



Symbolic Interactions in Traditional Medicine Practice

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Abstract

This study aims to explain the symbolic interaction in traditional medicine of the Sungai Guntung community. The traditional treatment in question is the administration of salt acid. Giving salt acid from the patient to the shaman is still preserved and believed by the community as the key to treatment. The theory used to analyse is Herbert Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism. This research uses a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. The determination of informants was carried out by purposive sampling technique or method. Based on the results of this study, the Sungai Guntung Village community still practises traditional medicine. This research resulted in the finding that the administration of salt acid is a spiritual phenomenon where the illness comes from physical, psychological and magical sources. The meaning of tradition depends on social interaction, so the continuity of meaning is also very dependent on changes in social interaction. The symbolic interaction in this treatment is reflected in the symbol of bonding between the shaman and the patient, the symbol of the patient's trust in the shaman, the symbol of gratitude from the patient to the shaman, the symbol of the key to treatment, the symbol of the belief that illness and treatment are spiritual phenomena.

Introduction

The concepts of tradition and culture are often mixed. Traditions are material objects, ideas and intangible heritage that originate from the past and are still sustainable, have not been destroyed, have not been damaged, have not been forgotten and have not been thrown away until now. So, tradition is a legacy of the past. (Sztompka 2004) Meanwhile, culture is more complete, namely the unity of habits, beliefs, knowledge, morals, arts, laws and customs obtained from members of society. (Sir Edward Taylor in Horton, 1992). The Indonesian nation also has traditions and culture like other nations. Uniquely, Indonesia has a diversity of cultures, religions, beliefs and ethnic groups.

Various types of traditions and culture exist throughout, one of which is the Guntung River, Tagaraja Village, Indragiri Hilir Regency, Riau Province. Riau is thick with Malay culture and Islamic teachings, so it is not surprising that the various traditions and culture in Riau originate from the Malay tribe. This reciprocal acculturation (cultural fusion) between Islam and culture can provide the assumption that Islam is quite influential in shaping society's culture. (Elsera, Wardana, et al., 2023) Malay society upholds ritual traditions which must be carried out by the community if they do not want to experience problems or disasters. The ritual traditions of the Malay community are; the tradition of building a new house, the wedding ritual tradition, the salt and acid ritual tradition and the rice field ritual tradition.

The people of Sungai Guntung Village are Malay people. The tradition of giving salt acid in traditional medicine remains sustainable even though Indragiri Hilir Regency has three government hospitals, 31 community health centers, a total of 34–42 specialist doctors in Indragiri Hilir Regency. (Amendments to the RPJMD of Indragiri Hilir Regency 2018–2023, 2018) but the tradition of seeking treatment from shamans is still maintained by the people of Sungai Guntung and some even do it side by side treatment (traditional and medical). Even though biomedical doctoral practices are



increasingly developing and health service centers are beginning to spread, both managed by the government and the private sector, traditional medicine still exists. This proves that health is not only a medical phenomenon but also a sociocultural phenomenon. The Indonesian people's medical system has existed for hundreds of years, which is then called the traditional medical system.

Traditional medicine is still very popular among the people of Sungai Guntung, they believe it is their own local wisdom for every region that still believes in it. In traditional medicine with a shaman (in the Big Indonesian Dictionary shaman means a person who heals, casts spells, spells and helps sick people), the patient goes through a process starting from the beginning, namely through examination until healing usually takes 3–4 days (depending on the condition of the disease). If the patient is declared cured, then the final process/closure of a series of treatments or what the Sungai Guntung community often calls drug locking. Locking medicine uses acid and salt as symbols given to shamans or arks.

People trust shamans due to the internalized understanding among society that shamans are helpers. (Abidin in Karmila 2017). In this tradition there is no coercion, meaning that shamans or healers do not oblige patients to carry out this tradition. However, it is based on the initiative and trust of the community itself. This tradition is believed by the community to originate from the ancestors of the Malay community who still believe in spirits and also objects such as statues, trees and stones which are considered to have power. This is as stated in Suwardi's opinion in (Karmila, 2017) that the history of Malay society believes in animism and dynamism. Malays recognize the existence of forces beyond human control. Symbols of power and strength can take the form of trees, stones and spirits.

Preserving traditions for the Malay people is a necessity because they cannot let go of themselves even though most of them have shown changes towards modernity. (T. F. F. Situmorang 2019) This change occurred due to the mixing of cultures with immigrant communities (Elsera 2022). As research (Desti 2022) explains that there is meaning in the practice of visiting graves as a form of respect for ancestors, increasing community solidarity and strengthening existing values in society such as religious values and the value of peace. The tradition of visiting graves uses media such as yellow pulut, red eggs and yellow rice.

Research on local traditions that are still believed in is that the reason people believe in these sacred objects is because these objects were left by their ancestors or forefathers. This belief is mandatory for society because it has been passed down or inherited from parents for a long time so it is difficult to eradicate. (Rahmawati & Elsera, 2023) (Mardiana 2022) beliefs of the Malay community in Air Glubi Village, Bintan Pesisir District. This belief is in the form of a new kenduri pompong tradition for fishermen. The continued existence of this belief is influenced by historical stories or past tragedies and the advice of their parents.

Guntung River is not a city, but its strategic geographic location makes the Riau Islands and the busiest trade route in the world, the Strait of Malacca. Economic activity on the Guntung River is fairly dense, especially in the coconut plantation sector and is supported by the growth of companies in this area creating job opportunities so that various ethnic groups, races and religions apart from the Malay community are also found on the Guntung River. Although along with developments, the Guntung River has grown into a very heterogeneous area.

In terms of culture and culture, the Guntung River cannot be separated from Malay culture, such as the tradition of giving acid and salt, which to this day is still

maintained and carried out by the people of the Gutung River. There are historical meanings and values contained in the tradition of giving acid and salt which people still trust and believe in to this day. Previous research (Elsera & Normayani 2023) shows that people still practice traditional medicine. This traditional medicine is believed to be able to cure all kinds of diseases if the process carried out follows all the rules of treatment. People believe that this procession contains values, and it is believed that health will improve and disease will not return. The previous research above has not analyzed the social interactions of local communities regarding traditional medicine. In this article, reveal the continuity of the meaning of traditional medicine is very dependent on changes in social interactions where over time the meaning of the tradition of giving acid and salt can change.

Research Method

This research uses a qualitative method with a descriptive type. Research aims to holistically understand the phenomena, actions, motivations, behavior, perceptions experienced by research subjects. Describe it descriptively in the form of words and language and utilize various natural methods (Moleong, 2018) Meanwhile The research location is the Guntung River, Tagaraja Village, Indragiri Hilir Regency. Determination of informants is carried out using techniques purposive sampling, namely a technique that selects informants based on certain criteria. The informants in this research are the Guntung River community, traditional leaders, shamans and healers, people who currently still carry out and also those who do not carry out this tradition.

The data collection techniques used in this research are direct observation techniques and in-depth interviews. Interviews were carried out to collect data by holding direct questions and answers between researchers and selected informants using previously created interview guidelines. After the data related to the tradition of giving acid and salt in traditional medicine had been obtained, the researcher carried out data analysis to facilitate understanding, so the researcher made several efforts, namely data reduction, data presentation and drawing conclusions.

Herbert Blumer's Theory of Symbolic Interactionism

The theory of symbolic interactionism was first formulated by George Herbert Mead, a social philosopher, in his book entitled *Mind, Self and Society*. However, Herbert Blumer is the figure who popularized the term symbolic interactionism. The basic characteristic of this theory is a relationship that occurs naturally between humans in society and the relationship between society and individuals develops through the symbols they create. Blume (Ritzer & Goodman 2011) symbolic interactionism rests on three premises: (1) Humans act on the basis of the meaning given by various things that exist for them, (2) The meaning of various things comes from or arises from human social interactions with other people. (3) These meanings are modified through an interpretation process, then these meanings are refined during the social interaction process. Interrelated patterns of action and interaction will form groups and communities.

According to Blumer, the term symbolic interaction refers to the specifics of interactions between humans. The characteristic is that people interpret and define each other's behavior. This is not simply a reaction to one person's behavior towards another person. People's reactions do not occur directly to other people's actions, but rather occur based on the "meaning" given to other people's actions. Interaction between individuals, through the use and interpretation of symbols, or through joint efforts to understand the meaning of each other's actions. Therefore, the process of human

interaction is not a process in which a stimulus automatically and immediately causes a response. However, between the stimulus received and the response, an interpretation process occurs by the actor. It is clear that this interpretation process is a thinking process which is a human ability (Ritzer & Goodman 2011). This theory is used in this research to analyze the meaning of society or the administration of salt and acid in treatment. Through this theory, we are able to produce an analysis that the meaning of salt and acid in traditional medicine is not formed only through the provision of stimuli but rather through human interpretation.

Indragiri Hilir Regency is not an area where the community cannot access health care. It is proven that the Indragiri Hilir Regency government has provided three government hospitals which can be accessed by the public both through BPJS and general routes. The data on the ideal capacity ratio for the three hospitals is 1000: 1 bed or the equivalent of 655 beds for 654,909 people. The development of hospital ratios can be seen in the picture below:

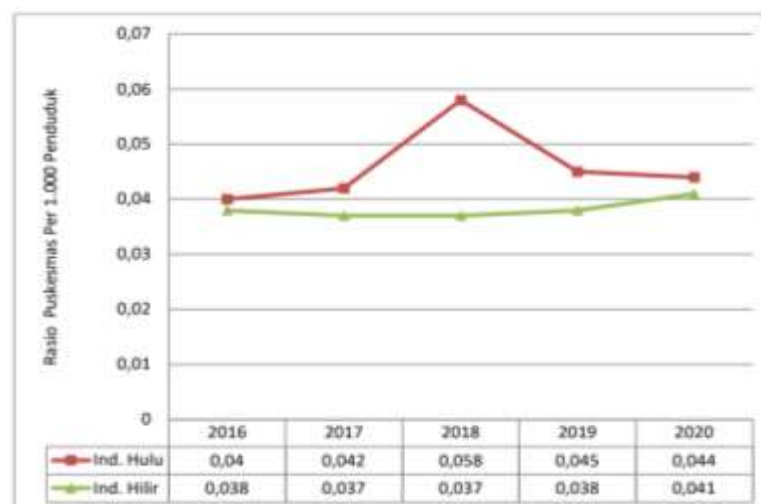
Figure1. Development of Hospital Ratio per 1000 Population of Indragiri Hilir Regency, Indragiri Hulu and Riau Province



Source: <https://indragirihilirkab.sipd.kemendagri.go.id>

The data above shows that there are 3 hospitals that support modern medicine in Indragiri Hilir which can be the people's choice when seeking treatment. However, in fact the availability of hospitals has not been able to eliminate people's trust in seeking treatment from shamans. Some people still believe that the disease can be treated through traditional medicine. Apart from hospitals, Indragiri Hilir Regency also has a community health center. There are 31 more health centers than the number of sub-districts (20 sub-districts). As for The ratio of Indragiri downstream health centers is 0.038 – 0.041 per 1,000 population, meaning that each health center serves 38 – 41 in 1,000 residents. The ratio of community health centers can be seen in the following figure:

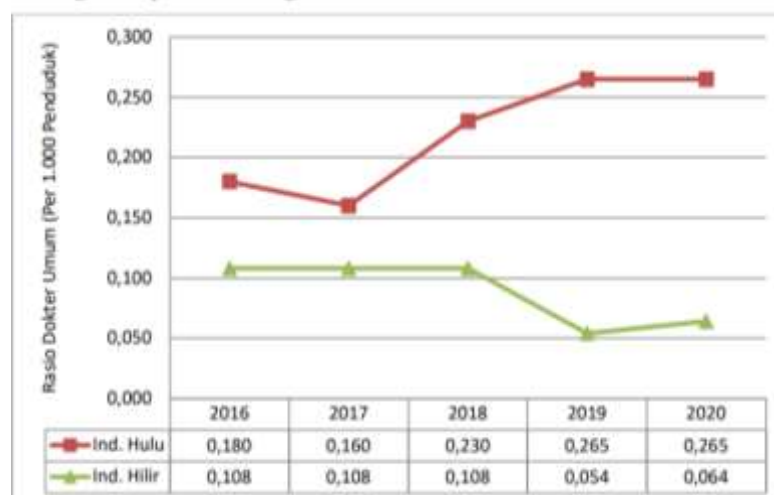
Figure 2. Development of Community Health Center Ratio per 1,000 Population of Indragiri Hilir and Indragiri Hulu Regency 2016 – 2020



Source: <https://indragirihilirkab.sipd.kemendagri.go.id>

Modern medical facilities in Indragiri Hilir are not only hospitals, but also community health centers have been established in every sub–district. Even so, the availability of modern medical facilities and facilities has not been able to eliminate the trust of some people in seeking treatment from shamans. A total of 3 hospitals and 34–41 health centers are available in Indragiri Hilir Regency. Meanwhile, the availability of specialist doctors in Indragiri Hilir Regency is 34 – 42 people. The development ratio of specialist doctors and general practitioners can be seen in the following picture:

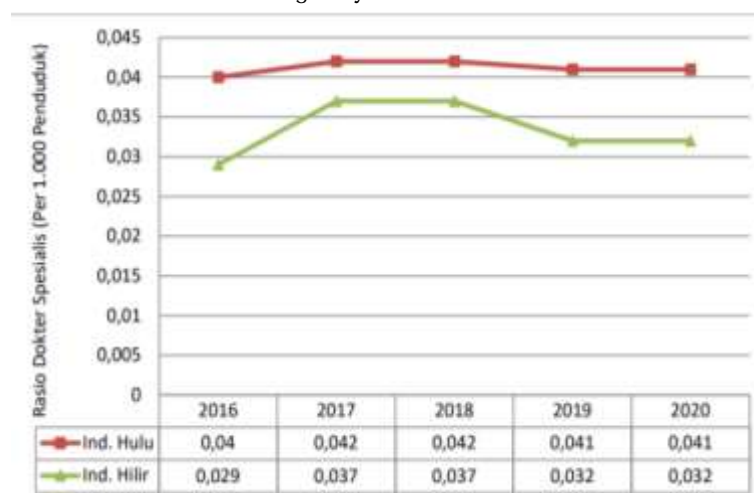
Figure 3. Development of the Ratio of General Practitioners Per 1,000 Population of Indragiri Hilir Regency 2016 – 2020



Source: <https://indragirihilirkab.sipd.kemendagri.go.id>

The data above does show that the availability of general practitioners is less than that of Indragiri Hulu Regency, but the availability reaches 292 doctors. Meanwhile specialist data can be seen in the image below:

Figure 4. Development of the Ratio of Specialist Doctors Per 1,000 Population of Indragiri Hilir Regency 2016 – 2020



Source: <https://indragirihilir.kab.sipd.kemendagri.go.id>

Based on the two pictures above (figures 3 and 4), it can be concluded that there are government efforts to encourage modern medicine to be utilized by all district residents. Therefore, the addition and recruitment of general practitioners and specialists is being carried out. However, the presence of a medical team has not been able to eliminate people's trust in seeking traditional medicine from shamans.

1. Conserving Symbolic Interaction Tradition of Giving Acid and Salt in Medicine

The tradition of acid and salt in traditional medicine is still maintained by the Guntung River community not without reason, this is due to the interpretation, translation and definition of their behavior which originates from social interactions. In short, choosing to preserve traditional medicine by administering acid and salt is not just to get a reaction from other people but also to get meaning from the action. (Deep blurJohnson, 1990) mentioned People's reactions are not based directly on other people's actions, but on the meaning they give to other people's actions. Traditional medicine is still accepted among the Liliweri people (Jufriyandi Mokodompit et al., 2022) stating that the traditional system of medicine is believed to be so because it comes from the ancestors or is based on beliefs passed down or inherited using natural ingredients and non – medical healing powers.

The hereditary beliefs referred to by Liliweri seem to be in line with Blumer's view in (Johnson, 1990) that they are formed as a result of very long, lengthy and intimate social interactions. The process of preserving this tradition and culture use symbols, interpretations and mutual understanding of the meaning of actions. In this research, the Guntung River community understands and believes that their actions in trusting traditional medicine by providing acid and salt as a final treatment is a manifestation of their interpretation of a disease that is considered not only to need to be treated medically but also non – medically.

The non – medical treatment taken by the Guntung River community has become a spiritual phenomenon in which they believe that some illnesses originate from physical, psychological and magical origins. Therefore, people trust shamans to treat diseases that cannot be cured by medicine. Based on an interview with Atan Acik, a shaman in Sungai Guntung, he was informed that most patients come with complaints of fever, pain caused by caterpillars, reprimands, and sometimes there are people who go to the shaman to ask for help, such as a runner, or even subduing someone. For the Guntung

River community, the above types of disease cannot be treated by doctors and must seek alternative treatment from traditional healers. Even though some people have tried to go to a doctor before, they have not been able to recover and have been able to get healing by going to a shaman.

Giving acid and salt is done because people believe that this object means that their treatment with the shaman has ended and healing has been obtained. This symbol of acid and salt cannot be exchanged for other items because the shaman has internalized to the public that the key to treatment is in the form of acid and salt which the patient hands over to the shaman. Substituting acid and salt for shamans is an absolute must for both local communities and immigrant communities. This is as expressed by Mr. Atan Ali, "It cannot be (replaced), acid and salt have become a custom for our people, when people use a thousand duets, the important thing is acid and salt".

Some people actually give acid and salt at the beginning of treatment, although generally people do it at the end of treatment. For patients who are given salt during the treatment period, the aim of giving salt acid during the treatment period is usually so that the patient does not forget this, as stated by Hamdan and Baharudin as follows, "It's up to us, whether we provide it after treatment or whether we provide it after treatment. "Only if it's near this mountain, people usually give it acid and salt after they have finished treatment," said Hamdan. In line with Hamdan, Baharudin also expressed the same thing, "We can sleep when we ask for medicine, we can also deliver it after we finish treatment, if we miss it when we ask for medicine, so we don't forget. "Most people here take them off for treatment" (Interview 2021)

The same interpretation shared by the Guntung River community and shamans has resulted in this tradition being preserved. The patient's recovery after treatment and ending it with the administration of acid and salt is a form of stimulus that is not obtained automatically but is a process of responses that arise. This interpretation process is a thinking process. This thought process occurs naturally between humans in society. This is in line with thinking Blumer (Ritzer & Goodman, 2011) states that symbolic interactionism rests on three premises: (1) Humans act on the basis of the meaning given by various things that exist for them, (2) The meaning of various things comes from or arises from human social interactions with others (3) These meanings are modified through an interpretation process, then these meanings are refined during the social interaction process. Interrelated patterns of action and interaction will form groups and communities.

People in ancient times said that salt acid was a medicine hardener (strengthening the efficacy of medicine). People believe that if they don't provide acid and salt then the medicine given by the shaman/physician will be tasteless. Bland what is meant in this tradition is that it is not effective or efficacious. The meaning of giving acid and salt is likened to strength in carrying out treatment. If you give salt to a shaman, it means that the patient is entrusting treatment to the shaman's knowledge. Salt acid will be a strength for shamans in treating patients. The more salt you taste, the stronger the shaman's power will be. This was stated by informant Atan Ali, "Acid and salt do have a meaning, that's the term for salt. If you see ketchup masen so that you know it later, the knowledge will be much stronger or stronger, like salt, you can use as much as you can after that knowledge. If you laugh, you can add salt if you cook. I don't know what salt is like in my cooking, of course, I'm a slave, so acid and salt are like the power of our knowledge."

From the presentation given by Mr. Atan Ali, it can be known that what salt is when it is tasted or tasted will taste salty like that is the knowledge of those who taste salt the more they taste salt the stronger the knowledge of those who taste it. The purpose of this tamarind salt is that when mixed with salt, the sour tamarind loses its sour taste, there is a delicious taste between the tamarind and the salt, but when the tamarind is mixed with water, the tamarind will lose its sour taste, but if the tamarind with salt has the sour taste and there is the salty taste. Between knowledge, intellect and thought there is also the key. Another opinion was conveyed by informant Hamdan, a traditional leader, that the meaning of giving acid and salt comes from the philosophy that disease comes from the sea. Usually, people who are sick often state that they went somewhere and after returning from there they were sick. So treatment by giving acid and salt is like uniting land and sea, a symbol of peace.

"Acid and salt are proof that land and sea have made peace. Acid is used because it has the highest value, this acid has many medicinal uses, from the leaves, fruit to the roots, it is useful for medicine or is multifunctional. Because these two objects, namely acid and salt, are multifunctional objects, people in ancient times concluded that the two things that can calm the lives of living creatures are acid and salt. The sea everywhere is salty, and multifunctional acid. "In ancient times, people worshiped objects that had many uses because they were thought to be able to help them in all aspects of life," (Interview 2021).

If you use Blumer's view, the belief that salt acid is a strengthening drug is not just a person's reaction to other people's behavior so that they simply believe it, but it is a process of interpreting and defining each other's behavior. Indeed, Blumer believes that people's reactions do not occur directly to other people's actions, but rather occur based on the "meaning" given to other people's actions. However, internalizing this meaning requires an interpretation process until it can be accepted as a unified meaning in society.

Because the meaning of traditions depends on social interaction, the continuity of that meaning also depends greatly on changes in social interaction. Over time, the meaning of the tradition of giving acid and salt can change. Situations during social interactions contribute to changes in meaning. If initially the tradition of giving acid and salt by the Guntung River community was interpreted as locking in medicine, then over time the meaning of this tradition can be modified through an interpretive process or views regarding this meaning. So, this interpretation will create other meanings in the future.

The meanings modified through the interpretive process are interrelated with the provision of acid and salt. So, if at the beginning the giving of salt acid is a symbol of the end of treatment, then with social interaction the meaning can change to become a symbol of thanks. For the community, if they have delivered acid, it means that the person has shown gratitude to the person who has helped him without having to directly say a thank you sentence and through this acid, it is said to be a form of prayer from the patient. This can be linked to the ritual of salt acid, where acid and The salt is read with a prayer or incantation addressed to the Almighty so that with the Almighty's permission the person can be healed through the intermediary of a shaman/physician. The more salt the shaman/healer obtains, the more people will pray to the healer/shaman and the stronger the knowledge of the shaman/healer will be.

Another interpretation of giving acid is as a symbol of bonding between the shaman and his patient. This bond is built from the social interaction that takes place between the shaman and the community as well as the social construction that takes

place in the community. In reality, acid and salt is just a symbol that reflects the patient's trust and gratitude to the shaman after carrying out treatment. Blumer in (Johnson, 1990) states that humans will not act if it is not based on the meaning they believe in. Meanwhile, the trustworthiness of this symbol must go through social interaction. This symbolic change in giving acid and salt is not an automatic stimulus process and immediately causes a response. The process of interpreting salt and pepper as a symbol of gratitude is of course a thinking process which is a human ability (Ritzer & Goodman, 2011)

Another finding that was found to be the reason why the Guntung River community still believes in giving acid and salt to cover traditional treatment is the success and failure of treatment from previous communities. The people of Sungai Guntung who still believe in traditional medicine see and analyze for themselves the behavior of patients receiving treatment from shamans. Many of them were successfully cured after seeking treatment from a shaman and their illness did not recur after administering acid and salt as the final requirement of the treatment. This was expressed by informant Atan Ali, a resident of Sungai Guntung:

"For example, if you don't use that acid and salt, you will repeat it over and over again. The purpose of this salt is to make this salt sour. How does this salt taste sour and when it is mixed with salt, the sour taste disappears, maybe there is a taste of sweetness between the acid and the salt earlier, but if the acid is mixed with water, the sour taste is lost, but if the sour is mixed with salt, it is sour. There is a taste of salt. Between the knowledge of will and thinking there is also the key"(Interview 2021)

Atan Ali's statement is similar to the statement of informant Cik Atan, a shaman in the Guntung River. "There has been an incident where someone who didn't lock it had the same disease with the same disease, but it's never happened before that person died." Informant Amnah's belief in giving acid and salt was to prevent the disease from recurring when she helped take her nephew for treatment to a shaman. The child has a non-medical illness. His nephew keeps crying and can't stay away from his mother. The child forbade his mother from praying, was not allowed to wear a headscarf and often cried and wailed at night. At that time the family and the shaman believed that this child was being disturbed by demons/jinn. After treatment, the child recovered. However, because he forgot to give him acid and salt, it wasn't long before the child relapsed. Finally, treatment was carried out from the start.

Some people also admit that they believe that patients who relapse and even become more serious are patients who do not give acid to the shaman after completing treatment. According to the informant, patients who failed to recover from their illness after seeking treatment from a shaman generally had a history of non-medical illness. In ethnomedicine, the terms healthy and sick are known which do not only refer to a person's body/physical condition but also non-physical conditions. Such as beliefs, values, social and culture have an important role in defining health conditions. (Herlan et al., 2020) Human behavior in dealing with health problems is not random behavior, but selective, planned and structured behavior within a health service system which is an integral part of the culture of the community concerned. This selective behavior is a sociocultural adaptive strategy that emerged in response to the threat of disease.

The medical and traditional treatment carried out by the Guntung River community is part of the medical system which is included in the elements of a nation's knowledge system which in its realization can be included in the technological element. The diversity of ethnicities and cultures has consequences for the diversity of medical systems (traditional and modern) in society. The medical system is a universal element of a culture so that the medical system is an integral part of culture. Therefore, each medical system has a different concept of health and illness, as well as treatment efforts. There are classifications of causes of disease that are considered to originate from naturalistic systems (natural forces, individual imbalances, not regarding certain people) or personalistic (intervention from an agent, whether supernatural or human).

2. Prohibition in Giving Hydrochloric Acid

The tradition of giving acid and salt in traditional medicine, which is believed by the Guntung River community, contains taboos and taboos, meaning there are things that must not be done so that the treatment is successful and the disease will not recur. The abstinence is in the form of a prohibition so that the giver of salt acid, who is a shaman's patient, does not eat the salt acid. It is feared that this will cause the patient's disease to recur. This was expressed by Tok Atan Cik, a shaman:

"It's taboo, yes, if you've already filled the salted acid, the salted acid that you read earlier won't boil again until the person who brought it eats the salted acid. Make nye say, if the salt and pepper that is shared by the person, I separate it with the salt and pepper that I bought myself, what else is there to serve to the guests. I told my son to cook using the salt and pepper that I bought, if the salt and pepper that was shared by the person, I would only eat it for my family. die back again".

Conclusion

This study found that there was a symbolic interaction in giving salt acid at the end of traditional treatment. Patients who have been successfully cured by a shaman are required to administer acid and salt so that the disease does not recur. The forms of symbolic interaction in administering acid and salt in treatment are as follows: first, it can be seen from the symbol of a shaman's bonding with his patient. This bond is built from the social interaction that takes place between the shaman and the community as well as the social construction that takes place in the community. Second, a symbol of the patient's trust in the shaman who has tried to cure him. Third, the symbol that giving acid and salt is a form of gratitude from the patient to the shaman after carrying out treatment. Fourth, a symbol so that the treatment carried out is not in vain so it needs to be locked. Fifth, it becomes a symbol of the belief that disease and treatment are spiritual phenomena. Because disease does not only come from the physical/body, treatment should not only be centered on the body but also carried out psychologically and magically. As for the meaning of traditions depending on social interaction, the continuity of that meaning also very much depends on changes in social interaction. Over time, the meaning of the tradition of giving acid and salt can change. The administration of salt acid in treatment is a thinking and interpretive process, selective, planned and structured behavior in a health service system which is an integral part of the culture of the community concerned.

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