

## The Therapeutic Impact of Bontok "Chaw-es" Ritual Healing: Integrating Indigenous Practices into Modern Mental Health Frameworks

Annie Lourie Y. Paredes<sup>1\*</sup>, Annie Grail F. Ekid<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>\*Mountain Province State University, Bontoc, Mt. Province,  
Email ID : Philippines, lourie421@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup>Mountain Province State University, Bontoc, Mt. Province, Philippines,  
Email ID : anniegrailekid@yahoo.com

### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to investigate the therapeutic potential of the Bontok Chaw-es ritual healing practice, as well as its cross-cultural significance in the context of contemporary mental health, and to compare the healing practices utilized by Aboriginal people. The research investigates the shared therapeutic principles that underlie these many healing systems. These principles emphasize the importance of community involvement, emotional catharsis, and spiritual intervention. The research is grounded in qualitative data from experiences such as storytelling, interviews, and participant observation. According to the findings, culturally distinctive healing practices, such as Chaw-es, provide useful insights for contemporary counseling approaches, particularly in the areas of trauma recovery, cultural sensitivity, and community-based treatment. The implications for mental health education, counseling, and policymaking, to push for the incorporation of indigenous healing methods into mental health practices, are discussed..

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

One of the most complicated and multifaceted aspects of human existence is the interplay that exists between culture, mental health, physical well-being, and spirituality at the same time. Diverse cultures, each with their unique worldview, provide a variety of viewpoints on the linked aspects of life. These perspectives may be found all around the world. When individuals connect with healthcare and mental health experts, they carry their values, belief systems, and cultural backgrounds with them. This has a significant impact on how symptoms are presented and perceived. The diagnosis and treatment of mental health problems are made significantly more difficult by the cultural influence that influences them.

Indigenous populations, such as the Bontok people who live in the Cordillera region of the Philippines, bring with them a wealth of traditions of traditional healing methods that are intricately connected with their cultural, social, psychological, and spiritual aspects. The purpose of these activities is to promote holistic well-being, which encompasses the spiritual, mental, physical, and psychological components of health. These practices include herbal treatments, ceremonies, and rituals. For indigenous tribes such as the Bontoks, maintaining rituals that promote peace with God, spirits, environment, ancestors, and kin is an essential part of living within their culture. According to their worldview, sickness is a result of disruptions in the equilibrium of connections with these elements, and they place an emphasis on healing as an act of reconciliation.

Within the larger framework of indigenous cultures, the spiritual orientation of the Bontok society and the

employment of religious rites are essential characteristics that deeply impact the cultural psychology of the Bontok people. The Bontok types of indigenous healing are founded on indigenous knowledge, traditions, beliefs, and practices. These forms of indigenous healing reflect a perspective that regards health and wellness as the harmonious integration of the mind, body, and spirit. A person's imbalance can be caused by any deficit in these interconnected characteristics, which can then lead to a variety of health problems of varying severity. The Bontok people continue to employ modern mental health methods in addition to their traditional healing ways, despite the fact that Christianity, education, and urbanization have all had an impact on their culture. This dual-use model is prevalent among indigenous groups, and it reflects a combination of traditional and modern methods to the healing process.

In recent decades, there has been a shift in perspective on ancient healing methods such as ritual healing, according to Sax (2014). Previously, some people have considered these practices to be magical and otherworldly. There is a growing recognition in the contemporary literature of the significant importance that traditional healing procedures play in the preservation of the health of indigenous communities (RCAP, 1996; Attagutsiaq et al., 2003; Roue, 2006; Williams, 2001; Edge & McCallum, 2006). The attention shifts from the therapist to the client as a result of new models that highlight the significance of the narratives and belief systems that are distinctive to the context of the client. Because of this, the combination of conventional psychotherapy and traditional healing techniques has emerged as a popular trend in the field of mental health treatment (Levin et al., 1997).

When there is a rise in the number of people experiencing mental health problems all over the world, it is vital to investigate traditional healing methods in order to address this urgent public health matter. There has been a rise in the prevalence of mental problems, particularly anxiety and depressive disorders, which has been made worse by occurrences such as the COVID-19 pandemic. One country in particular that is struggling with a huge load of mental health issues is the Philippines. These issues have ramifications for both physical health and total well-being. According to the World Health Organization (2022), the Philippines has the third highest rate of mental health problems in the Western Pacific Region. Furthermore, mental, neurological, and substance use illness is the third most common disability in the Philippines (<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1677897/mental-health-day-the-need-to-defuse-a-ticking-time-bomb-for-millions>).

As a result of the fact that individuals may be dissuaded from seeking assistance due to cultural stigmas and bad attitudes of mental disease, it is essential to comprehend and address the various cultural perspectives of mental medical health. As a result of the enormous influence that religious beliefs and cultural norms have on attitudes toward mental health care, it is essential to establish programs and services that are culturally sensitive and accessible to a wide range of populations. With a particular emphasis on the Bontok Chaw-es ritual healing technique, the purpose of this research is to investigate the experiences of clients who have been touched by indigenous healing traditions. The objective of this research is to discover the fundamental principles and structures that are responsible for the positive outcomes that are associated with transpersonal psychotherapy and mental wellness. It is possible for us to have a more profound comprehension of the lasting relevance and therapeutic efficacy of ancient healing techniques in the contemporary world if we shed light on the psychological components of Bontoc Chaw-es.

### 1.2 Research Objectives

This study seeks to explore the therapeutic principles of the *Chaw-es* ritual and its potential application in modern mental health frameworks. Specifically, it investigates:

1. How the *Chaw-es* ritual functions as a therapeutic system within the Bontok community.
2. The perceived efficacy of *Chaw-es* among healers, clients, and medical professionals.
3. The commonalities between Bontok and Aboriginal healing practices, with implications for modern mental health education and counseling.

### 1.3. Significance

Considering the growing incidence of mental health problems all over the world, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is imperative that therapeutic approaches that are sensitive to different cultures be established. An approach to dealing with traumatic experiences and mental health that is culturally specific but has the potential to be universal is provided by the *Chaw-es* ritual. This study makes a contribution to the understanding of how indigenous

healing traditions might be incorporated into contemporary mental health practices, particularly in settings that are characterized by a multicultural composition.

## 2. RELATED LITERATURE

### 2.1. Healing and Mental Health in Indigenous Communities

In indigenous healing systems, the interdependence of a person's physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being is given a high level of importance. As is the case with many other traditional traditions, the Bontok healing ritual *Chaw-es* places an emphasis on spiritual intervention and requires the participation of the community. This is similar to the holistic techniques that are found in various indigenous cultures, such as the healing methods used by Aboriginal people, which likewise place an emphasis on the interconnectedness of life, spirituality, and community (Dein, 2020; Lee et al., 1992).

Aboriginal healing practices, for instance, incorporate activities that take place in groups, such as smudging, Healing Circles, and the utilization of traditional symbols, such as the Medicine Wheel. According to Edge and McCallum (2006), the purpose of these practices is to bring about a state of harmony between the individual, the community, and the environment. According to research conducted by Nordje et al. (2016), such techniques have been shown to be beneficial in lowering symptoms of anxiety and depression, as well as providing people with psychosocial support.

### 2.2. Combining Traditional Healing Methods with Contemporary Mental Health Practices

There is a growing body of research that supports the idea that historic treatments should be incorporated into contemporary mental health care approaches. Through the engagement of the individual's cultural and spiritual frameworks, the provision of a sense of control, the reduction of fear, and the enhancement of emotional resilience, indigenous practices such as *Chaw-es* are able to treat mental illness (Hinde, 1999; Jilek, 2002). The authors Levin et al. (1997) highlight the significance of acknowledging traditional healing techniques in mental health settings. They point out that incorporating these practices can lead to improved therapy outcomes, particularly among indigenous communities.

Furthermore, according to Frank and Frank's (1991) Common Factors Theory, all types of healing, whether traditional or contemporary, have fundamental therapeutic components in common. These components include a confiding connection, a healing environment, and emotionally charged rituals associated with the healing process. Both the community aspect and the spiritual intervention of the *Chaw-es* ritual provide a culturally grounded therapeutic experience. These features are obviously apparent in the *Chaw-es* ritual.

### 2.3. Recovery from Emotional Trauma and Spiritual Rejuvenation

Traditional healing therapies, like as the *Chaw-es*, frequently incorporate elements of emotional discharge and spiritual purification into their procedures. In his

article from 1992, Schumaker makes the argument that rituals have the ability to alleviate tension, offer purpose, and improve social support, all of which are essential for mental health. This is supported by the findings of Portman and Garrett (2006), who discovered that Aboriginal healing traditions, which include activities such as talking circles and smudging, encourage the expression of emotions and the formation of social bonds. In a similar vein, the application of chanting, storytelling, and participation from the community in the Chaw-es ceremony is congruent with these therapeutic components.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research Design

To investigate the therapeutic effects of the Chaw-es ritual, this study utilized a qualitative research approach. The investigation was carried out with a cross-cultural approach, with the intention of contrasting the healing practices of the Bontok people with the healing procedures utilized by the Aboriginal people. The gathering of data was carried out through the use of storytelling, interviews, and participant observation, which resulted in a detailed and comprehensive description of the Chaw-es healing process.

#### 3.2. Participants of the Study

In the course of the research, fifteen key informants from the Bontok community participated. These included five culture bearers, who are community elders who carry out the Chaw-es ceremony, five customers who have participated in the ritual, and five medical practitioners. Through the use of purposive sampling, the participants were chosen, with a particular emphasis placed on persons who had personal involvement with the ritual.

#### 3.3. Data Gathering Procedure

In-depth interviews with clients, cultural bearers, and medical specialists were conducted in order to collect the necessary data. Storytelling was utilized in order to elicit the experiences of the Chaw-es ceremony from the participants, which enabled an authentic representation of the healing process to be carried out. Additionally, the researchers documented the components of the Chaw-es ritual as well as the therapeutic effects of the ritual through participant observation that was carried out during the ceremonies.

#### 3.4. Analysis of the Data

For the purpose of determining the fundamental therapeutic ideas that underlie the Chaw-es ritual, thematic analysis was utilized. Through the utilization of open and axial coding, particular themes arose from the data. These themes included emotional release, spiritual intervention, and communal support. The Common Factors Theory developed by Frank and Frank (1991) served as the basis for the study, which enabled the researchers to establish a connection between the findings and more comprehensive treatment frameworks.

## 4. THE DISCUSSION AND THE RESULTS

#### 4.1. Chaw-es's Therapeutic Principles and Principles

A number of therapeutic ideas that are utilized in

contemporary mental health techniques are embodied in the Chaw-es ritual. These principles include emotional catharsis, social support, and spiritual healing services. It was noted by the participants that the ritual assisted them in recovering from traumatic experiences, reducing anxiety, and regaining emotional equilibrium. It was believed that the communal aspect of Chaw-es, which included activities such as chanting, storytelling, and spiritual intervention, was significant to the effectiveness of the therapy.

#### Case Study No.1: Recovery from Trauma

The Chaw-es ritual was recounted by a government employee who had participated in a harrowing search-and-rescue effort following a landslide. He stated that the ritual assisted him in overcoming the lingering pictures of the tragedy. Immediately following the performance of the ritual, he stated that his nightmares had stopped, and he was able to resume his regular sleeping schedule. This is consistent with contemporary trauma-informed care techniques, which place an emphasis on giving emotional release and receiving support from the community (Hinde, 1999).

#### Case Study No. 2: Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD) in Soldiers

In addition to experiencing anxiety and nightmares, a soldier who was involved in an ambush and lost two of his fellow soldiers described experiencing great psychological distress. As a result of participating in the Chaw-es ceremony, he reported experiencing a sense of emotional relief and a reduction in the intensity of the terrible recollections. A conclusion that is consistent with Aboriginal healing practices that address trauma through spiritual and communal means (Nortje et al., 2016) is that this instance demonstrates the possibility of Chaw-es in the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

4.2. Taking into account cultural norms and incorporating them into contemporary mental health The findings highlight the significance of mental health interventions that are responsive to one's cultural background. The practitioners of medicine who took part in the research acknowledged the significance of incorporating traditional healing methods such as Chaw-es into their treatment strategies. The researchers observed that patients who participated in ancient rituals frequently displayed a quicker emotional recovery, which led them to conclude that Chaw-es could be utilized as a supplemental therapy in conjunction with contemporary psychiatric treatments.

Comparison with Aboriginal Healing Both Bontok and Aboriginal healing techniques place an emphasis on the discharge of emotions, the utilization of spiritual intervention, and the participation of the community. In Aboriginal healing, the use of the Medicine Wheel and Healing Circles seeks to restore equilibrium between the individual, the community, and the environment. This notion is similar to the Chaw-es ceremony, which places an emphasis on reestablishing a connection with nature and ancestors (Edge & McCallum, 2006).

#### 4.3. Recovery from Trauma and Feelings of Emotional Catharsis

Achieving emotional catharsis is one of the most

important therapeutic aspects of the Chaw-es ritual. This is accomplished through the use of storytelling, chanting, and the support of the community. In instance, it has been discovered that the practice of chanting can alleviate feelings of stress and anxiety, hence fostering relaxation and a sense of emotional equilibrium (Fallon, 2020). Expressive therapies and cognitive-behavioral interventions are two examples of contemporary therapeutic approaches that emphasize the discharge of emotions as a means of healing (Schumaker, 1992). This is analogous to the procedures that are used in contemporary therapy.

**4.4. Components of Spirituality and the State of Being**  
The Chaw-es ritual also places an emphasis on the significance of spiritual healing, which is an essential component of indigenous approaches to health and wellness. After the ritual, participants reported feeling spiritually cleaned and protected, which is consistent with Aboriginal beliefs regarding the role that spirits and ancestors play in improving health. Modern holistic health models, which advocate for the integration of spiritual care in mental health interventions (Frank & Frank, 1991), are increasingly acknowledging the spiritual aspect of recovery as a component of the healing process.

## 5. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PRACTICE OF MENTAL HEALTH

### 5.1. The Use of Traditional Indigenous Healing Methods in Psychotherapy

Within the context of contemporary mental health care, the study provides support for the use of traditional therapeutic techniques, such as Chaw-es. Collaborating with local healers and incorporating cultural rituals into treatment can be beneficial for mental health practitioners who work with indigenous or culturally diverse groups. This can lead to improved therapeutic outcomes.

### 5.2. Care that Incorporates Trauma

Considering the efficacy of Chaw-es in the treatment of trauma, particularly in circumstances that involve collective trauma, the ritual provides useful insights for the development of trauma-informed care models. Group therapy and family counseling are two

techniques that can be informed by the communal and spiritual aspects of the ritual. These approaches can provide emotional support and promote rehabilitation.

### 5.3. Policy Recommendations

The promotion of culturally adapted models of mental health care that incorporate traditional healing techniques needs to be something that policymakers should take into consideration. Indigenous communities would have better access to mental health care because of this strategy, which would also preserve the traditional autonomy of these people.

### 5.4. Educational Implications

Future practitioners in the field of mental health should be trained to be culturally competent and receptive to incorporating indigenous knowledge systems into their practice through the completion of mental health education programs. In this way, mental health practitioners would be more prepared to operate in multicultural settings and to meet the specific mental health needs of a wide range of populations from different backgrounds.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The Bontok Chaw-es ritual has been shown to have substantial therapeutic potential, particularly in the fields of trauma recovery and mental health care that is sensitive to cultural norms. The research shows the therapeutic concepts that are shared between modern counseling and indigenous healing techniques. These principles emphasize emotional catharsis, communal support, and spiritual healing. Mental health professionals are able to deliver care that is more culturally responsive when they include ancient healing techniques in contemporary mental health frameworks. This is especially true in situations that involve indigenous and multicultural populations. It is advised that additional studies be conducted in order to investigate the wider application of indigenous healing approaches in the context of global mental health care.

Counseling with American Indians and other native peoples. New York: Teachers College Press.

6. Edge, L., & McCallum, T. (2006). Métis identity sharing traditional knowledge and Healing practices at Métis Elders gatherings. *Pimatisiwin*, 4(2), 83-115.

7. Frank, J. D. (1991). Persuasion and healing: A comparative study of psychotherapy (3rd ed.). Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

8. Golberstein E, Wen H, Miller BF. (2020). Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) and mental health for children and adolescents. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 174(9), 819-20. doi: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2020.1456.

9. Hinde, R. A. (1999). Why Gods persist: A scientific approach to Religion. Routledge.

10. Honwana, A. M. (1998). Sealing the past, facing the future: Trauma healing in rural Mozambique.

## REFERENCES

1. Attagutsiaq, T., Joamie, A., Joamie, A., Pitseolak, J., Ootoova, E., & Ijjangiaq, T. (2001). Perspectives on Traditional Health. In F. Laugrand & M. Therrien (Eds.), Interviewing Inuit Elders: The Series. Vol. 5: Health Practices. Nunavut: Nunavut Arctic College Publications.
2. Benning, T. (2013). Western and Indigenous conceptualizations of self, depression, and its healing. *International Journal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation*, 17(2), 129-137.
3. Cultural beliefs on mental health. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.health-improve.org/cultural-beliefs-on-mental-health/>
4. Dein, S. (2020). Religious healing and mental health. *Mental Health, Religion, and Culture*, 23(8), 4-5.
5. Duran, E. (2006). Healing the soul wound:

Retrieved from <http://www.c- .org/ourwork/accord/mozambique/pastfuture.php>

11. Janetius, S. T. (2015). Kabunianism & Pneumasomatic Sickness: Cordillera Indigenous People in the Philippines. Mishil & IS Publishing.
12. Jacobs, J. (1992). Religious ritual and mental health. In J. Schumaker (Ed.), *Religion And mental health* (pp. 291–299). Oxford University Press.
13. Jilek, W. (2002). Indian healing: Shamanic ceremonialism in the Pacific Northwest today. Surrey, B.C: Hancock House.
14. Lee, C. C., Oh, M. Y., & Mountcastle, A. R. (1992). Indigenous models of helping in non-Western countries: Implications for multicultural counseling. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 20, 1-10.
15. Levin, J. S., Larson, D. B., & Puchlaski, M. (1997). Religion and spirituality in Medicine: Research and education. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 278, 792-793.
16. Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1991). Culture and self: Implications for cognition, emotion, And motivation. *Psychological Review*, 98(2), 224-253.
17. McClenon, J. (2004). What is to be done: Evaluating the ritual healing theory. Retrieved from <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/WHAT-IS-TO-BE-DONE%3A-EVALUATING-THE-RITUAL-HEALING-1>
18. McClenon/a5319df8ce8c14a90b6147b52e365bb0f858be a1
19. Moylan, C. (2009). Treating depression: Towards an Indigenous psychotherapy. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, James Cook University, Australia.
20. Nortje, G., Oladeji, B., Gureje, O., & Seedat, S. (2016). Effectiveness of traditional healers in treating mental disorders: A systematic review. *The Lancet Psychiatry*, 3(2), 154–170. doi:10.1016/S2215-0366(15)00515-5
21. Nuñez, S. (2008). Brazil's ultimate healing resource: The power of spirit. In Cervantes, J. & McNeill, B. (Eds.), *Latina/o healing practices: Mestizo and indigenous perspectives* (pp. 139–174). New York, NY: Routledge.
22. Oyebode, F. (2004). Obituary: Thomas Adeoye Lambo. *The Psychiatrist*, 28, 269.
23. The Diagnosis and Treatment of Mental Health Problems Among Older Women. <https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/handle/10822/914034>.
- ..