewed, compared, combined, and refined the codes to ensure that they accurately represent the participants' accounts.

3.10 Step 4. developing descriptions

The codes were examined and grouped according to similarities and relationships. From these codes, the researcher developed descriptions of what the participants experienced, including the conditions, situations, and contexts surrounding their experiences.

3.11 Step 5. developing themes

Related codes were then clustered to form themes. These themes represented recurring and meaningful patterns found in the participants' narratives and was aligned with the study's research questions.

3.12 Step 6. interpreting and interrelating the data

The researcher examined how the identified themes and descriptions are connected. Relationships among the participants' experiences, meanings, and responses were considered to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

3.13 Step 7. interpreting the data

The researcher interpreted the themes and descriptions based on the participants' accounts and the purpose of the study. The interpretation focused on the meanings that participants attached to their experiences rather than imposing assumptions on their responses.

3.14 Step 8. validating the accuracy of findings

Throughout the analysis, the researcher validated the accuracy and credibility of the findings by returning to the original transcripts and participants' statements. The researcher ensured that the themes, descriptions, and interpretations are supported by the data and accurately reflected the participants' experiences.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Presentation, analysis, and interpretation of data

This part of the study presents the findings from the study on *Tandok*, a traditional healing practice in Balete, Aklan. Utilizing a qualitative, ethnographic approach, the researcher gathered data through participant observation and in-depth interviews with the *manugtandok* (traditional healer) and individuals who have undergone *Tandok* treatment. The aim of this chapter is to interpret the data in relation to the study's objectives, focusing on the (1) *Tandok* and Its Belief, (2) Rituals performed in *Tandok*, (3) Materials used in Performing *Tandok*, (4) Steps in Performing *Tandok*, (5) Significance of *Tandok*.

4.2 Participant profiles

The participants of this study were six (6) individuals, including the practitioner and individuals who frequently avail *tandok* as a means of treatment for animal bites. All six participants were interviewed in the places where they are comfortable. Also, the researcher observed as a participant-observer during the conduct of the study to directly experience the practice.

Table 2. Participant profiles

Pseudo name	Address	Role	Age
Gie	Balete, Aklan	Practitioner	58 Years Old
Lyn	Balete, Aklan	Attestor	60 Years Old
Chel	Balete, Aklan	Attestor	33 Years Old
Liv	Balete, Aklan	Attestor	63 years Old
Mary	Balete, Aklan	Attestor	57 Years Old
Bel	Balete, Aklan	Attestor	50 Years Old

4.3 Thematic analysis

4.4 *Tandok* as a culturally rooted healing tradition

Healing belief, traditional treatment, perceived healing, personal experience

Tandok is perceived not merely as a remedy but as a tradition grounded in indigenous belief systems that blend physical, spiritual, and social health. The practice is based on the notion that ailments especially those involving animal bites, fatigue, or bodily imbalances are caused by toxins or spiritual disturbances that must be "drawn out" using suction via carabao horn or similar tools. Gie shared:

Tandok as a healing process can help remove acid, reduce high blood pressure and sugar, and relieve pain or numbness in the hands, feet, and other areas.

Lyn also shared her sentiments stating that:

For me, I'm 60 years old already but I've never been confined in a hospital. I rely on herbal remedies. Tandok, based on my belief, works. I used to walk tiptoeing due to heel pain, back and hip pain, but after tandok I felt better. The cold, wind, and uric acid were removed. That's why I believe tandok is good. It still depends on the person's belief, but for me, it's effective. If you have an internal fever, the process of tandok does massages before doing the actual treatment. It has a lot of benefits for example the Uric acid, it will be sucked out, muscle stiffness and such, chills, it will be sucked out, then you'll get better.)

Liv's statement about *tandok*:

That Tandok, what I experienced on that is that those rabies from snakes, dogs, all animals, can be removed

The testimonies of participants reflect a shared belief in *Tandok*'s effectiveness for relieving conditions like high blood pressure, uric acid buildup, muscle numbness, back pain, and even perceived "rabies" from animal bites. The participant's consistent reliance on *Tandok* demonstrates its deep cultural roots and the trust placed in its healing power, especially in communities with limited access to formal healthcare.

This perception aligns with Tan's (2008) findings that traditional healing persists in rural areas because it resonates with local beliefs about health as a balance of bodily and spiritual elements. Likewise, Bode and Dzokoto (2015) emphasize that such practices are valued for offering culturally meaningful ways to interpret and address illness, reinforcing the legitimacy of *Tandok* as a form of community-based wellness.

4.5 Healing rituals through massage, suction, and laceration

Tandok incorporates rituals such as prayers and chants that invoke spiritual forces believed to enhance healing and protect against further harm. Gie stated that:

The steps in tandok treatment begins with massaging the back of the customer well to relax the nerves and veins up to the hips of the customer. After massaging, the cups or horn will be put at the back to suck and put pressure on the back of the customer to make that spot feel numb. After 5 or 10 minutes and it seems like it is now numb, that is the time to make a small laceration using a blade. After putting a laceration, it is not necessary that it is big because some people felt nervous just by hearing the term "blade". Just make a small laceration and the toxins will then flow out from the nerves or veins. Then after another 5-10 minutes, you will take the suction cup or horn up and the rabies, fatigue, acid, those are what could be removed by that. These are the process and then just repeat again and again until there is no longer that flows out of the small laceration and as long as there is something that flows out, wipe it off because if there is no longer that flows out, the cup or horn will never hold on to that person's skin. It will just fall off.)

Tandok, as described by Gie, incorporates a sequence of physical and ritualistic steps that were deeply rooted in indigenous Filipino healing traditions. The process starts with massage to stimulate circulation and ease muscle tension, followed by the use of a suction instrument either a carabao horn or a *ventossa* cup to numb the area. Once numb, a small blade incision was made to allow the perceived toxins such as rabies, fatigue, and acid to flow out. This cycle of suction and incision was repeated until no more substance emerges, indicating that the body has been cleansed. Gie emphasizes that even the size of the blade incision is carefully considered to reduce fear among patients, highlighting the healer's dual role as both a physical and emotional caregiver. This method reflects a broader cultural understanding of illness as both physical and spiritual. As noted by Bagamasbad and Camacho (2014), traditional healing rituals like *Tandok* and *Hilot* are effective not just because of their physiological impact, but because they affirm the patient's beliefs and cultural narratives about wellness. These rituals invoke spiritual forces and follow symbolic gestures that provide psychological comfort and communal validation. Gie's practice exemplifies this showing that *Tandok* endures not only for its affordability and accessibility but also for its ability to resonate with the cultural logic of healing among rural Filipinos.

The practice of *tandok* in Aklan exemplifies a deeply rooted cultural tradition, transmitted across generations through familial lines and community engagement. This form of traditional healing is not merely a medical alternative but a manifestation of cultural heritage, embodying beliefs, rituals, and social structures that have persisted despite the advent of modern healthcare systems.

A study by Sosa III (2016) in Marinduque highlights the enduring influence of traditional healing practices like *tandok* and *tawak* on community health behaviors. Despite awareness of biomedical treatments, many individuals continue to prefer these traditional methods due to factors such as cost, accessibility, and cultural familiarity.

4.6 Traditional healing tools and materials

Tandok were never be completed without the materials that are used and is essential in the treatment. The participants identified several materials used during *tandok*. The primary material described by the practitioner was the horn, which was applied to the

patient's body to create suction. A blade was also used when the practitioner performs the small laceration described in the treatment process. The horn may sometimes be used together with other tools, such as a Chinese cupping set.

The openness to adapt tools from other cultures illustrates the dynamic and evolving nature of indigenous healing. It reflects a form of cultural pragmatism, honoring heritage while embracing innovation. This is connected with Cultural Relativity Theory which emphasizes that cultural practices should be understood within their unique context and are valid in their own right (Herskovits, 1948).

The effectiveness of *Tandok* as a traditional healing practice is closely tied to the materials used, which serve both practical and symbolic purposes. As Gie, a *Tandok* practitioner, described, the process begins with a massage to stimulate the nerves and veins, followed by the application of the buffalo horn (*sungay*) to create suction, and then a small blade incision to release what are believed to be harmful substances like "rabies," "fatigue," and "acid." These materials are not only tools but also carry deep cultural symbolism, signifying the removal of negative elements from the body and restoring internal balance.

Interestingly, Gie also noted the use of foreign tools such as Chinese cupping sets, which she mentioned are now sometimes integrated into *Tandok*. This openness to adopt and adapt tools from other cultural traditions highlights the dynamic and evolving nature of indigenous healing. Rather than being rigid, *Tandok* reflects a form of cultural pragmatism preserving traditional values while embracing useful innovations. This aligns with Cultural Relativity Theory, as proposed by Herskovits (1948), which asserts that cultural practices must be understood within their own contexts and are inherently valid. Similarly, Janzen (1978) emphasized in his study of African therapeutic systems that the flexibility of traditional healers to incorporate new methods and materials enhances their relevance and resilience in contemporary settings.

4.7 Sequential and experiential practice of Tandok

The healing practice of *Tandok* follows a structured and experiential process rooted in indigenous knowledge. Beyond the materials used, the specific sequence of actions performed by the healer plays a crucial role in its perceived effectiveness. These practices involve massaging, suctioning, and at times, making minor incisions; each step believed to facilitate the release of harmful elements from the body. Gie stated that:

The ways for the treatment is that it could be possible that there will be no laceration, but it is better if there is a small laceration because that acid and such will flow out of the wound that entered your body depending on the food that you intake; those toxins, I must say.

As Gie explains, the decision to make an incision is often based on necessity and patient condition, emphasizing the healer's discretion and practical wisdom in tailoring the procedure to ensure the best outcome.

4.8 Significance of Tandok

4.9 Tandok as a culturally rooted healing tradition

The historical significance of *Tandok* is reflected in its continued presence within the community and its transmission from one generation to another. The participants' accounts indicate that *Tandok* was not newly introduced to them but was already practiced within their families and community during their childhood. Their experiences demonstrate how knowledge of *Tandok* has been maintained through observation, personal experience, and continued practice. Although not all participants were able to provide detailed information about the origin of *Tandok*, their narratives consistently indicate that the practice has existed in their community across generations.

Gie described *Tandok* as a form of inherited knowledge that he learned from his parents and intended to pass on to his children:

It's like an inheritance because ever since I was born, this is what I've seen from my parents; that's why this is also what I am trying to teach my children, right? By the time comes that I could no longer practice tandok, at least they could help other people.

This statement demonstrates the intergenerational transmission of *Tandok* as a traditional healing practice. Gie viewed the knowledge not simply as an individual skill but as an inheritance received from his parents, and intended for transmission to the next generation. His intention to teach his children suggests that the continuity of *Tandok* depends partly on the passing of knowledge and practical skills from older practitioners to the younger members of the family.

The historical presence of *Tandok* was also evident in Liv's personal recollection:

...it's just that when I was born, there was tandok already, and my personal experience was that back then, there was a lot of water dripping at my back, which was treated by tandok. The mother of the current practitioner of tandok was the one who treated me.

Liv's account provides evidence of continuity between generations of practitioners. Her experience of being treated by the mother of the current practitioner demonstrates that *Tandok* has been practiced by successive generations within the community. Her recollection also shows how personal experiences can become part of the historical memory through which the practice is remembered and recognized.

This account indicates that people previously made an effort to seek out *manugtandok* for treatment. The recollection of one participant traveling to a practitioner demonstrates that *Tandok* occupied a place in the community's traditional healing practices and was sought by people even before the present practitioner became established.

The statements connects *Tandok* with the historical conditions under which traditional healing practices were used. From the participant's perspective, *Tandok* formed part of the community's earlier means of responding to health concerns, particularly in a context associated with the absence or limited presence of doctors. However, the statements represented the participant's understanding of the history of *Tandok* and do not, by themselves, establish the exact historical origin of the practice.

These statements are significant because they show that while some participants could not identify the specific origin or historical beginnings of *Tandok*, they recognized it as an established practice that existed before their own experiences with it. The participants' lack of detailed historical knowledge does not negate the historical significance of the practice. Instead, it indicates that the history of *Tandok* is remembered primarily through lived experience, family transmission, and community continuity rather than through a clearly documented origin story.

Taken together, the accounts of participants demonstrate that the historical significance of *Tandok* lies in its continuity as a traditional healing practice and its transmission across generations. It illustrates the direct intergenerational transmission, while the experience somehow connects the present practitioner with an earlier generation of practitioners. The participants were already part of their community when they were born or growing up. Thus, *Tandok* can be understood historically as a practice sustained through family knowledge, personal experience, and continued community recognition.

The findings also show that participants does not possess a uniform, or comprehensive account of the historical origin of *Tandok*. Some participants were unable to identify when or how the practice began, while others remembered encountering it through parents, older practitioners, or their own childhood experiences. Therefore, the historical significance of *Tandok* in this study is more strongly reflected in its continuity and intergenerational transmission than in a documented account of its origin. This continuity demonstrates how traditional healing knowledge may remain present within a community as it is remembered, practiced, and passed from one generation to another.

4.10 Tandok as an accessible and community-based healing practice social significance

Gie stated how has *tandok* affected the health and wellness of the people in her community that continuously seeks *tandok* treatment:

Almost everyone that availed my service in tandok, I think they feel better, and if they are not feeling well, they came back and they eventually get well. I doubt that there've been an unfortunate result of my tandok treatment since the time we began in 1975 here in Aklan because here in Aklan, there is no practitioner of tandok here.

Gie shared how important *tandok* has been to the lives of the people living in her community that continues to seek her treatment:

All I can say is that since I was born in this world, we've never experienced being brought to the doctor like being bitten, because we focused on tandok because we can say that it is tested and proven by us based on experience, so it depends on a person if they believe. I don't insist or endorse that they need to avail tandok. It depends on you; just try it so that you can attest if tandok is effective for you or not, correct?

Furthermore, attestors of *tandok* also shared why they chose to avail *tandok* treatment. Lyn stated that:

If it is for me, it is better there than the hospital. Why? It does not have, like, I mean, have herbal treatment first, and if it does not work, then seek the help of doctors. With that, your body will not suffer compared to availing the doctor's medication that you don't get well and you get well with that treatment. With that, it's okay, and your body will not have complications if you prioritize it first before the doctor's.

The practice of *tandok*, a traditional healing method in Aklan, Philippines, continues to thrive due to its accessibility, cultural relevance, and strong community trust. Practitioners and recipients of *tandok* highlight its effectiveness in relieving common ailments, often attributing recovery to the treatment's integration of massage and herbal remedies. Many community members prefer *tandok* over formal medical services due to its affordability, proximity, and perceived safety, especially for non-severe conditions. Although not everyone fully subscribes to traditional healing, *tandok* is widely viewed as a first-line or complementary treatment option. The practice's continued relevance is also reinforced by generational knowledge and testimonies of positive experiences, further strengthening its role in community health and wellness. This also aligns with the study of Rondilla et. Al (2021) which found out that folk medicine is perceived to be effective alleviating health concerns. The acquisition of such products is attributed to satisfaction from prior experience, distrust in the current healthcare system, family tradition, and intention to supplement existing medical treatment.

4.11 Tandok as an expression of cultural belief and identity cultural significance

The cultural significance of *Tandok* is reflected in its continued recognition, practice, and transmission within the community. The participants' accounts show that *Tandok* is not understood solely as a method of treatment but as a traditional practice associated

with beliefs, experiences, and knowledge passed from one generation to another. This is particularly evident in Gie's description of *Tandok* as an "inheritance" from his parents:

It's like an inheritance because ever since I was born, this is what I've seen from my parents that's why this is also what I am trying to teach my children, right? By the time comes that I could no longer practice tandok, atleast they could help other people, correct?

This statement demonstrates that *Tandok* forms part of the traditional knowledge transmitted within the family. Gie does not view the practice merely as a technique but as knowledge that he inherited and considers worth passing on to his children. His intention to teach the next generation illustrates how *Tandok* contributes to the continuity of traditional knowledge within the community.

The accounts indicate that belief is an important cultural element in how participants understand and continue to practice *Tandok*. Rather than being uniformly accepted by everyone, the practice was interpreted according to individual experience and belief. The participants therefore demonstrated that cultural knowledge can be maintained through personal experiences that reinforce people's connection to traditional practices.

Tandok becomes part of an individual's cultural experience from childhood. The participant's experience with a previous generation of practitioners also connects the past practice with its present form. In this sense, *Tandok* is culturally sustained not only through formal teaching but also through participation, observation, personal experience, and relationships with practitioners.

A participant recalled that people repeatedly seek the practice and return based on their own experiences. This suggests that *Tandok* continues to receive recognition through community participation and experiential knowledge rather than through formal institutional systems.

The cultural significance of *Tandok* is further reflected in participants' continued acknowledgment of the practice despite the presence of modern healthcare. Liv stated that:

There are a lot of people that got well. I did not hear anything about complications or any unfortunate circumstances that happened to people after receiving tandok. And also, seeing a doctor is the first priority. Tandok is just an option, not that it is something that is the main treatment for illnesses.)

This statement is important because it shows that cultural continuity does not necessarily mean that participants completely reject modern medicine. Instead, *Tandok* remains a recognized traditional practice that exists alongside other forms of healthcare. Its continued presence demonstrates how traditional healing knowledge can persist even as community members have access to contemporary medical services.

The findings are consistent with the Cultural Mapping of Panay and Guimaras through Lunasco (2024), which identifies *Tandok* as an element of intangible cultural heritage and describes it as a traditional healing practice passed down through generations and connected to cultural identity. Similarly, Sosa's study of *Tandok* and *Tawak* in Marinduque found that cultural beliefs surrounding these practices influence people's knowledge, attitudes, and practices concerning animal-bite treatment. These sources support the interpretation that traditional healing practices can function not only as health-related practices but also as forms of cultural knowledge maintained through belief, experience, and intergenerational transmission.

4.12 Summary of themes

The following summarizes the Themes in this study.

Theme 1: Tandok as a Culturally Rooted Healing Tradition

Theme 2: Healing Rituals Through Massage, Suction, and Laceration

Theme 3: Traditional Healing Tools and Materials

Theme 4: Sequential and Experiential Practice of Tandok

Theme 5 : Significance of *Tandok*

5. Findings, conclusions, and recommendations

This study explored the significance of the traditional healing practice *tandok* in the lives of individuals in a rural community. Through qualitative interviews with selected participants, insights were drawn regarding their beliefs, practices, and reasoning behind their preference for *tandok*. The findings revealed a deep interconnection between cultural traditions, accessibility of healthcare, and individual experiences.

5.1 Tandok and its belief

Participants expressed strong belief in *tandok* as a healing method deeply embedded in their cultural identity. For many, it is not merely a treatment but a traditional wisdom passed down through generations. The absence of chemical substances and the perception of natural healing made *tandok* preferable, especially to those with a strong inclination toward indigenous practices. Mostly, individuals who prefer *tandok* rather than medical means argue that it is safer due to its natural way of treatment without

any chemicals entering your body, such as medicines and injections. This is supported by the findings of Lansang and Castro (2019) where traditional healing practices remain a central part of health-seeking behavior in many rural Filipino communities.

5.2 Rituals performed in Tandok

The findings showed that *Tandok* involves a sequence of traditional healing rituals performed by the practitioner. According to the participants, the process generally begins with massaging the patient's back and affected areas to relax the body. This is followed by the application of a horn or suction cup to the skin. The suction is maintained for several minutes before a small laceration may be made using a blade. The horn or cup is then reapplied to the area as part of the traditional healing process. The participants' accounts indicate that these rituals are performed according to knowledge and procedures learned through traditional practice. The sequence of massage, suction, and, when practiced, laceration forms part of the recognizable process of *Tandok*. Although the procedure may vary depending on the practitioner or condition being addressed, the participants identified these practices as important components of the traditional healing ritual.

5.3 Materials used in performing Tandok

The findings identified several materials associated with the practice of *Tandok*. These include the animal horn or *sungay*, suction or cupping materials, and a small blade used for laceration. According to the practitioner, the horn or suction material is applied to the patient's back after massage, while a blade may be used to create a small laceration as part of the traditional procedure. The participant also mentioned the use of a Chinese cupping set as another tool that may be incorporated into the practice. The materials used in *Tandok* therefore form an important part of the traditional knowledge and procedure associated with the practice. Their use demonstrates that *Tandok* is performed through specific tools and materials that have been maintained through the practitioner's experience and traditional knowledge.

5.4 Steps in performing Tandok

The findings revealed that *Tandok* is performed through a traditional sequence of procedures involving preparation, massage, suction, and, when deemed appropriate by the practitioner, laceration. The practitioner first massages the patient's back and affected areas before applying the horn or suction cup. The suction is maintained for approximately five to ten minutes. A small laceration may then be made using a blade, after which the horn or suction cup is reapplied. According to the practitioner, the process may be repeated depending on the condition and the procedure being performed. The participants also revealed that the performance of *Tandok* is influenced by the practitioner's knowledge, experience, and judgment. The practitioner explained that laceration is not always necessary and that the procedure may be performed without it. This indicates that while *Tandok* follows recognizable traditional practices, its actual performance may vary according to the practitioner and the perceived needs of the person receiving the treatment. The practice is therefore both procedural and experience-based, with knowledge of its performance transmitted through traditional learning and continued practice.

5.5 Significance of Tandok

Personal and familial experiences reinforced the belief in *tandok*. Those who experienced positive health outcomes, such as recovery from illness or relief from snake or dog bites, developed a consistent trust in the practice. The repeated use of *tandok* was not just habit-based but experience-validated. These positive outcomes weren't isolated incidents; they were recurring experiences that solidified belief in *tandok* as a reliable healing method within the community. This experiential validation fostered a deep-seated trust that transcended mere cultural adherence, most especially among people who seek such treatment, as well as in referring it to those they believe, that are in need. This finding is also similar to the finding of Sosa (2016) on how traditional healing practices like *tandok* and *tawak* influence how people in Marinduque respond to animal bites. Despite knowing about modern treatments, many still relied on traditional methods due to cost, accessibility, and past positive experiences. The continued use of these practices was not only cultural but also based on participants' perceived experiences of healing or improvement, which strengthened trust and encouraged others to do the same.

5.6 Community influence and social norms

Decision-making regarding *tandok* was also shaped by social observations. The testimonies of others and visible results influenced individuals to either continue or begin using the practice. In many cases, once someone experienced or witnessed effective outcomes, they became lifelong supporters of *tandok*. It is also the word-of-mouth which makes *tandok* more known to people, and why its survival has been strengthened over time. With more seekers of *tandok* specifically rural individuals is the reason of its continued practice, specifically in treatment in rural areas. This is also supported by the study of Sosa III (2016) whereas his study underscores how community influence and social norms play a crucial role in health-seeking behaviors, particularly in the preference for traditional healing practices like *tandok*.

5.7 Historical significance of Tandok

Based on the findings, *Tandok* is presented as inherited knowledge that has continued across generations. The accounts of the participants, however, did not specifically state the exact timeline of the emergence of *tandok* as a traditional healing practice, but as a practice that was already present during their childhood and was learned through observation and personal experience. As per the practitioner, she stated that her knowledge on practicing *tandok* was an inheritance from her parents and that she is also

teaching it to her children so that it may also continue to be practiced. These accounts indicate that the continuity of *tandok* is strongly related to intergenerational transmission of the knowledge. Also, the participants stated that the practice also became known due to the limited access to doctors and medical services.

Social Significance of *Tandok*: The findings indicated that *tandok* has social significance through its accessibility, affordability, community trust, and shared experiences. Participants described the practice as an available option for people who may have difficulty accessing formal medical services due to its convenience and affordability compared to medical treatments. Also, the experiences of the participants about the effectiveness of *tandok* to their health is one factor in why they frequently seek the said treatment rather than seeking it from medical facilities. These findings suggest that *tandok* is socially significant in the community due to its accessibility, personal experiences of attestors, trust, and individual beliefs.

5.8 Cultural significance

The findings demonstrated that *tandok* is culturally significant because it embodies traditional beliefs, healing practices, rituals, and locally transmitted knowledge. Participants in this study associated *tandok* with particular understandings of illness and healing, including their beliefs concerning muscle stiffness, pain, spasms, fever, uric acid, and conditions associated with not only dogs but other animal bites as well. These findings reflect how community members interpret bodily discomfort and healing through knowledge passed down through experiences and traditions.

5.9 Conclusions

Based on the findings, the following conclusions were drawn:

Tandok remains a meaningful traditional healing practice that bridges cultural tradition, personal experience, and the practical realities of healthcare within the community. The findings showed that participants' beliefs in *tandok* are shaped by cultural knowledge, familial transmission, and their own experiences of seeking and receiving the practice. The study also documented that *tandok* involves recognizable rituals, including massage, suction using a horn or cupping material, and, when considered appropriate by the practitioner, small lacerations. Its materials and procedures reflect traditional knowledge that has been learned through observation, experience, and continued practice.

The continued use of *tandok* is also influenced by social and practical factors. Participants described the practice as accessible and affordable, while personal experiences, community observations, word-of-mouth, and trust contributed to its continued use. For some participants, *tandok* serves as an option when formal healthcare is perceived as difficult to access or costly, while others recognize the importance of consulting health professionals. These findings suggest that the persistence of *tandok* is supported by an interaction of cultural beliefs, socioeconomic considerations, personal experiences, and community relationships. The Health Belief Model, Social Cognitive Theory, and Cultural Relativity Theory provide perspectives for understanding how perceived benefits and barriers, observational learning, and culturally shared meanings may influence participants' health-related choices.

Tandok is more than a healing procedure; it is a cultural practice that reflects traditional knowledge, communal relationships, and experiences developed across generations. Its historical significance is evident in its intergenerational transmission and continued presence in the community, while its social significance is reflected in accessibility, affordability, trust, and shared experiences. Its cultural significance is manifested through traditional beliefs, rituals, materials, and understandings of healing. Thus, documenting *tandok* contributes to the preservation and understanding of local ethnomedicinal knowledge while recognizing that the findings describe the beliefs and experiences of the participants rather than establishing the medical efficacy of the practice.

5.10 Recommendations

5.11 For rural Filipino communities

Recognize and value the role of *tandok* as part of the community's identity and health resource. The practice affirms cultural roots while promoting informed health decisions, especially in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas where traditional healing remains a trusted and relied-upon method.

5.12 For traditional healers (*Manugtandok*)

This study documents and affirms the knowledge and practices of traditional healers, recognizing their significant role in community wellness and cultural preservation. It opens possibilities for constructive dialogue and collaboration with the formal health sector, especially in bridging gaps in primary care.

5.13 For Barangay health workers and rural health units

Use the insights from this research to design and implement culturally sensitive health education programs. By acknowledging and respecting local belief systems, health workers can more effectively encourage safe and integrative health practices.

5.14 For the department of health (DOH)

Incorporate indigenous knowledge into public health planning and outreach. Programs related to rabies prevention, wound care, and early intervention should consider traditional healing as part of community behavior and create strategies that do not dismiss but rather complement such practices.

5.15 For future researchers

This study can serve as a foundational reference for future research into traditional healing, rural health behaviors, and cultural practices in the Philippines. It contributes to the growing literature on ethnomedicine, local health knowledge, and indigenous belief systems.

5.16 For educators and students

The results from this study could provide locally relevant material for instruction in health education, *Araling Panlipunan*, and Social Sciences. The intersection of health and culture presented by *tandok* can be used to foster a deeper appreciation of Filipino heritage in academic settings.

5.17 For local government units (LGUs)

Utilize the findings to craft localized health and cultural development programs. These initiatives can promote both community well-being and heritage conservation by integrating safe traditional practices into broader health and educational objectives.

5.18 For the national commission for culture and the arts (NCCA)

Support documentation and preservation efforts of indigenous healing knowledge like *tandok*. This aligns with NCCA's mission to safeguard intangible cultural heritage and can contribute to policy and advocacy frameworks for indigenous knowledge systems.

The recommendation synthesizes the voices of those who keep the tradition of *tandok* alive, and not out of superstition, but through lived experience, economic reality, and cultural wisdom. The study affirms the continued relevance of traditional medicine and urges a respectful and inclusive approach to healthcare development in rural communities.

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