

# Health and Harmony: House Construction and Entering a New House Practiced by the *Ifontoks*

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## ABSTRACT

**Background.** The *Ifontok* people are an ethnolinguistic group in the Mountain Province of the Philippines, for whom constructing and occupying a new house symbolizes the fulfillment of personal aspirations and reflects cultural traditions and beliefs that shape community life, worldviews, and social behavior.

**Objective.** This study examined the house construction rituals of the *Ifontok* people and their influence on health beliefs, highlighting the interconnectedness of culture, environment, and well-being.

**Methods.** A qualitative ethnographic design was employed. Six participants were interviewed between February 2021 and June 2022 until data saturation was reached. Colaizzi's seven-step method was used for the systematic analysis of cultural experiences.

**Results.** The *Ifontok* perform rituals before, during, and after house construction, as well as upon occupying a new home. Rooted in traditional beliefs, these rituals aim to ensure structural stability, invite prosperity, and safeguard holistic health. Beyond their symbolic function, the rituals serve as rites of passage that foster psychological reassurance, emotional resilience, and social cohesion. They frame health as a balance of physical, mental, and spiritual well-being, while adaptive strategies address challenges in sustaining these practices amid modern influences.

**Conclusion.** *Ifontok* house construction rituals integrate practical building practices, spiritual beliefs, and communal welfare. They promote mindful living, psychological well-being, and environmental awareness, offering insights for educators and healthcare practitioners working with Indigenous communities.

**Keywords:** health, house construction, rituals, harmony, holistic health, physical, psychological

## INTRODUCTION

Constructing and occupying a new house is a deeply personal and aspirational endeavor, often intertwined with cultural practices, traditions, and beliefs. Among the *Ifontoks*, "having a house is considered an honor, for it is not only a place to live but also the place where we are finally laid to rest when we die." These practices shape community life, influence worldviews, and guide appropriate conduct. They are regarded as essential to health and well-being, prosperity, and harmony within households and communities. It is widely believed that failure to observe prescribed rituals related to house construction and occupancy may result in misfortune, including unexplained illness affecting a household member. Consequently, younger generations continue to observe these practices to avoid tempting fate and to prevent blame should adverse events, particularly illness, occur in the future.

Culture, defined as the complex whole that includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, and other capabilities and habits acquired by individuals as members of



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society, is indispensable in the formation of social life.<sup>1</sup> Hunt, on the other hand, described culture as encompassing material interventions and achievements such as tools, weapons, and instruments. Culture is learned, universal, socially produced, cumulative, transmitted across generations, gratifying, relatively stable yet dynamic, organized, integrative, and diverse. Many scholars emphasize the importance of studying culture.<sup>2</sup> Hall further argues that different cultures experience and interpret the same environment in distinct ways.<sup>3</sup>

Several practitioners have also drawn inspiration from traditional building practices, as vernacular forms are often energy-efficient and environmentally responsive, shaped by local resources, geography, and climate.<sup>4</sup> Based on the work of Paul Oliver and other scholars, architectural rituals may be categorized into six stages: site selection and purification, laying of the foundation stone, ridge-beam setting, orientation of the main door, construction rituals, and purification of the house before occupancy. These rituals are typically performed at an auspicious time determined by an astrologer or priest, linking the concept of an auspicious place with an auspicious time to promote luck and prosperity for the household.

The relationship between the built environment and culture has been further examined to understand how identity and meaning are inscribed in architectural forms by their users.<sup>5</sup> Housing plays a central role in this dynamic. As Setha M. Low states, “*dwellings can be conceptualized as meaningful social and cultural objects.*”<sup>6</sup> Empirical studies have demonstrated how spatial configurations reflect particular social and cultural patterns.<sup>7</sup> Hesselgren similarly argues that buildings express attitudes toward living.<sup>8</sup> Among *Ilokanos*, for example, the orientation of main doors and bedrooms is believed to influence longevity.<sup>9</sup> These perspectives reinforce the view that housing should provide a safe and healthy environment for its occupants.<sup>10</sup>

Numerous technical, social, planning, and policy factors related to housing can affect physical and mental health, as well as social well-being. Although there is no single universal definition of healthy housing, certain foundational requirements are widely recognized. Poor-quality housing is associated with health hazards, including infectious disease, accidents, fire-related injuries, and psychological and social disturbances. In general terms, the relationship between housing and health may be expressed as follows: better housing conditions are associated with better health outcomes, whereas poor housing conditions are linked to poorer health.

The *Ifontoks* practice diverse and distinctive rituals related to house construction and occupancy, which are believed to significantly influence health and life outcomes. However, these traditions are gradually evolving or diminishing due to modernization and intermarriage.

## OBJECTIVES

This study documents and analyzes the house construction and entry rituals of the *Ifontok* community. It provides

culturally grounded insights into how these rituals shape beliefs about health and well-being among those who construct and occupy a newly built house. By integrating indigenous practices with holistic health concepts, this research contributes to anthropology, cultural preservation, and health sciences. Specifically, the study aims to document these unique rituals, increase public awareness of their relationship to beliefs about health and well-being, and inform academic discourse to support preservation and deeper understanding of these ancestral practices.

## METHODS

### Research Design

This study employed a qualitative ethnographic design to explore rituals practiced by the Bontoc people in relation to house construction and house entry. Participant interviews, observations, and fieldwork were conducted, with researchers immersed in the community and actively engaging with participants. This immersion allowed the researchers to gain insight into lived realities. Ethnography facilitates the examination of beliefs, social interactions, and behaviors within small societies through prolonged participation, observation, and systematic interpretation of collected data.<sup>11</sup>

### Participants and Setting

The study was conducted in Bontoc, Mountain Province, Philippines, from February 2021 to June 2022. Purposive and criterion sampling were used to select participants. Inclusion criteria were: (1) permanent residence in Bontoc, Mountain Province; (2) adherence to local cultural practices; (3) residence in the province for more than 10 years; (4) age 60 years or older; and (5) experience in performing rituals related to house construction and entry. Six participants were interviewed until data saturation was reached.

### Data Collection Tools

Data were collected through in-depth interviews that began with broad, open-ended questions about cultural practices related to house construction. As themes emerged, the interview guide was refined to explore health beliefs, environmental considerations, and the symbolic meanings of specific rituals. This iterative process enabled the generation of rich, context-specific data. Observations of ritual practices and, when appropriate, limited participation were also conducted. Audio and video recordings were used to document interviews and observed rituals with participants' permission.

### Data Collection Procedure

Ethical approval was obtained from the University's Institutional Research Ethics Committee, and written informed consent was secured from all participants. Data were gathered through individual in-depth interviews and focus group discussions conducted between March and April 2022. A total of six in-depth interviews and three

focus group discussions were conducted face-to-face, each lasting approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Rituals performed during house construction were observed with participants' consent. Data collection ceased when subsequent interviews yielded no new themes or insights, and narratives consistently reinforced the cultural significance of rituals across different stages of house construction.

**Ethical Considerations**

All data were collected and handled confidentially. Personal identifiers were removed during transcription to ensure anonymization. Participant responses were coded, and identifying details were excluded from reports. Digital files, including audio recordings and transcripts, were stored on password-protected computers and encrypted drives, while hard copies were secured in a locked cabinet accessible only to the research team. Access to raw data was limited to the primary researcher and a designated assistant. In accordance with confidentiality protocols, records were securely destroyed after completion of analysis and reporting. The study was approved by the Mountain Province State University Ethics Committee, and Free Prior Informed Consent was obtained from the National Council for Indigenous Peoples.

**Data Analysis**

Colaizzi's seven-step method was used to analyze cultural insights rigorously. Data analysis commenced concurrently

with data collection. An inductive coding approach was applied to transcripts from interviews and focus group discussions. The primary researcher conducted the initial coding, while a co-researcher independently reviewed a subset of transcripts to ensure consistency. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion until consensus was achieved. Coding matrices were developed to identify patterns, similarities, and differences across the dataset. To ensure rigor, an audit trail was maintained, member checking was conducted, triangulation across data sources was applied, and reflexivity was practiced through reflective journaling to minimize researcher bias.

**RESULTS**

This study explored the rituals associated with house construction and house entry among the *Ifontoks* of Mountain Province, Philippines, and how these practices influence beliefs about health and well-being. Data analysis generated three major themes: (1) House Construction and Entry Rituals; (2) Traditional Rituals and Spiritual Practices Integrating Health and Well-being; and (3) Challenges and Mitigation in House Construction and Entry Rituals. The second theme included three phases: before construction, during construction, and entry into a new house. Figure 1 presents the conceptual map of the study.

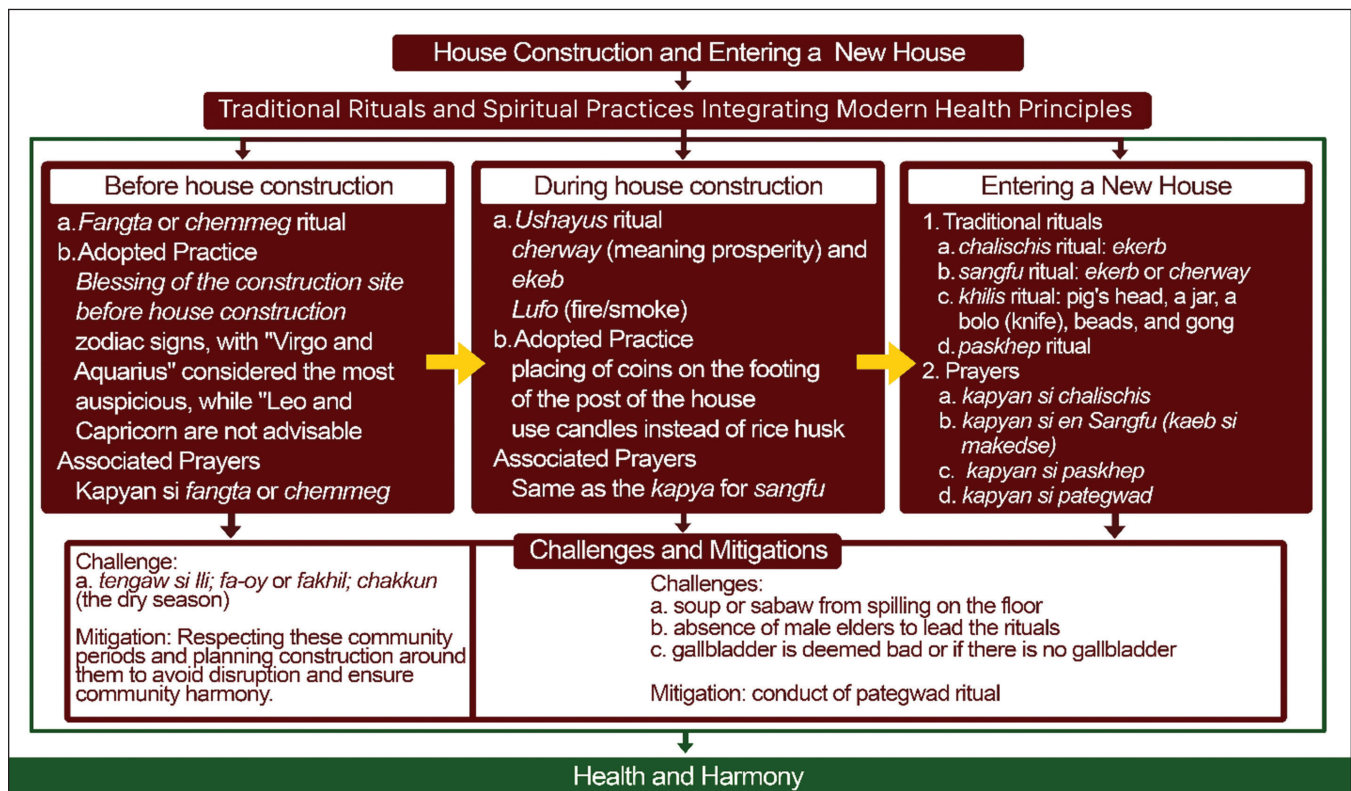


Figure 1. Conceptual map.

## House Construction and Entry Rituals

The *Ifontoks* believe that a home should provide peace, comfort, and safety, particularly in terms of health. Their homes are regarded as spaces for recharging after a day's work and for resting when feeling tired or unwell. Consequently, it is imperative that the houses they construct are endowed with blessings from their ancestors and from *Lumarwig*, the deity they honor as God. To this end, they practice rituals during house construction and when entering a newly constructed house. These rituals are anchored in the belief that blessings from the unseen (i.e., whether deceased ancestors and/or *Lumarwig*) are bestowed upon the house when the rituals are properly performed. Over time, these practices have evolved due to modernization and cultural exchanges, with prayers often integrated to address contemporary challenges and adaptations.

Participation in these rituals largely depends on individual beliefs. As one participant explained, "if you believe it, you practice it, but if you don't believe it, you don't do it because it will be useless." This underscores the emphasis placed on personal conviction and faith in the efficacy of the rituals.

While many *Ifontoks* recognize the benefits of performing the rituals, some express skepticism or selective adherence. One participant verbalized, "for me I do not do all the rituals because...", indicating a measured approach. Others perform the rituals merely "for the sake of performing," as "for some they just perform so people will have nothing to say," reflecting social compliance rather than deep personal conviction.

Conversely, a strong segment of the community maintains that these rituals must be performed because they were divinely imparted by *Lumarwig* to their ancestors and are inherently good. As one participant stated, "bad if they will not perform since it has been a part of the *Ifontok* culture," emphasizing the role of cultural preservation and continuity. Adding a pragmatic dimension, some *Ifontoks* actively integrate practices from other cultures, believing it is "safer if they would perform both."

A central belief guiding the performance of these rituals is that they ensure the family's health, fortune, and prosperity, blessings thought to emanate from *Lumarwig* and the ancestors. For many, the rituals also serve as a profound expression of thanksgiving for the blessings received. These diverse, deeply held beliefs collectively sustain the community's engagement in these essential practices. The *Ifontoks* further believe that adherence to these rituals guarantees abundance and health, while failure to observe them may invite sickness or misfortune upon the household.

## Traditional Rituals and Spiritual Practices Integrating Modern Health Principles

The *Ifontoks* often compare house construction to building a pigpen, believing that rituals performed during the process ensure the well-being of future occupants, whether human or animal. These culturally significant rituals are observed both during the construction of a house and when

entering it for the first time, as one participant noted: "there are practices being done in house construction and entering a house."

The *Ifontoks* believe that performing these rituals will bring a better life, good health, improved financial status, and strong family relationships to the owners of the newly constructed houses. This was reinforced when participants shared: "we follow these practices so the family will not face misfortune, sickness, or financial constraints," and "sometimes if a family member is sick elders will always ask questions related to either house construction and entering a new house."

Beyond physical and spiritual protection, these practices provide structure, predictability, and emotional stability, especially during life transitions. Rituals such as offerings of pigs or chickens, prayers, and communal gatherings are believed to ease anxieties, foster emotional stability, and reinforce cultural continuity. One participant explained: "I do believe that I am already comfortable when I have done the practices on constructing a house and before I live in the house." Another participant added: "I have peace of mind, and I do not have anything to worry about with these practices because when I do not abide with these practices, I always feel afraid... what if something will happen?"

Spiritual rituals involving prayers and animal sacrifices, including chickens and pigs, are central to these practices. The gallbladder of the sacrificed animal carries particular significance, symbolizing future health and luck. Elders pay careful attention to the gallbladder during butchering, seeking it to be "cherway," which represents prosperity, and "ekeh," signifying good health and protection from danger or harm for those who will dwell in the house. These rituals are also considered powerful, bearing similarities to the Christian Stations of the Cross, and are believed to impact overall health and well-being.

Elders and community members perform these rituals not only for spiritual protection but also to strengthen social ties and provide emotional support. They are conducted at multiple stages—before, during, and after house construction, as well as upon entering a newly constructed house—demonstrating the integration of traditional spiritual practices with attention to practical and modern concerns for health and well-being. Figure 2 shows a sample photo documentation of the stages undertaken in house construction.

## Rituals Observed Before House Construction

### Preparing for House Construction

Before building a house, the *Ifontoks* prepare both the land and the environment to ensure an auspicious start, physically, spiritually, and emotionally. The first ritual is "fangta" or "chemmeg," a pre-construction ceremony. This involves slicing meat, spreading wood, cooking the meat, and offering it to the lot where the house will be built. The ritual is performed as a gesture of respect and a request for permission from the unseen spirits of the land. While not all *Ifontoks* strictly adhere to this ritual, full-blooded members



Figure 2. Stages in house construction.

continue to follow the ancestral practice as a sign of respect to elders and the spirits of their ancestors.

After cooking the meat, the elders recite a prayer: *"We pray to you, Oh God, because it is but natural that they offer the foundation of this house. Please don't feel bad, O earth, for its good they put a roof, and you will never get wet because they will construct a solid place for you to stay. Give strength to the workers as they continue to build their house until it is done. As for the construction workers, we pray that they will never get hurt nor fall down, nor be pricked by a nail. This is what we are telling you as our prayer as they start digging the foundation until the construction of this house is accomplished, and the earth can relax; likewise, the builders—anyone who enters the house being built—we pray that they will stay strong so you can have someone to drink with, and anyone approaches you because of hunger, if you marked the path of the unseen, that you might have sheltered..."*

After the prayer, three carpenters eat a small portion, as instructed with "eat a little," before laying out the house foundation. All carpenters, the owner, or a relative must witness the ritual. This ritual, performed as an offering to the lot, symbolizes respect and permission from the unseen spirits and underscores the *Ifontoks'* prioritization of health, safety, and spiritual harmony at the start of construction.

### Adopted Practices

Western and Christian influences have modified some pre-construction rituals. Some *Ifontoks* now ask a priest to bless the lot before construction begins. Blended practices are also common, with families simultaneously calling a priest or pastor while performing traditional rituals.

Individual beliefs ultimately determine whether the old ritual, the modified ritual, or a combination of both is performed. Additionally, some families adopt *Ilokano* cultural practices, selecting construction dates according to zodiac signs—Virgo and Aquarius being auspicious, while Leo and Capricorn are considered unfavorable. Regardless of the method, the central intent of these rituals is consistent: to ask for blessings for the construction, the workers' well-being, and the proper use of materials for a safe, strong house.

### Challenges and Mitigation

Critical pre-construction challenges are rooted deeply in cultural beliefs. The location of the house is paramount; sites near a recent death or a household experiencing bereavement are considered inauspicious. One participant explained: *"If the place for construction is near the house of a person who dies, the construction will be delayed for a year because it is not good and believed to bring misfortune."* Another added: *"This is showing respect, as our ancestors always taught us,"* and *"this is for the well-being of the family."*

Community observances such as “*tengaw si Ili*” (community isolation) during “*fa-oy*” or “*fakhil*,” when misfortunes are believed to linger, also restrict construction. Starting construction during “*tengaw*” is taboo, as loud community announcements would disrupt the sacred building process. If a family insists on proceeding despite these prohibitions, a penalty (usually a pig or chicken) is paid to the sponsoring community elders, and the animal is shared in the *sitio* or “*ato*” (communal house). Practical considerations, such as starting construction during “*Chakkun*” (the dry season), are also taken into account to ensure favorable working conditions for carpenters.

### Associated Prayers

The “*Kaeb si Fangta/Chemmeg*” is the foundational prayer performed during the pre-construction ritual. The house owner formally requests permission from the land, emphasizing that the construction is for the good of the lot and the future residents. The prayer also seeks protection, asking that construction materials be safe, durable, and used properly, while workers remain healthy, and accidents are avoided. Participants described it as “*asking permission from the land that a house will be constructed on, and that the construction workers and the owner of the house will be healthy and will not meet any accident during the construction.*” This prayer sets a tone of respect, safety, and well-being from the very beginning. If not performed, participants believe misfortunes or accidents may occur, which the *Ifontoks* often attribute to non-performance of the rituals.

### Rituals Observed During House Construction

#### Ushayus Ritual

A key ritual performed during house construction is the “*ushayus*” ritual, a religious practice conducted after the concreting of the first floor’s ceiling or roofing. This ritual is believed to ensure the sturdiness of the roof and to protect the health and well-being of the family. Participants explained: “*We practice the ushayus ritual because we believe that if we perform this, the roofing of our building will be strong even if the strongest earthquake comes, and of course we are being protected.*” Another participant added: “*If the roof is strong, we will be protected, and our life will not be at stake.*”

During the ritual, a small pig is butchered at the construction site, with the carpenters serving as the primary recipients. The pig’s gallbladder is carefully examined, preferably “*cherway*” (prosperity) and “*ekeb*” (good health and protection). No leftovers are allowed at the site, as accidental consumption by the owner is believed to bring bad luck and harm their health. An elderly relative sleeps at the construction site, maintaining a “*Lufo*” (fire or smoke) to prevent “*Anito*” (spirits) from entering the area. Passersby are advised not to shout near the site, respecting the sacred space created. The “*Lufo*” is maintained to guarantee a long life for those who will dwell in the house and to ensure the ritual fulfills its

purpose. The ritual concludes with a rest day for the workers. Sticky rice is cooked for relatives and community members, who dine and offer donations in kind or cash, symbolizing community support and blessings. The owner may choose to perform the “*ushayus*” ritual for each concrete floor, but unlike chicken sacrifices, the pig sacrifice is performed only once.

### Adopted Practices

The *Ifontoks* have incorporated practices from other cultures while preserving the core intent of their rituals. For instance, some now use candles instead of rice husks for the “*Lufo*,” and others place coins before concreting the footing, believed to strengthen the house. These adaptations continue to reflect the ultimate goals of the ritual: structural stability, family health, and well-being of future occupants.

### Challenges and Mitigation

During construction, the house owner or person in charge is generally forbidden from attending wakes. If a death occurs within the direct family, they may attend, but construction must pause. If the owner insists on continuing, they must avoid the construction site until a new moon appears. Failure to observe this restriction is believed to bring serious misfortune, such as death or chronic illness among family members. One participant recounted: “*A family member had been diagnosed with chronic illness after entering his new house, and it was found out that he had been attending a wake at the same time going to the house being constructed.*” Such incidents reinforce the community belief that non-compliance with these rituals is “*larwa*” (bad) and could prevent the owner from dwelling long in the house. Moreover, the “*ushayus*” ritual also serves to invoke ancestral spirits and natural forces, ensuring the strength and durability of the roof and the house as a whole. Figures 3 and 4 show sample photo documentation of the traditional practices done by the *Ifontoks* in house construction.

### Prayers Upon Entering a New House

The *Ifontok* rituals surrounding house entry are not merely sequences of actions; they are deeply imbued with chants and prayers that give them spiritual significance and purpose. These prayers are distinct and named according to the specific ritual they accompany: (1) *Kapyan si Chalischis*, (2) *Kapyan si en Sangfu (Kaeb si Makedse)*, and (3) *Kapyan si Paskhep*.

The “*Kapyan si Chalischis*” is a prayer of thanksgiving, expressing gratitude for the blessings the family has received. During this prayer, the family requests that the newly constructed house remains strong and protected against any calamity. The prayer explicitly invokes the protective roles of various ritual materials, such as the winnower, plate, knife, wine (rice wine), bowl, and plant (“*sis-ilew*”), ensuring that these objects continue to guard the family and all who dwell in the house. A narrative accompanies this ritual, telling of two brothers searching for a house to bestow prosperity and



Figure 3. Conduct of rituals.



Figure 4. Maintaining a “Lufo” (fire).

good health through the “*chalischis*” ritual. As they journey through the community, a family may accept the blessing by performing the “*chalischis*” ritual. If accepted, that family is believed to subsequently receive prosperity and good health. This narrative structure resembles the Stations of the Cross in Christian practice, with distinct stages or “stations” culminating in the house that performs the ritual, symbolizing a complete journey of blessing and acceptance.

Following the “*chalischis*” ritual, the “*Kapyan si en Sangfu*” ritual is performed as a prayer of strength, called “*Kaeb si Makedse*.” An elder recites this prayer, which reinforces the family’s resilience and well-being in their new home. During

the “*sangfu*” ritual, the “*khilis*” ritual is also observed. This is typically performed in the morning, preceding the cooking of the pig’s head if that is planned for the following day. These rituals collectively reinforce spiritual protection and communal support for the household.

Three days after the “*sangfu*” ritual, the “*Kapyan si Paskbep*” ritual is performed, marking the formal entry into the new house. The “*Kapyan si Paskbep*,” or prayer for entering, concludes all preceding rituals. When this prayer is completed, it is believed that prosperity and good health will reside in the inhabitants, and the house will fulfill its intended purpose.

Variations observed in the construction and entry rituals, including the prayers and their specific interpretations, are influenced by intermarriage between *Ifontoks* and individuals from other cultural backgrounds. Despite these variations, the core purpose of invoking protection, prosperity, and health remains central to all rituals.

## DISCUSSION

This study explores house construction rituals among the *Ifontoks* in Mountain Province, Philippines, revealing

the intricate connections between cultural practices, health, and spiritual harmony. These findings align with broader anthropological research highlighting the role of rituals in fostering social cohesion and well-being. The emphasis placed by *Ifontoks* on health and harmony in house-related rituals reflects the belief that physical spaces influence human well-being, where rituals imbue these spaces with symbolic meaning, promoting psychological and communal balance.

The *Ifontoks* perform rituals to cleanse and protect homes, fostering collective peace and spiritual well-being that encompasses physical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions. These practices contribute to individuals' sense of purpose, identity, and connection to something greater than themselves. House construction and entry rituals among the *Ifontoks* prioritize environmental understanding, symbolic meaning, communal bonds, and spiritual dimensions, collectively fostering the health and well-being of both the community and individuals.

Similar patterns are observed among the *Ilokano*, whose beliefs and practices during house construction and blessing are thought to contribute to success, prosperity, and well-being in their new homes. These practices reflect the "duality" inherent in many dynamic cultures, which blend rich indigenous traditions with adaptations to political, economic, and social exigencies of the modern world. The infusion of cultural elements from Chinese, Hindu, Malay, Spanish, American, and Japanese influences has shaped many Filipino cultural practices, including those of the *Ilokano*, demonstrating the fluidity and adaptability of indigenous knowledge systems.

The rationale behind house construction rituals is increasingly interpreted in contemporary terms while retaining traditional significance. The *Ifontoks* perform these rituals with intentions of good health, prosperity, and protection against life challenges, paralleling the *Ilokano*'s desire for a successful life, well-paying jobs, and certain material comforts. These findings reaffirm the value of rituals as cultural practices imbued with meanings of prosperity, protection, and moral order, while also revealing the challenges of sustaining these traditions amidst modernization and shifting community dynamics.

The rituals have important health implications, fostering psychological resilience, emotional balance, and holistic well-being that integrates the physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions. By documenting these practices, this study not only preserves indigenous knowledge but also offers insights into how traditional rituals intersect with contemporary understandings of health and community resilience.

Although the *Ifontoks*' house construction rituals may not be scientifically validated, they align with the community's spiritual relationship with their environment. This underscores the importance of cultural sensitivity in integrating traditional practices with scientific perspectives to understand their impacts on health and well-being. The rituals emphasize that homes are spiritual domains requiring consecration.

Challenges such as urbanization, migration, and the decline of traditional knowledge threaten the continuity of these ritual practices. Yet, these pressures have also prompted adaptive strategies, allowing communities to integrate rituals into contemporary contexts, ensuring their resilience and relevance. Central to these rituals are prayers, which serve as direct communication with ancestors. This relational aspect echoes broader Filipino indigenous spirituality, where prayers are acts of relationality, affirming the interconnectedness of the human and spiritual worlds.

The *Ifontoks*' house construction and entry rituals demonstrate the profound impact of indigenous knowledge systems on health, harmony, and cultural identity, emphasizing the importance of preserving and understanding these practices within the context of contemporary society.

## CONCLUSION

The study revealed that the *Ifontoks* practice rituals before and during house construction as well as upon entering a new house. These rituals carry symbolic meanings of prosperity, protection, and the moral value of *larwa* (avoiding wrongdoing), which guide communal life and social conduct. Participants highlighted challenges in sustaining these practices in contemporary times, raising concerns about the potential loss of cultural continuity among younger generations. Despite these challenges, the rituals remain meaningful, incorporating prayers to gods and ancestors that function as rites of passage and serve as mechanisms for strengthening psychological resilience, emotional well-being, and social support systems. From a health perspective, the rituals hold significant implications, offering a holistic view of health that integrates physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends: **(1) Integration into Cultural Education and Community Development** – Indigenous *Ifontok* rituals should be included in cultural education programs and community development initiatives to foster respect for indigenous knowledge systems; **(2) Collaborative Documentation and Preservation** – Local government units, cultural institutions, and educational sectors should collaborate to document, preserve, and promote *Ifontok* rituals associated with house construction and house entry, ensuring elder participation in the process; **(3) Incorporation into Housing Practices** – Consideration of these rituals in housing projects can strengthen cultural continuity, while integrating modern construction best practices and responsible environmental measures to address practical challenges; and **(4) Future Research Directions** – Future studies should include younger generations, non-practicing members, and *Ifontok* communities in varied geographic and diasporic settings to capture a broader range of perspectives. Employing longitudinal and comparative designs can illuminate how

rituals evolve over time. Integrating cultural narratives with biomedical or quantitative health data may provide a more comprehensive understanding of the rituals' health implications. Additionally, examining the intersection of *Ifontok* rituals with Christian house construction practices could explore possibilities for culturally sensitive integration, reflecting the dual spiritual and indigenous identity of the community.

### Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. Data collection was limited to elder participants who met inclusion criteria. Perspectives of younger generations, non-practicing community members, and health professionals were not captured. In addition, the study was conducted solely in Bontoc, Mountain Province, among identified *Ifontok* participants, excluding other indigenous groups. Moreover, health-related interpretations were cultural and symbolic, without biomedical or quantitative validation. Finally, the researchers are *Ifontoks* who believe in performing these rituals. However, efforts were made to maintain objectivity, relying solely on the participants' shared experiences rather than personal practices.

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### Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to reasons of sensitivity.

### Statement of Authorship

Both authors certified fulfillment of ICMJE authorship criteria.

### Author Disclosure

Both authors declared no conflicts of interest.

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