

# Namalo - Traditional Healer In Batak Toba: Community Knowledge And Herbs For Medicine

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**Abstract:** Traditional medicine is an alternative medicine that can be chosen by the community besides medical treatment. Traditional medicine is a treatment that has been known since ancient times and it has become a culture in every society and even in every country. One treatment method known from the process of traditional medicine is the use of herbal ingredients. This paper uses a qualitative and quantitative approach to 12 traditional healers (Namalo) and 117 residents of Humbang Hasundutan District and Toba Samosir District to find out the types of plants used by traditional healers and the reasons of the community, especially the Batak Toba ethnicity, to choose this treatment. The medicinal plants used by Namalo in the treatment process are plants obtained from the surrounding environment. The plants used by Namalo have been known to be able to cure diseases since a long time ago. The knowledge of these medicinal plants and their properties are obtained from the ancestors of Namalo. Some of the plants are guava leaves, purba jolma root, galinggang, sijukkot, kecibling, salagundi leaves, and others. Many aspects influence people to choose this treatment, for instance, because herbal ingredients do not cause side effects, the price is cheap and because this treatment has been known for a long time and has been used for generations in the community.

**Index Terms:** Namalo, herbs, traditional medicine, society perception

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Traditional healers exist in all cultures, and their widespread presence in developing countries is well documented. In fact it has been estimated that 80% of the world's population continues to use their own traditional system of medicine despite the increasing presence of allopathic medicine [1]. The Bureau of Indigenous Thai Medicine report that this initial policy had continued developing under the Fifth to the Ninth National Health Development Plan, 1986-2006, and it had increased the use of plants and herbs in methods of health promotion [2]. Current estimates suggest that in many developing countries, about two thirds of the population relies heavily on traditional practitioners and medicinal plants to meet primary health care needs. As a result, the medicine all over the world is nowadays revalued by extensive researches on base materials plant species and their therapeutic principles, however to date only about five percent of the total plant species have been thoroughly investigated to ascertain safety and efficacy of traditional medicine [3]. Traditional medicine still exists in several countries in the world. Traditional Chinese medicine using the method of acupuncture and herbal medicine is one treatment method that is widely known to the public and increased in western countries in this frame [4]. In Thailand traditional healers are known as mor baan, but some other regions in the country call them mor pheun bann, mor baan, mor bo raan, or mor bhaa. The herbalists are divided into several types, for example tom ya sa moon prai (stewed herbal medicine). Herbalists are also called mor sa moon prai, but they also practice the skills of mor du (fortune teller), mor nuat (massage healer), and mor wai phom (ceremonial healer or faithhealer). Their knowledge is based on the discipline of indigenous medicine [5].

In South Africa traditional healers as consulted for a wide range of physical, social, and emotional problems and are often expected to assume the roles of medicine healer, priest, psychiatrist, advisor, diviner and herbalist [1]. There are many terms for traditional healers in Indonesia, but in Batak Toba ethnic community, it is known specifically as Namalo. Each Namalo has the ability and knowledge that vary in providing treatment to patients. There is a Namalo that performs a reflection massage and uses herbs for internal medicine. There is also a Namalo that uses herbs for herb fractures [6]. As a result, the medicine all over the world is nowadays revalued by extensive researches on base materials plant species and their therapeutic principles, however to date only about five percent of the total plant species have been thoroughly investigated to ascertain safety and efficacy of traditional medicines. Plant species have long been the principal ingredients of traditional medicine and their use dates back to the beginning of human civilization. Herbal medicine has clearly recognizable therapeutic effects as well as some toxic side-effects. The knowledge base for traditional herbal medicine stems from spirituality, customs, livelihood strategies and available nearby resources. Medicinal herbs are main ingredients of traditional herbal medicine, and the traditional herbal medicine is considered as the main lifeline, the first choice, fewer side-effects, better patience tolerance, relatively less expense, and cultural acceptance and long history of use, in comparison to western medicine [3]. In Hainan Island, China known medicinal plants exceed 3100 species; more than 1100 plant species were documented as Traditional Chinese Medicines (TCM), with 250 species commonly used and 135 species officially recorded [7]. In Indonesia, traditional medicine is indeed very popular as an alternative treatment option. The number of people who use traditional medicine continues to increase every year. In 2001, according to the National Socio-Economic Survey, there were around 57.7 percent of Indonesia's population doing self-medication, 31.7 percent using traditional medicine, and 9.8 percent choosing traditional medicine. Then, in 2004, that number increased dramatically. It was recorded, there were around 72.44 percent of the population using self-medication, and 32.87 percent chose traditional medicine. The data is also supported by the number of traditional healers who reached 280,000 [8], [9]. In addition, the development of alternative medicine in

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Indonesia is also supported by the discovery of about 5,000 species of plants that have a healing function of 28,000 species of plants in the archipelago [10]. This paper will discuss about types of herbs and treatments used by Namalo to cure illness. Moreover, the general view from community about traditional treatment of Namalo will also be explained.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This paper examine the results of research conducted from 2016-2018 in two districts in North Sumatra, namely Humbang Hasundutan District and Toba Samosir District. This paper uses a mixed approach, namely qualitative and quantitative approaches, that are usually used in sociology research [11] [12] [13]. In this method, data are collected by conducting in-depth interviews, observations and by distributing questionnaires to informants. There are 117 informants who participate in the research. They are patients or families of patients who had experienced traditional treatment from Namalo. Other informants are 12 Namalo people (traditional healers) who are widely known and still practicing their expertise. The method of collecting data through questionnaires was carried out to 117 informants to find out their experiences regarding traditional medicine treatment by

Namalo. For examples, the benefits, how they found out about Namalo, their reasons for choosing traditional medicine and the perceived impact after the treatment. The method of collecting data through in-depth interviews was conducted to the Namalo to find out the types of plants used by them to cure the patients, how to mix herbs, and the efficacy of the ingredients that have been processed by Namalo themselves.

## 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. Community Knowledge (Going to Namalo to Get Treatment)

Most of the respondents have known about the treatment by Namalo, from the times when Namalo treated their illness or when they accompanied relatives who wanted the treatment. There are certain elements in community who barely accept Namalo existence. However, the majority stated that the existence of Namalo in their neighborhood is really helpful and needed by community. People demand for quick, easy, and cheap treatment, due to the situation at the research locale. It is considered a poor community and some of the residents' houses

**Table 1: Treatment by Namalo and Its Benefits for Community**

Statement	F	%	Statement	F	%
I have gone to Namalo a few times	40	34,18	Really helpful	81	69,23
I have gone to Namalo once, long time ago	36	30,76	Nothing special	27	23,07
I go to Namalo frequently; the treatment suits me	27	23,07	Hospital is better	7	5,98
Never go to Namalo	12	10,25	Uncomfortable	2	1,7
Never, because I do not trust Namalo	2	1,7	Annoying	-	-
Total	117	100	Total	117	100

Source: Research Data, 2017

are remote or nearly inaccessible. These difficulties have impacts on community getting medical treatment. The price and the remote location make local people prefer traditional medicine. The existence of Namalo makes it easier for people to receive affordable treatment without side effects. Namalo never set a fixed cost for the treatment they give to the patients. This was revealed by one of Namalo, br Manurung:

*"... if the patient gives (money), I will accept it. But, it is okay if they don't. If a person comes to me for treatment and give Rp 10,000, so be it ... that's all (he/she) can afford. No money, no problem. I never told people 'your medicine cost this etc.'. I'd just say 'this is the name of the medicine, find it yourself' then they thank me. If I put a price, I would be rich. There are so many patients I healed, even the handicapped. If I set the price to 1 million, only the rich person would be able to afford the treatment here. Rich people don't even mind if I told them (that the price is) 3 million. But that means I don't help people anymore. Oppung (I) doesn't want to be like that (making profit) ... "*

The facts above are reasons why people prefer to get treatment from Namalo compared to doctors at the hospital. Other informants, or 27 people (23.07%) gave out "Nothing special" answer. These informants never received treatment

from Namalo and only heard about the treatment from their neighbours or relatives.

### 3.2. Sources of Information about Traditional Healers

Different receptions from society do not turn into obstacles for Namalo to survive with their traditional medicine treatment. Although Namalo never promote their practice on radio, newspapers, banners and so on, their existence is increasingly recognized by many people. This statement was acknowledged by 12 Namalo who became informants in this study. They stated that they had never put out such advertisements. In fact, their patient do not only come from their own communities, but also from other cities such as Pematang Siantar, Medan, Jakarta, or Kalimantan. One of the Namalo, Betaria br Siregar, emphasized that:

*"I never put up banners or advertisements to convince people to come to me for treatment. They came for the treatment, experienced my medical services and they were satisfied. This treatment becomes widely known due to word-of-mouth marketing done by my patients. So, more people come here and I treat their illness using herbs and traditional medical tools ... "*

Moreover, the sources of informations about Namalo and their expertises are explained below:

**Table 2.** The Main Sources of Informations about Namalo And Their Expertises

Statement	F	%
I found out about it a long time ago	26	22,22
I found out about it from my friends and neighbours	62	52,99
I found out about it from mass media/internet	-	-
I found out about it because I have experienced treatment from Namalo	20	18,8
I found out about it randomly	9	7,69
Total	117	100

Source: Research Data, 2017

From the table above, it is known that there are no informants who searched information about Namalo from the internet/mass media.

### 3.3. The Reason of Choosing Traditional Treatment over Medical and Its Perceived Impacts

The information about Namalo spreaded widely affects the decision of community to choose Namalo treatment over medical treatment at hospital or clinic. This indicates positive perception of community towards Namalo. These perceptions could be explained through several reasonings below:

**Table 3.** The reason of choosing Namalo treatment over medical and the perceived impacts of the treatment.

Statement	F	%	Statement	F	%
Namalo treatment is more affordable and quick	45	38,4	Feeling better	28	23,9
No side effects during the treatment	30	25,6	Recovering gradually	41	35,0
I don't like taking generic drugs	5	4,2	Illness is cured	29	24,7
Our family has been using Namalo treatment for ages	11	9,4	Feeling no changes	8	6,8
Others, which are...	26	22,2	Others, which are...	11	9,4
Total	117	100	Total	117	100

Source: Research Data, 2017

The reasons for choosing Namalo treatment are summarized by several points mentioned by 26 informants (22.2%) above. For instance, there are a number of diseases that cannot be treated by doctors as well as by Namalo, such as fractures, internal diseases and conjured diseases caused by witchcraft. Treatment of these diseases requires massage and the use of herbs [14]. Namalo guarantee that the patients are going to be healed completely. However, not all diseases or illness can be cured by Namalo. Namalo will tell patients directly if they are not able to cure the illness. Namalo will not conduct treatment if they are certain that they are not capable to do so. This was mentioned by one of the Namalo as follows:

... "there are various kinds of disease that affect the patient. However, there are few that I couldn't cure, like acute complications, or abbori (epilepsy) suffered by patients above 5 years old...."

In fact, the patients also know that each Namalo has different ability and expertise. The success of the treatment depends on the patients themselves; they must comply with the rules given by Namalo during the treatment process, in order to ensure that they are healed completely. The limitations of Namalo's ability are known by the public. As seen in the table below, the community's knowledge about diseases that can be cured by Namalo are as follows:

**Table 4.** The diseases that can be cured by Namalo based on the community's knowledge

Statement	F	%
Only mild illnesses	17	18,5
Only conjured diseases	11	9,4
Only certain illness/disease, which is...	48	41,0
Diseases that cannot be cured by medical treatment	35	29,9
Serious illnesses like cancer, etc.	6	5,1
Total	117	100

Source: Research Data, 2017

The informants acknowledge that Namalo can only cure certain diseases as mentioned by 48 informants (41.02%). According to 35 other informants, Namalo can cure diseases that cannot be handled by medical treatment. Patients who come to receive treatment from Namalo have tried medical treatment before and spent a lot of money, but the doctors could not cure them. Therefore, they prefer the traditional medicine from Namalo. One of the informants told the personal experience and stated that:

... "I went to the hospital and after being examined by the doctor, I was diagnosed as having HNP and I had to undergo operation immediately. However, seeing the condition of my brother who had experienced the same illness and had surgery but not recovering, then I decided to be treated by Namalo instead. After being examined by Namalo and getting treatment for 6 visits, my illness began to lessen. I also know that serious illnesses like cancer are very difficult to cure by Namalo ... "

## 3.4. Herbs and Treatments

**Table 5.** The Application of Herbs in Treatment by Namalo

Name of Namalo	Expertise/Types of Disease	Types of Plants/Herbs	Preparation
Mr.Tobing and his son	Broken Bone	Rice, black pepper, lengkuas (Alpinia galanga), kecombrang, turmeric (curcuma longa), adulpak, betle leaf (Piper betle), coconut milk and kamput (traditional cocktail)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Rice, black pepper, lengkuas, kecombrang, and turmeric are mixed with lard and bird saliva, then all of these are cooked (Note: bird saliva can heal the bird's broken bones; leaves inside the bird's nest are also included)</li> <li>2. Namalo splash boiling water from potion bag that contains rice, black pepper, lengkuas, kecombrang, turmeric lard) and unknown type of leaves (the informant does not want to give information about the leaves and patients cannot explain the leaves either)</li> </ol>
Mr. Sihombing	Gastritis	Garlic, turmeric (curcuma longa), candlenut (Aleuritesmoluccanus), lengkuas (Alpinia galanga) Turmeric (curcuma longa)	
Mr. Hutahaean	Medicine for Epilepsy	Aromatic ginger (Kaempferialgalanga), patchouli leaf, white pepper, black pepper, temulawak (Curcuma zanthorrhiza Roxb).	All plants are ground until smooth, then cook it until it is boiling. Add eucalyptus oil. Put a handful of cooked plants, then smear it throughout the body according to the age of the patient. Treatment is done starting from the head to the legs. For the head, it should be smeared gently.
Mrs. Br Manurung	Reflexology and herbal concoction, Colds in babies	Castor bean leaves (Ricinus communis)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Namalo gives the drug by telling the patient to wrap the baby's body from the back to the abdomen with castor leaves covered with cooking oil and heated the leaves near the fire briefly.</li> <li>b. Namalo also writes down some plants that patients must look for, then process them to be used as a medicinal herb for babies</li> </ol>
	Lump on neck (cancer)	Galinggang and sijukkot	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Namalo ask patients to bring coconut oil, galinggang and sijukkot plants</li> <li>b) Then, Namalo process the plant until it turns into a herbal oil</li> <li>c) After that, Namalo perform reflexology massage using the oil. The massage is performed on the patient's foot area to the ankles</li> </ol>
	Gastritis	Aloe vera (Aloe vera (L.) Burm.f.)	<p>How to process the aloe vera:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. take the aloe vera, wash it then peel the skin like peeling cucumber</li> <li>b. allow 10 minutes to let the mucus comes out</li> <li>c. then, cook the aloe by boiling it with a little salt until the mucus is gone and the texture is like jelly</li> <li>d. consume it 3 times a day before meals</li> <li>e. consuming aloe vera with its mucus can cause pain in the heart</li> </ol>
	Menstrual pain	purba jolma root, white turmeric (Curcuma zedoaria), red ginger, aromatic ginger (Kaempferialgalanga) and temulawak (Curcuma zanthorrhiza Roxb).	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Peel and clean all ingredients</li> <li>b. Cut them or shred, then boil the ingredients until it becomes a mixture (jamu).</li> <li>c. Put sugar palm and some salt to add flavours.</li> <li>d. Drink it once a day after meal</li> </ol>

	Breast cancer	Temulawak, purbajolma, white turmeric ( <i>Curcuma zedoaria</i> ), ginger, aromatic ginger ( <i>Kaempferiagalanga</i> ), and soursop leaves	a. Clean all ingredients b. Shred the plants from temulawak, white turmeric, and ginger c. Boil the ingredients until cooked d. Filter the mixture, then drink it
	Stomachache	Yellow guava leaves ( <i>Psidiumguajava</i> ), Turmeric ( <i>curcuma longa</i> ), and rice	
	Eye pain	Kitolod leaves and flowers	Pluck the kitolod flower, then put in a glass of water. Close the glass lid and wait 5 minutes. Later, use the water as ointment for rinsing the eyes. Do these steps everyday until the eyes are healed. In some areas, kitolod leaves are used instead of the flowers. It will feel very painful, but keep doing that everyday until the pain is reduced.
	Kidney problem	Kecibling ( <i>Strobilanthescrispa</i> )	Take fivekecibling, boil it with water then drink the water
	Fever	Salagundi leaves ( <i>Roudholiateysmanii</i> )	
	Dysentery	Yellow guava leaves ( <i>Psidiumguajava</i> )	
	Kidney stone	Kecibling ( <i>Strobilanthescrispa</i> ), kumis kucing ( <i>Orthosiphonaristatus</i> ), white turmeric ( <i>Curcuma zedoaria</i> )	a. Kecibling and kumis kucing are dried in the sun b. White turmeric is dried in the sun, then it is ground c. All ingredients are boiled d. Then, sugar candy is added e. Place the mixture in a bottle
	Urinary tract infection	Arabica beans parasitic plant ( <i>Loranthus ferrugineusRoxb.</i> ), 1 soursop leaf, 1 spoonful of black honey	Loranthus is cooked with water until it is boiled, then 1 soursop leaf is added. One glass of the mixture is taken in the morning and another one in the afternoon, by adding 1 tablespoon of black honey while the water is still warm.
	Heart disease (under treatment/consuming pills); usually the patients with low blood pressure are given herbal concoction	Beet ( <i>Beta vulgaris</i> ) (1/3), broccoli, honey, sugar palm ( <i>Arengapinnata</i> ), papaya	Boil the broccoli, then blend the papaya and beet. Add some salt and sugar palm with one spoonful of black honey
	Diabetes	Skin of cempedak ( <i>Artocarpus integer</i> )	Cempedak skin is dried in the sun, drained, then crushed into powder. The powder is brewed, then it is consumed by the patients two times a day. But, it has to be adjusted to the patients' blood pressure.
	Internal cancer	Cempedak ( <i>Artocarpus integer</i> )	One handful of cempedak is consumed everyday to release gas and repair the excretion process so that the cancer will not spread.
Mr. Manotar Siregar	Herbal concoction, Acid reflux	Sikkam ( <i>Bischofiajavanica</i> Blume)	
	Epilepsy	Coconut milk, pepper ( <i>Piper Albi</i> Linn) and bay laurel oil	
	Ovarian cancer	Tamarind ( <i>Tamarindusindica</i> ) and sugar palm ( <i>Arengapinnata</i> ), andorpaet ( <i>Tithoniadiversifolia</i> )	
Mr. Manullang	Herbal concoction and massage, Internal medicine, like gastritis or liver disease	Turmeric ( <i>curcuma longa</i> ), lengkuas ( <i>Alpinia galanga</i> ), temulawak ( <i>Curcuma zanthorrhiza</i> ), patchouli oil, andorpaet ( <i>Tithoniadiversifolia</i> ) brotowali ( <i>Tinosporacordifolia</i> )	All ingredients (turmeric, lengkuas, temulawak) are shredded, then cooked into mixture. After that, the patient drinks it.
	Epilepsy	Salagundi ( <i>Roudholiateysmanii</i> )	Salagundi is soaked in hot water, then given as a drink to the patient. After drinking salagundi, the patient will vomit, which means the disease is regurgitated.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based of their views on the existence of Namalo, the community could be divided into 3 groups of people:

- a. People who accept the existence of Namalo as traditional healers; they are willing to be treated by Namalo and having confidence on Namalo's ability to cure the illness.
- b. People who accept the existence of Namalo as traditional healers after experiencing medical treatment; they turn to alternative medicine because doctors could not cure them. They also choose Namalo treatment due to several reasons, like the cost, accessibility etc.
- c. People who do not accept the existence of Namalo and refuse treatment offered by Namalo; they only believe in medical treatment.
- d. All the elements of community in the research locale understand that herbs or traditional medicine are important alternative that are worth to be considered when they want to choose the type of treatment.

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