

# Traditional Medicine as Mentawai Local Wisdom

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**Abstract:** The Mentawai community still have a strong culture and holds a profound reverence for their heritage, particularly in the realm of traditional medicine. They continue to place significant value on traditional healing methods alongside modern medical treatments, comprising two distinct complementary healthcare systems. In this modern sophisticated era, the use of traditional medicine in Mongan Poula village has been marginalized or ignored because of the emergence of modern medicine and the entry of health teams in villages, such as doctors and nurses. Modern medicines are widely circulated in villages and even sold to stalls. This research aims to examine the media used in traditional medicine, the process of treatment, and traditional Mentawai medicine that have an impact on local wisdom. This research utilized a qualitative approach and ethnographic research type. The informant selection technique was carried out by purposive sampling. Data collection techniques used in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation studies. Data analysis employed an interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman. The results of this study revealed that in accordance with the formulation of the problem, including: Traditional medicine media, Traditional medicine process in Mentawai society, and Mentawai traditional medicine that has an impact on local wisdom. Based on the formulation of the problem, it shows that Sikerei traditional medicine is used to treat sick people.

**Keywords:** Local Wisdom; Sikerei; Traditional Medicine

## Introduction

The Mentawai Islands are a group of small islands geographically located in the Indian Ocean and administratively included in the territory of West Sumatra, Indonesia. This island is located in the western part of West Sumatra. Among the 40 small islands, only four large islands are inhabited, namely Videlicet, Siberut Island. It is the largest island located in the north of Mentawai Island. The Mentawai Islands Regency was formed under Indonesian Law No. 49 of 1999 and named after its original geographical name. In stages, the Regent's office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs located at KM.12 Tuapeijat, the capital of the Mentawai Islands region, was inaugurated in 2005. The center of government of the Mentawai Islands region is located in Tuapejat, and the Topejat region is located in Sipora island. All central government services are carried out in Tuapejat. The Mentawai community still have a strong culture and holds a profound reverence for their

heritage, particularly in the realm of traditional medicine. They continue to place significant value on traditional healing methods alongside modern medical treatments, comprising two distinct complementary healthcare systems (Marques et al., 2021).

Usually, medical treatment uses drugs by medical personnel or doctors, while traditional medicine is treatment through the intermediary of Sikerei or *shamans*, using natural plants and formulated in a traditional way (Fanisah et al., 2023; Deswika et al., 2024). Traditional medicine is still passed down from generation to generation based on ancestors, beliefs, or native customs (Liu et al., 2023; Satrianegara et al., 2021). The utilization of traditional medicine media becomes an important aspect in preserving the local wisdom and culture of a community (Hilman & Hendriawan, 2018; Akhmar et al., 2023). In Mongan Poula village, local wisdom in the use of traditional medicine has become a common part of daily life. This village is a clear example of how the tradition of hereditary medicine has been

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deeply rooted and has become a valuable heritage that is upheld by the local community. Local wisdom in the utilization of traditional medicine media in Mongan Poula village not only reflects rich cultural values, but is also a form of response to the health challenges and needs of the local community. The researchers examined how this local wisdom becomes a reflection of daily life in the village, as well as its positive impact on the well-being and cultural identity of the Mentawai people (Munandar et al., 2023). Local wisdom or traditional wisdom is a unique knowledge to a particular community or culture that has developed over time as a result of the process of reciprocal correlation between the community and its environment (Diver et al., 2019; Gede Agung et al., 2024; Nugroho et al., 2023). Local wisdom is the wise attitude of a community towards its environment by maintaining, caring for, protecting, and utilizing it for living purposes.

In the Mentawai community there are also shamans who can provide treatment to sick people. Shamans in the Mentawai community are commonly called Sikerei (treating the sick). Sikerei also have expertise as a ceremonial leader and relate to the spirit world. Referring to the original belief of the Mentawai people themselves called Arat Sabulungan, which means arat means custom, Sa means around and bulungan means leaves. Sabulungan was born because the ritual always uses leaves that are believed to mediate the relationship between humans and god, called Ulaui Manua. (Sitanggang, 2022). The rapid development of science in the modern era is certainly increasing education among the community and will bring changes and mindsets to each community towards a better direction. But the reality is not so possible, because many of the people of Mongan Poula Village do treatment in a traditional way compared to medical treatment and even from educated people still do traditional treatment with sikerei and siagai laggek.

Sikerei said that the Mongan Poula village community of the Mentawai islands has a wide range of media used in traditional medicine, most of which are closely related to the surrounding natural resources and spiritual beliefs. Mentawai is famous for its many forests or large trees, the people there do not want to cut down the forest because of the many benefits such as ombuk (bamboo) trees besides being used for the staple food sago, can also be used as an alternative in the media used by sikerei in making traditional medicine. There are several media used by sikerei in treating tasapo disease (the anger of supernatural creatures) which are used as tools in traditional medicine such as ombuk (bamboo), bulungan kan (taro leaves, and Gugundui (grater). This bamboo tree has many benefits such as in the fields of health, skills, building etc. The people of Mongan Poula

Village also preserve the local wisdom of their surrounding environment.

Local wisdom in traditional medicine can be interpreted as community behavior to utilize the flora and fauna in their environment for public health (Wibowo et al., 2021; Fadilla et al., 2023; Nugroho et al., 2022). Local wisdom in traditional medicine in Mongan Poula village not only reflects rich cultural values, but also a form of response to the challenges and health needs of the local community. In the issue of traditional medicine, this can be seen that local wisdom is a reflection of daily life in Mongan Poula village. In this modern sophisticated era, the use of traditional medicine in Mongan Poula village has been marginalized or ignored because of the emergence of modern medicine and the entry of health teams in villages, such as doctors and nurses. Modern medicines are widely circulated in villages and even sold to stalls (Yu, 2021). However, in Mongan Poula village, traditional medicine is still used as a treatment technique for the local community (Henri & Erpandi, 2021; Mutola et al., 2021).

Through this method, the local community not only heals physical ailments, but also maintains a spiritual and ecological balance that is closely correlated to their surrounding environment (Abida et al., 2023); (Buckton et al., 2023). For example, people who are severely ill understand that Sikerei, when picking leaves, take care of them and do not pick them carelessly before they become medicine as an inheritance from the ancestors of the Mentawai people. When someone is seriously ill, they must kill a 2-year-old pig so as to preserve the local wisdom of the Mentawai people. The utilization of traditional medicine is an important aspect in preserving the local wisdom and culture of a community (Ramadhani et al., 2021); (Supiandi et al., 2023).

Based on the background above, this research is a form of refinement of previous research, by examining the existence of traditional medicine as local wisdom so that the Mentawai people still utilize traditional medicine as an alternative to community medicine in Mongan Poula village. The media used traditional medicine from picking leaves to mixing into medicine, in traditional medicine, especially Mentawai, and there is a process of sikerei in carrying out traditional medicine to the sick people.

## Method

This type of research is qualitative through ethnographic approach. In this study, the researcher describes in depth the traditional medicine as local wisdom in Mentawai community. Through this

ethnographic approach, the researcher explores the treatment actors of Mentawai people who have the ability and knowledge to cure sick people, the traditional treatment media of Mentawai people who come from natural objects such as media in traditional treatment of plants, which include leaves, stems, roots, and flowers. Grated coconut, and pig's blood. The process of traditional medicine in the Mentawai community, carried out by drinking, flushing, applying and massaging throughout the body, traditional medicine of the Mentawai community has an impact on the preservation of local culture, which has a positive impact on always protecting and maintaining the preservation of the culture of medicinal plants planted by the Mentawai community and at the same time can cure nonmedically and nonchemically.

The research was conducted in Mongan Poula Village, North Siberut District, Mentawai Islands Regency. The data collection techniques used were observation, interview, and document study. This research uses source triangulation as a data validity technique. The data analysis technique refers to the concept of Miles and Huberman in (Hanson-DeFusco, 2023). Data collection is carried out until it reaches a saturation point. Activities in data analysis include data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.

## Result and Discussion

The media used in treating the sick people in traditional medicine, such as in Guna-guna disease performed by Sikerei are: Mentawai traditional medicine, especially that performed by Sikerei (shamans or spiritual practitioners), various media were used as aids in the healing process. The following is an explanation of the commonly used media as follows:

### *Bamboo Stems*

Bamboo sticks can be used as a tool to direct or move spiritual energy; Shamans may use bamboo sticks to massage or touch the patient as part of the healing process.

### *Grate the Coconut*

Grated coconut is commonly used to obtain medicinal ingredients from coconut, which are then applied to the patient's body; Coconut oil or coconut powder produced from grated coconut can have healing value in the view of traditional Mentawai medicine.

### *Plate*

Plates can be used as ritual tools or mediums that help shamans communicate with the spiritual world.; Shamans may perform a series of movements or plate

manipulations as part of the consultation process with spirits or supernatural entities.

### *Large Bucket*

Large buckets may be used in a variety of ways. For example, to wash or cleanse the patient as a symbol of purifying the body of negative energy; The water in the bucket can also be treated or blessed by the shaman and then used in the healing process. Each medium used has a symbolic and spiritual meaning in the context of Mentawai traditional medicine. Shamans rely on their hereditary knowledge and spiritual skills to carry out the healing process. The use of these mediums can also vary, as each shaman may have different practices and techniques in traditional medicine:

### *Traditional Medicine Process of Mentawai People*

Traditional Mentawai medicine is a system of medicine still practiced by the Mentawai tribe, an ethnic group that inhabits the Mentawai islands in Indonesia. Mentawai traditional medicine has its own characteristics and involves various cultural and spiritual practices. Here are some of the elements that are commonly contained in the traditional Mentawai medicine process:

### *Spiritual and Cultural Attitudes*

Traditional Mentawai medicine is heavily influenced by spiritual beliefs and local culture. In the treatment process, shamans or people with specialized knowledge of medicine will play an important role.

### *Ritual and Prayer*

Rituals and prayers are often an integral part of traditional Mentawai medicine; In the process of treatment, there can be special ceremonies performed to invoke the support of spiritual spirits or supernatural entities.

### *Use of Medicinal Plants*

Traditional Mentawai medicine often involves the use of medicinal plants; Medicinal plants are believed to have healing powers and are used in the form of concoctions or traditional medicines.

### *Energy Manipulation*

Some Mentawai medicine practices involve the manipulation of energy or spiritual forces to restore balance in the body; Shamans may use various techniques, such as massage or touch to direct positive energy and cure illnesses.

### *Understanding the Traditional Body System*

In traditional Mentawai medicine, there is a specific understanding of the body system and how disease is viewed from their traditional perspective.



Consultation with Spiritual Spirits




Shamans or practitioners of traditional Mentawai medicine may consult with spiritual spirits or supernatural entities for guidance or instructions in the healing process.

Understanding Natural Cycles

An understanding of natural cycles, including lunar or seasonal cycles, can influence traditional Mentawai medicine. It is important to remember that traditional Mentawai medicine is part of the cultural heritage of the Mentawai tribe and is unique in its own right. Although modern medicine is also available in the area, several Mentawai people still choose or combine traditional medicine with conventional medical methods.

In the traditional treatment process of Sapo Disease, it is believed that the devil enters into the human body due to various reasons, such as passing through areas with incompatible smells. This condition is then termed as Sapo Disease. The medicinal herbs used in treating this include *Sanggelei (Puring)*, *Spikpak (Jerangau)*, *Bekeu Boi Sainak (Hibiscus)*, *Pulaigak (ginger)*, and *Kopok (kencur)*. After the leaves are collected, they are separated one by one and immediately grated after being grated, then, they are immediately put into a plate and then drunk and bathed. Rituals are carried out before taking Sikerei medicine read first, namely “the devil who entered his body please come out because we have given him medicine.”

Table 1. Medicinal Plant Types

Name of Medicine	Image	Efficacy
Gojo/ Galangal		Boils
Bekeu Boi Sainak / Hibiscus		Sapo
Laigak Saileu / Temu Lawak		Fever Medicine

Name of Medicine	Image	Efficacy
Pelekak / Kecombrang		Nenei (Enter the Devil)
Spikpak / Jerangaau		Stomach Medicine
Surak Sikorok/Puring		Chest Medicine
Sipulenggek / Hajuang		Eye Medication



Name of Medicine	Image	Efficacy
Bekeu Simabo		Chest Medicine

Traditional Mentawai Medicine Impacts the Local Wisdom

The utilization of traditional medicine media in Mongan Poula village, North Siberut Sub-district, Mentawai Islands regency, has provided significant positive impacts on the lives of local people and the Mentawai cultural heritage as a whole. Some of the positive impacts that can be identified include: Maintenance of Cultural Heritage, the utilization of traditional medicine media has helped to maintain and preserve local knowledge that has been passed down from generation to generation. This includes knowledge about the use of medicinal plants, traditional rituals, and typical Mentawai medicine methods. Thus, Mentawai culture and identity are maintained and passed on to future generations; Public Health Improvement, traditional medicine mediums are often an effective source of health care for the people in this village. The people of Mongan Poula can treat various types of diseases and their health complaints using these traditional methods. In Mongan Poula village, traditional medicine has become an integral part of daily life.

This village is a clear example of how the tradition of traditional medicine has been deeply rooted and become a valuable heritage upheld by the local community, which many modern societies no longer understand (Blokker & Vieten, 2022; Stewart, 2024); (Paley et al., 2023). Traditional medicine uses natural ingredients, such as plants that are commonly obtained and used for generations, as well as formulated using ingredients from nature to be used as a treatment for various health problems (Chaachouay & Zidane, 2024). Various types of plants can be used as medicinal ingredients that are mixed with other natural ingredients into a traditional potion (Syahdar et al., 2020). Plants used as traditional medicinal ingredients can be taken from the roots, stems, leaves, flowers, or fruit (Regina Marinta Sinaga et al., 2021). The plant parts used as traditional medicine are processed in a simple

way, such as boiling, squeezing, or pounding (Maling et al., 2024).

The traditional medicine system is a socio-cultural phenomenon that has been integrated into the lives of the Mentawai people (Rahayu et al., 2024; Boedhihartono, 2017). The system is now used by the Mentawai people to overcome various diseases (Pascapurnama et al., 2018). The advancement of technology and science has not been able to eliminate the meaning of traditional medicine among the Mentawai people (Wiratma & Yuliamiaستی, 2023). However, they have long had knowledge of traditional medicine in various alternatives with other combination ingredients, but it has not been widely researched and known by many people (Hosseinzadeh et al., 2015). Mentawai people also have Shamans who can provide treatment to sick people called Sikerei (treating the sick) (Singh, 2018). They also have expertise as a ceremonial leader and relates to the spirit world. Referring to the original belief of the Mentawai people themselves called *Arat Sabulungan*, which means *Arat* means custom, *Sa* means around and *bulungan* means leaves. *Sabulungan* was born because the ritual always uses leaves that are believed to mediate the relationship between humans and God, called *Ulau Manua* (Wijarnako et al., 2023).

In the Mentawai language, medicine means *laggek*, while the person who treats is called *sipasilaggek*. The term *sipasilaggek* can be applied to medical workers including medicine men or health workers, *simatak* or *sikerei* (people who treat spiritually related to the human spirit or soul). While *simabesik* (people who are treated) are those who suffer from *besik* (illness). There are two kinds of traditional Mentawai medicine (Darmanto, 2024), namely natural treatment due to diseases that can be treated according to the level with *simatak* (treating minor illnesses), *siagai laggek* (treating moderate illnesses) and *sikerei* (treating hard or severe illnesses), as well as supernatural treatment for diseases caused by *bajou* (hard or severe). This treatment will be carried out

in the *pabetei* rituals (*guna-guna*) which can only be done by *sikerei*, especially those affected by hard diseases where *simatak* and *siagai laggek* cannot treat hard or severe diseases, only treatment can be done with *sikerei* (Saleleubaja, 2023). There are two categories of healers in Mentawai, namely *sikerei* and *simatak siagai laggek*. For *sikerei*, the cause of illness occurs due to disruption of the soul caused by evil spirits, while *simatak siagai laggek* is caused by illness usually or mildly occurs due to a disturbance of balance in the body. Treatment carried out by *sikerei* is generally by carrying out ceremonies or rituals, while *simatak siagai laggek* without having rituals (Ramadani et al., 2022).

Treatment carried out by *sikerei* and *simatak siagai laggek* usually utilizes plants that are around as medicine (Abdullah et al., 2023). The plants used as medicinal herbs are a reflection of the culture of the Mentawai people, namely Arat Sabulungan. This is in line with the concept of culture as a knowledge system (Lee et al., 2021). For example, if someone is sick, the treatment is mostly traditional. If someone is seriously ill, then the one who understands medicine is called a wise man or *Sikerei*. When picking the leaves, take care of them, and don't pick them carelessly or before they become medicine. There is a meaning or value passed down by the ancestors of the Mentawai people. If someone is seriously ill and old, then they must slaughter a 2-year-old pig, which can be said to be old, because there are values that are the basis of human culture.

## Conclusion

Traditional medicine is a medicine that is prepared by utilizing plants that are in the surrounding environment that are used for medicine. The use of plants used as traditional medicine has become a culture that is inherent in the lives of the Melntawai community to overcome health problems. In the Melntawai community, there is a healer other than *sikelreli*, namely *siagai laggelk*. The medicine carried out by this *siagai laggelk* is usually without carrying out ritual procedures only by utilizing plants as medicine and *sikelreli* carries out the medicine with rituals.

There are four traditional healers in the Mentawai community that researchers found, namely, *sikerei*, *simatak*, *sirua mata* and *siagai laggek*. These healers can cure diseases by using traditional herbal medicine and practices carried out by *sikerei* using healing rituals. While *simatak*, *sirua mata* and *siagai laggek* without using healing rituals only use herbal medicine from medicinal plants such as roots, stems, leaves and flowers.

Traditional healing herbs are medicines or tools used in traditional healing practices to cure diseases or maintain health. These herbs often include a variety of natural ingredients, including medicinal plants, minerals, animals, or other ingredients that are considered to have healing properties by traditional healing practitioners. Traditional healing procedures include 4 parts that will be studied from the type of disease, the herbs used in traditional healing, the method or procedure of traditional healing and the ritual in traditional healing. Treatment procedures are usually by massaging, drinking herbal medicine, bathing in herbal medicine, being doused, and being sprayed. The impact of traditional involvement on the preservation of local culture. That is, it has a positive impact on various traditional cultural preservation of the involvement of the Melntawai community. Traditional involvement in the culture of the Melntawai community is not just a mere practice, but also a priceless cultural heritage.

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## Author Contributions

Conceptualization, methodology, validation, formal analysis, investigation, A. P. S; resources, data curation, writing—original draft preparation, writing—review and editing, visualization, A. E. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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The author declares that he has no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this scientific article.

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