

Research Article

A Gender Analysis of Perceptions of Traditional Medicines by Sikerei

Fitria Deswika, Dany Romanza Putra, Diffa Khoirunnisa, Yulia Dwijayanti, Romy Nasmi Wibawa, Andri Rusta*

Universitas Andalas

Abstract.

This paper analyzed gender perceptions of traditional medicine by sikerei in Mentawai Islands Regency. Traditional medicine by sikerei still exists amid the modernization of medicine. The Mentawai Islands are one of the unique regions in Indonesia with a rich culture and traditions. One of the important aspects of Mentawai culture is the system of traditional medicine developed by *shamans* or *sikerei*. *Sikerei* is an individual who has knowledge and skills in traditional medicine and is recognized as a religious and spiritual leader in the Mentawai community. The Mentawai people develop traditional medications through rituals and use leaves as medicine in the healing process. Traditional medicine by *sikerei* in the Mentawai community is a practice that has existed for a long time and continues to be passed down from generation to generation. The people of the Mentawai Islands Regency view males as the ones who prioritize logic in their actions and tend to be different from females, who prioritize their feelings and hearts. This also impacts their perception of the traditional sikerei healing culture. This is in line with the Perception Theory proposed by Bimo Walgito, which states that perception is a view of an object that is obtained from the process of sensing, organizing and interpreting the object received by a person so that it is something meaningful and an integrated activity within oneself. The research method used in this research was a qualitative approach with data collection through in-depth interviews. Research participants were selected purposively by considering variations in gender, age, and socio-economic background. Interviews were conducted with *sikerei*, men and women in several villages in the Mentawai Islands. The study took 150 samples from the Mentawai Islands. Data was analyzed using a thematic approach. Data collected from interviews were processed and analyzed to identify the patterns and themes that emerge in the perception of traditional medicine by *sikerei*. Comparisons between female and male perceptions were made to explore the differences and similarities in their perceptions. The results indicated that there is a relationship between gender and perceptions of *sikerei* traditional medicine. The chi-square test showed the number 6.732 with df 2 which meant there was a relationship between the two variables, while the contingency coefficient test showed the number 0.214 which meant that there was a low positive relationship.

Keywords: Gender perception, traditional medication, *sikerei*

Corresponding Author: Andri
Rusta; email:
Arusta@soc.unand.ac.id

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1. Introduction

The Mentawai Islands are a region that is unique with its own characteristics, starting with its rich culture and distinctive traditions. One important aspect of Mentawai culture is the traditional healing system carried out by shamans or sikerei. Sikerei is an individual who has knowledge and skills in traditional medicine, and is recognized as a religious and spiritual leader in the Mentawai community.

Traditional medicine by sikerei in the Mentawai community is a form of practice that has existed for a long time and continues to be passed down from generation to generation. This traditional medicine involves various elements such as herbal concoctions, spells, physical actions, and traditional ceremonies carried out by sikerei. In Mentawai society, traditional sikerei medicine is considered to have the power to cure various physical and spiritual illnesses. *Sikerei* is a culture passed down from generation to generation by the Mentawai tribe which is still believed in today. *Sikerei* is someone who has intelligence or high spiritual energy and a connection with the spirits of previous ancestors who are used to cure various diseases, which is done by giving a medicalherbs which is then followed by dancing called *turuk*, in its ritual which aims to summon the ancestors. Usually, *Sikerei* is a person who is believed to have good behaviour who is believed to maintain the community's relationship with the spirits of their ancestors. *Sikerei* can also be called a healer or shaman because he is responsible for the health of the Mentawai people, which is done by reciting mantras in the *punen pabetai* ritual.

Sikerei has a very important role in the lives of the Mentawai people. *Sikerei* is a medical and spiritual figure as well as a ritual leader in every traditional ceremony or *Punen* (party) at *Uma* (Mentawai traditional house). Usually, *Sikerei* make medicinal herbs from plants found in the forest or yard. *Sikerei* take the plants as medicine and then recite prayers so that the plants taken are approved by the spirits, they believe in. *Sikerei* who carry out traditional medicine are part of the community, are in the midst of the community, close to the community, and the treatment they produce is part of the community's culture, more accepted by the community than doctors, orderlies, midwives, who are still foreign to them. The low health rate of the Regency community It is assumed that the accessibility of health services in the Mentawai Islands is due to people who believe more in the traditional healing traditions of *Sikerei* than in health services provided by the government, thus this is an interesting matter to discuss.

However, in recent decades, modernization and interaction with outside cultures have had an impact on Mentawai traditions and cultural practices, including traditional

medicine by sikerei. Factors such as technological developments, accessibility to modern health services, and global cultural influences have brought changes in the way the Mentawai people view traditional medicine.

In the midst of these changes, it is very important to understand how perceptions of traditional medicine by sikerei differ between men and women in Mentawai society. Gender plays an important role in decisions around health and treatment. Previous studies have shown that men and women have different views on health, disease, and treatment. Therefore, this research will explore and analyze differences in perceptions regarding traditional medicine by sikerei in the Mentawai Islands, especially from a gender perspective. So that raises research questions:

1. What are men's perceptions of traditional treatment by sikerei in the Mentawai Islands?
2. What are women's perceptions of traditional medicine by sikerei in the Mentawai Islands?
3. What are the factors that influence men's and women's perceptions regarding traditional treatment by sikerei?
4. How do gender differences influence the decision in choosing between traditional treatment by sikerei and modern health services?

Previously, someone had discussed how people perceive traditional medicine based on gender differences (Agus Djameluddin, Risa Kota Putra, Dewi Ratnasari: 2020). Then there is also research on the perceptions of pharmacy visitors regarding the safety and effectiveness of traditional medicines in Panguyangan sub-district in 2021 (Efi Yulias Astuti, Auli Rahman and Aziez Ismanuandar: 2022). Apart from that, there is also research that discusses medicinal plants as traditional healers in the Mentawai Islands, where traditional medicine is medicine that is formulated using plants found in the environment and used for treatment (Andreas Rino Sitanggang, 2022). Basically, this medicinal plant is used by the Sikerei to heal the community as a traditional method combined with their ritual traditions. As (Moh. Riyan Basofi, 2016). However, no one has discussed Gender Perceptions of Sikerei Traditional Medicine, where most previous research only discussed Sikerei traditional medicine but not the community's perception based on gender. So this research is interesting to discuss and find out

Based on the explanation above, This research aims to describe how women and men perceive traditional sikerei medicine and also this research wants to see what factors influence men's and women's perceptions so that later this can influence preferences in choosing traditional treatment by sikerei or modern health services. so that later it can provide an overview that will give consideration to the government in making decisions

2. Research Method

2.1. Conclusion of Research Results

This research uses a qualitative approach, where a qualitative approach is one of the research methods used to explain social phenomena by collecting data and analysing data using qualitative data. This approach aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the research topic by exploring various related aspects, such as perception, meaning, context and individual or group experiences. Data collection using a qualitative approach in this research was carried out using interviews, documents and text analysis.

In-depth interview techniques were carried out to be able to answer the research questions in this study by gaining insight into the views and perceptions of individuals and groups related to the research subject. Before the interview, it is necessary to prepare several things, such as preparing questions that will later be asked to the informant, selection of informant, namely by targeting people who will later be able to become resource persons, conducting thorough interviews, being an active listener when conducting direct interviews with the resource person, during the interview the researcher must take notes. and record the results of interviews in order to obtain accurate information. After conducting the interview, the next thing to do is to analyse the data and interpret the results which will later be used to answer the research questions.

Research participants or informants will be selected purposively by considering variations in gender, age and socio-economic background. Purposive selection of research participants means selecting participants who have certain characteristics that are relevant to the research question, so that the researcher hopes to get a variety of answers from various angles and perspectives of a person or group. The steps used in purpose sampling are identifying selection criteria, identifying suitable participants, selecting participants, diversifying, and finally confirming the participant's willingness to become a resource. Interviews conducted in this research were conducted with *sikerei*, male and female communities in several villages in the Mentawai Islands.

Respondents were obtained through an online questionnaire which had been distributed through advertised social media networks and 100 respondents were obtained through an offline questionnaire with field interview techniques which included people from various circles according to the respondent criteria. Researchers conducted a Building Rapport before conducting interviews with respondents in order to obtain maximum interview results in accordance with the questionnaire questions and provided

informed consent to respondents to obtain willingness and full awareness of respondents in providing answers. Researchers also accommodate respondents' stories and complaints regarding medical and traditional treatment related to research as material for elaboration on discussions and research findings.

Data analysis will be carried out through a thematic approach. The thematic approach in research is a research method that focuses on collecting, analysing and interpreting data related to a particular topic or theme. In research using a thematic approach, researchers try to identify and understand patterns that emerge from the data collected. The steps used in the thematic approach are data collection, transcription, coding or giving labels or categories to the data that describe the emerging concepts or themes, thematic analysis, and then interpretation.

The thematic approach is usually used in qualitative research which requires a deeper understanding of a particular theme or topic. This thematic approach allows researchers to dig deeper into the qualitative aspects of a phenomenon or research topic and identify the implications that may not be measurable quantitatively. In collecting the data for this research using interview techniques, the data obtained from the interviews will later be processed and analysed to identify the patterns and themes that emerge in the perception of traditional medicine by *sikerei*. between men and women will be carried out to explore the differences and similarities in their perceptions.

3. Result

TABLE 1: Gender* *sikerei* crosstabulation treatment rates

			sikerei treatment level			Total
			Low	Medium	High	
Gender	Male	Count	4	24	49	77
		% within gender	5.2%	31.2%	63.6%	100.0%
	Female	Count	12	15	36	63
		% within gender	19.0%	23.8%	57.1%	100.0%
Total		Count	16	39	85	140
		% within gender	11.4%	27.9%	60.7%	100.0%

This research took 150 samples from the Mentawai Islands, where these samples came from the island of Siberut, namely 2 respondents came from West Siberut, 3 respondents came from North Siberut, 12 respondents came from Central Siberut and

119 respondents came from South Siberut and finally 4 respondents came from South-west Siberut. Researchers took samples in these districts on the grounds that Siberut Island is an island that is still very strong in *sikerei* traditional healing culture compared to other islands in the Mentawai Islands Regency. Researchers took respondents from the age groups of teenagers, adults to the elderly with the majority of respondents aged 17 to 40 years.

In determining the respondents, researchers also looked at the respondent's highest level of education. The majority of respondents' education in this study was high school with a total of 56 people, the second majority was elementary school with a total of 36 people, for the undergraduate level there were 23 respondents, for the junior high school level there were 13 respondents and finally there were 11 people who had never attended school, this shows a variety of perspectives of society from various educational strata. Furthermore, the researchers also looked at the level of employment of the respondents. In this study, there were 40 respondents who worked as farmers and the second majority, 33 people, worked as housewives. From this work, the average income of people on the island of Siberut is below Rp. 250,000, this is due to the poverty rate in Mentawai Regency of 13.97%, which is the highest figure in West Sumatra Province. Even though the UMR (minimum regional pay) for Mentawai Islands Regency is Rp. 2,742,476, - One of the reasons why this happened was due to the difficulty of trade and transportation traffic so that people only met their needs with what was available in nature and around them.

Religion is also something that researchers look at in determining the research respondents. In this study, the majority of respondents adhered to Catholic Christianity, followed by Protestant Christianity, while Islam was a minority religion. Next is the type of toilet used by the respondent. In this study, the type of toilet used by respondents was that the majority of respondents, namely 118 people, already had private toilets in their respective homes, but there were still around 6 people who used public and open-air toilets.

4. Discussion and Analysis

The researchers' analysis of the findings obtained; overall men have a higher interest than women in carrying out traditional medicine (*Sikerei*). This is because the cultural doctrines and customs that men acquired from their ancestors are more vulnerable than women. This is proven by men's wider knowledge regarding *Sikerei*, Mentawai customs and culture. Men tend to be close to their *Sikerei* ancestors and culture, because in

reality *Sikerei* is only awarded to selected men, no woman is awarded the *Sikerei* except when she marries a *Sikerei*. Therefore, the cultivation of customs and culture is stronger and more vulnerable to men than to women. This is proven by the high interest in visiting *Sikerei* traditional medicine by men compared to women. Apart from that, this also has an impact on the different perceptions of men and women regarding traditional *Sikerei* medicine and modern medicine. Women, due to their lack of deep cultural cultivation, have made their interest in Mentawai culture erode with the development of the modern era, so they tend to follow the developments in the modern world. Researchers found that women had very little knowledge regarding *Sikerei*, and they even refused to be interviewed regarding *Sikerei* or Mentawai culture.

In addition, researchers found that women tend to have a higher interest in using health service facilities provided by the government compared to traditional treatment. "Even though modern medicine in hospitals is actually the same as traditional, because actually the medicine given by hospitals also comes from plants and nature, just like *Sikerei* which gives medicine from nature, the difference from hospitals is that it has been added with chemistry but we believe it is actually the same just. So that we can be clearer, it's better if we go for treatment to a hospital or health centre and we can understand what the disease is," said one of the respondents the researchers found. This means that women's perceptions and thoughts regarding their own culture are starting to erode with one form of progress in facilities, namely in the health sector. Meanwhile, the male respondents found by the researchers had the perception that Mentawai culture needed to be prioritized, including in treatment, because basically the treatment provided by the *Sikerei* had been discovered earlier than chemical drugs. This is based on what one male respondent said, "When we go for treatment, we really prioritize going to *Sikerei*, because that has become the culture of us, the Mentawai people. Because actually the medicines from hospitals also come from natural plants, so you could say our ancestors discovered the medicine earlier." These two respondents' statements are proof that the differences in perceptions between men and women influence their interest in traditional visits and treatment. This perception is also influenced by the background knowledge and cultural information they receive.

This difference in perception which is influenced by the background knowledge and cultural information is supported by strong evidence that the researchers found from respondents with mixed blood between Nias and Mentawai, where these respondents did not know much information about Mentawai culture and *Sikerei* traditional medicine, so these respondents also more likely to seek medical treatment at a health service facility rather than traditional *Sikerei* treatment. Therefore, this research found that

the perceptions between men and women greatly influence the level of visits and community interest in carrying out traditional *Sikerei* medicine.

5. Conclusion

It is hoped that this research will provide more insight into the differences in perceptions regarding traditional treatment by *sikerei* between men and women in the Mentawai Islands. The findings obtained show that men have a higher interest in carrying out traditional *sikerei* healing compared to women. This is because men tend to be closer to the culture and ancestors than women. Researchers also found that women know less about *sikerei* than men, which is because women are more likely to follow current or modern developments compared to men.

However, on the contrary, researchers found that women's interest tends to be higher in using health service facilities compared to men's interest. Women's own culture is starting to be eroded by one form of progress in facilities, namely in the health sector. This proves that there are differences in perceptions between men and women regarding Mentawai traditional medicine. This research found that there were differences in perceptions between men and women which resulted in an influence on the level of visits and community interest in carrying out traditional *Sikerei* medicine.

The results of this research can provide valuable information for efforts to preserve the culture and traditions amidst the ongoing social changes. In addition, this research can also provide input for the development of more effective and sustainable health programs in the area, by considering gender differences in decision making regarding treatment.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interest

The author hereby declares that there is no conflict of interest in the writing or purpose of this article.

Biographies

Fitria Deswika is a political science student at Andalas University. Currently she is in fifth grade and is one of the participants whose research is funded at the national level.

Dany Romanza Putra is a political science student at Andalas University. Currently he is in fifth grade and is one of the participants whose research is funded at the national level.

Diffa Khoirunnisa is a political science student at Andalas University. Currently he is in fifth grade and is one of the participants whose research is funded at the national level.

Yulia Dwijayanti is a political science student at Andalas University. Currently he is in fifth grade and is one of the participants whose research is funded at the national level.

Andri Rusta is a lecturer at the Department of Political Science, Andalas University.

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