



# Experiences and Beliefs of the Tehit Tribe Community in using Herbal Medicine during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Transcultural Nursing Phenomenological Study

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**Abstract.** The COVID-19 pandemic has posed significant global challenges, including in Indonesia. In rural areas, many Tehit people opt for traditional medicine like red fruit (*Pandanus conoideus* lam), or other remedies like buah taer (*Anisoptera thurifera*), buah kelapa hutan (*Borassus heneanus*), or sarang Semut (*Myrmecodiasp*), instead of seeking treatment at hospitals. The Tehit tribe holds the belief that consuming herbal plants improves immunity, making it difficult for the COVID-19 virus to invade the body. The goal of this study was to determine the impact of cultural values and herbs-based treatments for COVID-19 among the Tehit tribe. Using Papuan herbal medicinal plants can be a potential way for the community to boost their immunity and protect themselves against the virus, particularly for indigenous Papuan people who live communally and are at a higher risk of infection during the current pandemic. This qualitative research adopted a phenomenological study approach. The primary data collection technique used in-depth interviews. To check the reliability of the data collected, triangulation of data sources was conducted. The study results revealed that the advancement of science and technology affected the technology used in the herbal treatment of COVID-19 by the Tehit Tribe with increased community demand for quality health services. Therefore, it is imperative that both doctors and nurses enhance their skills to ensure that patients are satisfied with the care provided, and that healthcare facilities and infrastructure are well-equipped to address this demand.

**Keywords:** Herbs, COVID-19, Ethnic Tehit.

## 1 Introduction

Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), commonly known as the coronavirus, is currently a topic of widespread public interest. The virus was initially reported on December 31, 2019, and primarily affects the respiratory system. Its effects range from mild respiratory symptoms to severe lung infections, and in severe cases, it can be fatal. The global cases of COVID-19 infection have reached 95,321,880, resulting in 2,058,227 deaths [1]. COVID-19 is a virus that can cause

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disease in both humans and animals. It primarily affects the respiratory system and can lead to a range of illnesses, from mild flu-like symptoms to more severe respiratory diseases. The symptoms of COVID-19 infection vary from person to person and can range from mild to severe. The main clinical symptoms include a high fever (temperature  $> 38^{\circ}\text{C}$ ), coughing, and difficulty breathing [2]. In severe cases, symptoms may include septicemia and even bleeding. Meanwhile, individuals with COVID-19 may experience mild symptoms such as fever, even if they are asymptomatic. However, some may require medical attention due to more severe illness.

Based on a preliminary study consisting of observations and nurse interviews, the average patient who received a positive COVID-19 diagnosis through rapid antigen testing was medically diagnosed. Most members of the Tehit tribe in rural areas opt for traditional remedies rather than continuing their treatment in hospitals. The red fruit, *Pandanus conoideus* lam, is a popular choice for their medication, but they also consume other substances like taer fruit (*Anisoptera thurifera*), forest coconut fruit (*Borassus heneanus*), and ant nests (*Myrmecodiasp*). The Tehit tribe community holds the belief that consuming herbal plants enhances the body's immunity against the COVID-19 virus, resulting in mild symptoms and a quick recovery in the event of exposure. It is customary for the Tehit tribe to maintain their immunity with Papuan herbal medicinal plants. The decision to fortify Idiri, particularly for those residing in Papua and having a communal lifestyle, who are at high risk for infection during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research aims to comprehensively explore and understand traditional care for COVID-19 patients from the Tehit tribe by employing a transcultural nursing approach. The specific focus is on examining the impact of cultural values and lifestyle on the COVID-19 herbal treatment of the Tehit tribe.

## 2 Methods

The research method used is a qualitative approach with a phenomenological framework [3]. The primary data collection technique employed is in-depth interviews. To ensure data credibility, triangulation of data sources is conducted, involving cross-referencing data obtained from various sources, including written documents from the RSUD medical records in Teminabuan Regency. The peer debriefing process involves sharing interim or final results for analytical discussions with peers. Member checks are also utilized to evaluate the accuracy of information provided by research subjects, accomplished by revisiting previously asked questions.

The study population consists of individuals from Teminabuan District, South Sorong Regency, West Papua, who have tested positive for Covid-19. The inclusion criteria include individuals with a positive PCR test result, while the exclusion criteria pertain to those unwilling to participate in the study. Given the population size, the entire population is considered the sample. This research was conducted in September 2022.

Data collection encompasses three methods: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Data analysis, utilizing data condensation, involves the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, and transforming the collected data into

condensed forms. This process involves collecting data, drawing conclusions, verifying data presentation, and condensing information from field notes, interview transcripts, documents, and other empirical materials, ultimately enhancing the data's coherence.

### 3 Results

The research results provide a comprehensive account of the acquired data, aimed at understanding the influence of cultural values and lifestyle on herbal Covid-19 treatments among the Tehit tribes of Teminabuan district. This study encompassed 19 Tehit tribe members residing in Teminabuan district, resulting in the emergence of three themes related to the Tehit tribe's Covid-19 herbal treatment.

#### 3.1 Participant Characteristics

The study participants that met the inclusion criteria were five individuals, comprising two men and three women who were residents of Teminabuan District receiving herbal Covid-19 treatment.

#### 3.2 Tehit Tribe's Herbal Treatment for Covid-19

The Tehit tribe's approach to herbal treatment is part of their wider use of alternative traditional treatments, which can be explored within four categories. These categories encompass the rituals involved in processing herbal medicine. It's noteworthy that all participants confirmed the absence of any special rituals. The ritual category for ingesting herbal plants was also addressed in the provided keywords. Three participants indicated no specific ritual, while two participants used their right hand. The processing/treatment category was likewise covered in the keywords, including stripping, mixing, and boiling. The herbal plant categories utilized were obtained through participant keywords, which included samparu leaves, seaweed-honey mixture, red fruit, ant Tehit tribe.

#### 3.3 Qualitative Analysis

Verbatim transcripts were generated from in-depth interviews and field notes. A thematic analysis was conducted on the collected data, and the results are presented below. Themes identified pertain to the research objectives regarding the influence of herbal treatment for Covid-19 in the Tehit tribe.

The following themes delineate these objectives: **Obtaining a Disease Diagnosis:** Based on the presented data, three participants chose to consult a physician to ascertain the cause of their illness. Conversely, two participants recognized their condition based on the symptoms they experienced, which included fever, cough, flu-like symptoms, loss of smell, and lack of appetite. Despite this awareness, the latter two participants opted to continue with the Covid-19 herbal treatment employed by the Tehit tribe (table 1).

**Table 1.** Matrix of Interviews on Disease Diagnosis in the Tehit Tribe's Covid-19 Herbal Treatment.

<b>Matrix</b>	<b>P1</b>	<b>P2</b>	<b>P3</b>	<b>P4</b>	<b>P5</b>
Treated by	Doctor	Doctor	Doctor	-	-
Signs and Symptoms	- Fever, - Flu - Rapid antigen +	Rapid antigen +	- Fever - Cough - Rapid antigen +	- Fever - Flu - Loss of smell sense	- Cough - Fever - Loss of smell sense - Loss off appetite

Source: Primary data

Regarding the dosage category, participants reported taking the product either twice a day (as indicated by three respondents) or on a daily basis (as indicated by two respondents) (table 2).

**Table 2.** Tehit Tribe Covid-19 Herbal Process Interview Matrix.

<b>Treatment process</b>	<b>P1</b>	<b>P2</b>	<b>P3</b>	<b>P4</b>	<b>P5</b>
Processing ritual	None	None	None	None	None
Plant harvesting ritual	None	None	None	Plucked with the right hand	None
Treatment processing process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boiling</li> <li>• Strain</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boiling seaweed</li> <li>• Mixed with honey</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eat as vegetables</li> <li>• Consume oil in red fruit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Picked</li> <li>• Washed</li> <li>• Boiled</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peel</li> <li>• Mixed with lime</li> </ul>
Herbs	Sampare leaves	Mixed honey and seaweed	Red fruit	Sarang Semut (ant heap)	Water gourd
Dose	2x/day for a week	2x/day for a week	Everyday	2x/day	Everyday

### 3.4 Barriers to Herbal Treatment

Barriers to herbal treatment are a sub-theme related to the influence of alternative actions in the herbal treatment of Covid-19 within the Tehit tribe, and this sub-theme was addressed in one category.

Obstacles to herbal treatment were examined through keywords provided by all participants. It is noteworthy that there were no reported obstacles, as the Tehit tribe's herbal treatment relies on readily available, affordable herbal plants that are widely accessible in the market. Three sub-themes and categories of alternative approaches to traditional medicine in the Tehit tribe are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Three sub-themes and categories of alternative approaches to traditional medicine in the Tehit tribe

## 4 Discussion

### 4.1 Cultural Influence in the Tehit Tribe's Covid-19 Herbal Treatment

The impact of culture on the Tehit tribe's approach to treating Covid-19 is addressed through one overarching theme, which is the Tehit tribe's alternative measures for Covid-19. This theme is further explored through three sub-themes: disease diagnosis, herbal treatment process, and barriers to herbal treatment.

### 4.2 Disease Diagnosed

As revealed by the study's findings, participants acquired knowledge about their illness from both health workers and non-health workers. For instance, Participant 1 (P1) stated in their interview: *"I have a fever and a cold, and I've lost my sense of smell."* This observation underscores the role of both healthcare professionals and individuals within the community in diagnosing Covid-19 symptoms. In addition, some participants were aware of their illnesses based on symptoms as elucidated by P4's quote: *"My throat hurts before I can smell anything."* On average, participants sought medical attention after experiencing typical symptoms such as fever, cough, flu and loss of smell. Nonetheless, certain participants were diagnosed based on their own symptoms or those of family members. According to [4], when an individual falls ill, they accept their illness and subsequently seek validation from family or friends, leading to a role of being sick and subsequently seeking medical attention, self-medicating, or adhering to advice from said individuals. This aligns with the Tehit tribe, where some individuals seek assistance from healthcare professionals while others self-treat their ailments. Society's perceptions of health and illness exhibit substantial variation. However, individuals are expected to adopt healthy behaviors to support their own health and that of the wider community [5]. The promotion of healthy living behavior by both individuals and society is instrumental in achieving various health objectives, fostering physical, mental, and spiritual well-being, and enhancing productivity in social and economic spheres.

Based on the provided data, participants, on average, sought medical attention from healthcare professionals after exhibiting symptoms including fever, cough, flu, and loss of smell. However, a subset of participants reported that their diagnosis was solely based on self-reported symptoms and familial experiences [6]. Suchman's theory suggests that when an individual falls ill, they first accept their illness and then seek confirmation from family or friends [4]. This role of being sick and seeking help from health professionals may result in self-treatment or following the advice of loved ones. This is similar to the Tehit tribe, where sick participants seek help from health professionals or treat themselves.

Society's perspectives on health and illness exhibit significant variation. However, individuals are expected to engage in healthy behaviors to enhance their personal well-being and contribute to the larger community's health endeavors. Adherence to healthy living practices is advantageous for individuals and society in promoting overall physical, mental, and spiritual health, leading to higher productivity in social and economic contexts. Tehit Tribe's Herbal Treatment Process is a subtheme of alternative

Covid-19 measures outlined in five categories: herbal plants used, rituals for consuming herbs, processing rituals, herbal treatment procedures, and treatment dosages. Tehit Tribe's Herbal Treatment Process is a subtheme of alternative Covid-19 measures outlined in five categories: herbal plants used, rituals for consuming herbs, processing rituals, herbal treatment procedures, and treatment dosages. The process is presented objectively without subjective evaluations and employs clear, concise language in simple sentences [7]. Technical term abbreviations are explained upon first use and are consistent throughout the text. Standard high-level language is used, avoiding biased, emotional, and figurative language. The passive tone and impersonal construction are implemented to avoid first-person perspectives. Balanced language is used, avoiding bias and ensuring precision in word choice. The structure is logical and sequential with causal connections between statements. Grammatical correctness and proper formatting, inline with the selected style guide, are observed in citations and footnotes.

According to research findings, the Tehit tribe utilize sampara leaves, honey mixed with seaweed, red fruit, ant nests, and water gourd as herbal remedies for Covid-19. P4 stated, "*I drink boiled ant nests twice a day*", while P1 reported using sampara leaves. According to research findings, the Teminabuan people utilizes sampara leaves, honey mixed with seaweed, red fruit, ant nests, and water gourd for herbal remedies [9]. The Tehit people adhere to a specific ritual of using the right hand and saying "*bismillah*" while consuming herbal plants. The interviews conducted with P4 corroborated these practices.

### 4.3 Herbal Treatment Rituals and Processing

Contrary to earlier beliefs, it was noted that saying "*Bismillah*" and using the right hand are not integral to the Tehit tribe's herbal treatment practices. Nevertheless, some participants did express the belief that employing the right hand could aid in healing and alleviate illness. The Tehit tribe's herbal medicine processing, on the other hand, does not involve any specific rituals. As Participant 1 (P1) described it. "*The processing of sampara leaves involves boiling them and then consuming the infusion twice a day for a week (describing the processing method).*"

Based on responses from all participants, it was determined that the processing method for sampara leaves entails washing them and subsequently boiling them in water. Once boiled, the infusion is ready for consumption, administered three times a day. For the red fruit herbal plant, it is simply peeled and cut in half with a knife, then boiled and consumed daily. As for water gourd fruit, it is watered, strained, and boiled, with a recommended dosage of twice a day [10]. It's important to note that herbal medicine is deeply rooted in tradition and is considered a form of non-medical, alternative treatment. The Muna people's culture equates alternative medicine with herbal and folk remedies. Regarding the quality of herbal medicines, Risn emphasizes that these products are crafted from diverse natural ingredients [11]. To ensure high-quality herbal medicines, proper manufacturing methods are essential, with particular attention paid to raw material handling and production processes. This approach differs from the Tehit community's medical tradition, as there is no evidence-based or

clinically pharmacological testing to validate the accuracy of their processing techniques and treatment dosages.

#### **4.4 Barriers to Herbal Treatment in the Tehit Tribe**

The research findings pertaining to barriers to herbal medicine within the Tehit tribe revealed that there are, in fact, no significant obstacles. Participant 2 (P2) exemplified this sentiment with the following statement: "*There are no obstacles because the materials used are easy to obtain and cheap (with a smile).*" Participants consistently mentioned that the herbal plants they utilize are readily accessible and cost-effective, with the ingredients readily available in local markets. This strong preference for treatments derived from natural ingredients is not unique to Indonesia; it is a practice observed in many countries. These methods are often associated with the "*back to nature*" concept, believed to have fewer side effects compared to modern medicines. Pertiwi's perspective underscores the holistic nature of health, emphasizing its interrelated components and their influence on disease treatment approaches [6]. With advancements in health and communication technology, various methods of health treatment have emerged, each integrating herbal medicine systems according to specific cultural contexts [12]. Research conducted in numerous developing countries has consistently shown that when individuals feel ill, their initial response is often self-medication. In countries like Indonesia, many individuals seek treatment from shamans or herbal medicine experts before consulting a healthcare facility or health worker [13].

The study suggests that technology plays a substantial role in the Tehit Tribe's herbal treatment of COVID-19, as it aligns with the broader advancements in science and technology [14]. Consequently, the demand for high-quality health services among the public has increased. Therefore, both doctors and nurses must enhance their skills to ensure patient satisfaction, while healthcare facilities and infrastructure should be adequately equipped and supported to instill confidence in the superiority of medical healing over herbal remedies. The culture of herbal care for COVID-19 within the Tehit tribe necessitates a culture of care accommodation and negotiation. This is evident in their practice of herbal medicine, which relies solely on generational knowledge passed down through the years, including the processing methods and treatment dosages. To enhance the effectiveness of herbal treatments among the Tehit tribe, these practices should be informed by evidence-based or pharmacological clinical trials.

## **5 Conclusion**

Culture profoundly influences the Tehit tribe's approach to COVID-19 herbal care, particularly in the context of evolving technologies. Therefore, there is a compelling need for cultural care accommodation and negotiation to ensure the seamless integration of traditional practices with contemporary healthcare methods.

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