

Russian Refugee Influence on Older Adult Care in Tubabao Island

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Abstract

The study aimed to explain and gain insight into the social units of interaction and the acquired care culture of older adults on Tubabao Island, Eastern Samar, specifically focusing on the cultural influences resulting from the 1949 settlement of Russian refugees. This research utilized a qualitative, focused ethnographic approach. The sample consisted of 20 older adults born on or before 1949 who lived through the Russian refugee settlement period. The study environment was Tubabao Island, Guiuan, Eastern Samar. Ethical approval was granted by the Cebu Doctors' University Institutional Ethics Review Committee (CDU-IERC Code: 2022-157-Gaviola-CareCulture) on November 11, 2022, and data collection was conducted from December 2022 to January 2023. A multi-method data gathering strategy was employed, including non-participant observations, individual structured and unstructured interviews, two focus group discussions (FGDs), and the triangulation of intangible artifacts and historical literature. Data analysis involved organizing and ordering synthesis, iterative reading, and ethnographic analysis based on the frameworks of Corbin and Strauss. Three central themes describing the care culture emerged: (1) Reinforced practice of alternative/folk medicine, characterized by the use of alcohol-based tinctures and medicinal oils; (2) Appraisals of care and cure, which blend formal medical advice with personal judgment; and (3) Social concept of care, encompassing recreation, community camaraderie, and religious devotion. These findings culminated in a Theoretical-Cultural Model explaining care culture modification through subtle stimulus diffusion. The care culture of the older adults in Tubabao is predominantly rooted in the Filipino archetype, with minute modifications from the Russian refugee settlement acquired via a subtle process of inculturation. Understanding these unique cultural units is essential for nurses to provide culturally competent care that addresses the specific felt needs of this sub-population.

Keywords: *Care Culture, Focused Ethnography, Older Adults, Russian Refugees, Tubabao Island, Inculturation, Stimulus Diffusion.*

1. Introduction

In 1949, the Philippines served as a humanitarian asylum for approximately 6,000 "White Russians" who fled the Bolshevik Revolution and subsequent communist rise in Shanghai (Sembrano, 2020; Illeva, 2000). Under the leadership of President Elpidio Quirino, these multi-ethnic refugees were settled temporarily on Tubabao Island, Eastern Samar (Kwan, 2019). This historical event created a unique social environment where foreign and local cultures interacted for several years, leading to a "subcultural birth" of caring practices.

The interaction between the displaced Russian population and the natives of Tubabao led to a rebirth of cultural blueprints. According to Leininger's (2002) Culture Care Theory, nursing care is deeply influenced by cultural values, norms, and lifeways. For the older adults on Tubabao Island who lived through this period, their present care culture is an archetype modified by these prehistoric and historical influences (Department of Health, 2014; Macahiya, 1969). This process is best explained through stimulus diffusion, where existing cultural patterns are subtly reinforced or modified by external stimuli.

Understanding these cultural nuances is a vital social determinant of health. World Health Organization (WHO) (2025) and Nies & McEwen (2020) collectively identified community health nursing frameworks which emphasize that place, people, and function are essential units for understanding health outcomes. For nurses, exploring this secluded cultural group is necessary to achieve culturally competent care. By identifying the "felt needs" of the Tubabao older adults, healthcare providers can design interventions that decrease health disparities and address unmet needs specific to this population.

Despite the significance of the Russian settlement in Philippine history, there is limited literature on how this period shaped the acquired care culture of the surviving older adults. This study utilizes a focused ethnographic design to elucidate these cultural units, providing a foundation for theoretical analysis and the advancement of population-focused nursing practice.

2. Materials and Methods

- **Research Design:**

This study utilized a qualitative, focused ethnographic design being suggested by Palompon (2018); Denzin & Lincoln (1994), which is to elucidate the acquired cultural caring units of a specific, and small population group that shared a living environment with Russian refugees following the Bolshevik Revolution. By focusing on day-to-day encounters and historical context, this design allowed for the generation and synthesis of constructs that define the present caring culture of the community.

- **Participants:**

The primary informants consisted of 20 older adults who were born on or before 1949 and lived on the island during the Russian refugee settlement. Participants were selected using purposive-snowball sampling. Inclusion criteria required informants to be aged 72–85, currently residing on

the island, and possessing cognitive and hearing clarity to ensure the accuracy of re-lived cultural accounts. Secondary data were gathered from family members living with these older adults to triangulate the translated and collective culture.

- **Instruments:**

The primary instrument of this study is the researcher, who utilized a multi-method set of data gathering strategies. This included non participant observations, structured and unstructured interviews, event mappings, focused group discussions and retrieval of available artifact and historical literatures. Considering the scope of research, the study centered on exploring the acquired culture by answering the central focus being asked of “What is the caring culture at present?”. This research question is based and patterned on the basic units of ethnographic research that is to be considered in data collection, management and analysis according to Schensul & LeCompte (2013). The questionnaire has also been translated from english to the vernacular language of the participants which is “Waray-waray”.

- **Procedure:**

Data collection occurred over a three-week period from December 2022 to January 2023. Considering the scope of research, the study centered on exploring the acquired culture by answering the central focus being asked of “What is the caring culture at present?”. The researcher utilized a multi-method data gathering strategy:

- Non-participant Observation: Focused on the "place, people, and function" of the community to gain a general grasp of the caring culture.
- Interviews: Three sets of individual structured and unstructured interviews were conducted, often in the informants' homes to ensure privacy and comfort.
- Focus Group Discussions (FGD): Two FGD sessions were conducted, involving 15–18 participants each (primary informants and family members) to verify and enrich the individual findings.

- **Data Analysis:**

The study employed ethnographic analysis based on the frameworks of Knoblauch (2005). This entailed a cyclic process of inductive-deductive inquiry where cultural context data were progressively gathered, transcribed into field notes, and subjected to organizing and ordering synthesis. Through iterative reading and re-reading, the researcher identified recurring patterns and context clues, which were then triangulated to develop the final Theoretical-Cultural Model

- **3. Results:**

The ethnographic analysis revealed three central themes that define the care culture of older adults on Tubabao Island.

- **Theme 1: Reinforced Practice of Alternative and Folk Medicine.** The most prevalent practice is the use of herbal tinctures ("lana" or medicinal oil) and ethanol-based preparations locally referred to as "Sioktong", Rum, Gin, and Brandy. These preparations,

infused with roots and bark, are used daily for both oral consumption and topical application to treat ailments ranging from respiratory issues to sprains. Participants noted that these practices were reinforced by the Russian refugees' own strong affinity for natural remedies and alcohol-based elixirs (Eber, 2018; Ileva, 2000; Ristaino, 1990).

- **Theme 2: Appraisals of Care and Cure.** Older adults navigate between medical advice and personal appraisal, as subthemes. While they seek professional consultation for chronic conditions like hypertension or fatty liver, they often rely on "personal judgment" formed through hearsay or familial traditions to manage day-to-day health (Gaviola, 2019; de Guzman et al., 2014).
- **Theme 3: Social Concept of Care.** Care on Tubabao is viewed through a social lens involving subthemes of recreation, family camaraderie, and religious personification. This includes participating in community festivities (fiestas), mutual aid during illness (camaraderie), and the use of "cofradias" or religious devotion to saints for intercession during health crises (Nies & McEwen, 2020).
- These findings culminated in the **Theoretical-Cultural Model**, which posits that the present care culture is a product of **stimulus diffusion**. Unlike the radical cultural changes caused by colonization, the Russian presence initiated a subtle "inculturation" that enriched rather than replaced the existing Filipino archetype

4. Discussion

The care culture of older adults who lived with the Russian Refugees in Tubabao is deeply influenced by the island's unique social dynamics: place, people, and function. Geographically, the island's seclusion from the mainland of Guiuan encourages a reliance on alternative medicine when professional healthcare is not immediately accessible.

The characteristic of the inculturation stimuli—the 6,000 Russian refugees—was pivotal. Unlike Spanish or American colonizers who sought to erase the primitive Filipino identity, the Russians arrived seeking comfort and freedom, leading to a non-confrontational sharing of culture. This supports Leininger's (2002) theory that care is culturally defined and modified by historical events.

Furthermore, the prevalence of extended families (57.2%) on the island facilitates the transmission of these acquired cultural units. Older adults, acting as the "Ilaw ng Tahanan" (light of the home), serve as the primary conduits for passing these reinforced folk practices to younger generations. The Russian influence is most visible in the reinforcement of scientific health-seeking behaviors among those who were professionals (85% of the refugees) and the adoption of specific herbal tincture preparations common in Russian pharmacopoeia.

5. Conclusion

The present care culture of older adults in Tubabao Island remains rooted in the Filipino care archetype, having undergone only minute modifications through a process of stimulus diffusion. These changes were born from a mutual notion of growth and a shared history of seeking comfort and survival. For nursing practice, this study concludes that providing culturally competent care requires an understanding of these unique sub-cultural units. Nurses must recognize that for this population, "care" is not merely a clinical intervention but a social and spiritual process deeply tied to their historical interaction with the Russian refugees

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