

Perceived Health Benefits of the Banjar Bapukung Tradition for Children: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study in South Kalimantan, Indonesia

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Abstract

Introduction: Bapukung is a traditional Banjar infant-care practice in which a baby is wrapped and gently rocked in a cloth swing until calm or asleep. Although the practice remains part of local caregiving culture in South Kalimantan, qualitative evidence on its perceived health benefits for children is still limited. **Objective:** This study aimed to explore community perspectives on the perceived benefits of the Banjar bapukung tradition for children's health in South Kalimantan, Indonesia. **Method:** A qualitative study with a phenomenological approach was conducted in Palam Village, South Kalimantan, in 2026. Seventeen informants consisting of mothers, caregivers, and community members with experience or knowledge of bapukung were selected using purposive sampling. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and field observations and analyzed thematically using NVivo. **Results:** Four major themes emerged: bapukung is perceived to improve children's sleep quality, calm children and reduce fussiness, strengthen emotional bonding between mother and child, and represent a valuable cultural heritage that should be practiced safely. Participants viewed bapukung as a comforting and practical caregiving method that supports children's rest and emotional well-being. **Conclusion:** The Banjar bapukung tradition is perceived to provide positive benefits for children's comfort, sleep quality, calmness, and emotional well-being, while requiring safe implementation and culturally sensitive health education.

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Introduction

Indonesia is home to a wide range of cultural traditions that continue to influence family life, parenting practices, and community health behaviors. One traditional child-care practice that remains recognized among the Banjar ethnic community in South Kalimantan is *bapukung* (also known as *baayun bapukung*), in which an infant is gently wrapped in cloth and rocked in a swing until calm or asleep (Rahmawati et al., 2022). Although this tradition has been maintained across generations, it is not only regarded as cultural heritage but also as a practical caregiving strategy to promote children's comfort and emotional well-being. Previous studies have described *bapukung* as an important element of Banjar parenting and local wisdom. Caregivers perceive the practice as a practical method for soothing infants, improving sleep, and providing a sense of security and comfort (Rahmawati et al., 2022). Other studies have also suggested that *bapukung* may contribute to infant growth and support mothers in managing childcare and household responsibilities by helping children rest more calmly (Cahya & Prabowo, 2025; Najwa et al., 2024). These findings indicate that *bapukung* remains a meaningful caregiving practice within the Banjar.

Sleep is a fundamental component of healthy child development because it contributes to physical growth, emotional regulation, cognitive maturation, and family well-being. Contemporary evidence shows that caregivers commonly evaluate infant sleep not only by its duration but also by the child's comfort, emotional calmness, and ease of settling (Zanetti et al., 2023). In addition, safe-sleep practices are strongly influenced by caregiver beliefs, family traditions, and cultural contexts, highlighting the importance of culturally responsive health education when introducing evidence-based child-care recommendations (Aggelou et al., 2024; Cole et al., 2022). Despite increasing attention to *bapukung* in Indonesian literature, an important research gap remains. Existing studies have primarily focused on describing *bapukung* as a parenting tradition, a form of local wisdom, or an aspect of Banjar cultural identity. Limited qualitative evidence is available regarding how community members themselves perceive the health-related benefits of *bapukung*, particularly in relation to children's sleep quality, comfort, emotional well-being, and caregiver-child interactions. Understanding these lived experiences is important because community perceptions influence the continuation, adaptation, and acceptance of traditional child-care practices within contemporary maternal and child health services.

Therefore, this study aimed to explore community perspectives on the perceived health benefits of the Banjar *bapukung* tradition for children in Palam Village, South Kalimantan, Indonesia. By examining participants' lived experiences, this study contributes to the understanding of culturally rooted child-care practices and provides evidence that may support culturally sensitive maternal and child health promotion while maintaining child safety.

Method

Study Design

This study employed a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology was selected because the study aimed to explore the meanings, lived experiences, and community perceptions regarding the benefits of the Banjar *bapukung* tradition for children's health. This approach enabled the researchers to understand how *bapukung* is experienced, interpreted, and maintained as part of everyday

child-care practices in the Banjar community (Öhlén & Friberg, 2023) (Tanwir et al., 2021).

Study Setting and Time

The study was conducted in Palam Village, South Kalimantan, Indonesia, in 2026. The study setting was selected because *bapukung* remains known and practiced by some members of the Banjar community, making it a relevant site for exploring local perspectives on the tradition and its perceived health benefits for children.

Participants and Sampling

A total of 17 informants participated in this study. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their relevance to the research topic and their ability to provide rich information about *bapukung*. Participants consisted primarily of mothers who had direct experience practicing *bapukung*, as well as caregivers, grandmothers, a community member, and a community elder who were familiar with the tradition and able to provide relevant perspectives. The inclusion criteria were: (1) being a mother, caregiver, or community member who had practiced, observed, or had knowledge of *bapukung*; (2) being willing to participate in the study; and (3) being able to communicate experiences and perceptions clearly during the interview process.

Data Collection

Data were collected through in-depth interviews and field observations. Semi-structured interview guides were developed based on the study objectives and relevant literature on traditional child-care practices, infant sleep, and local Banjar culture. The interviews explored participants' knowledge of *bapukung*, their experiences in practicing or observing it, the perceived benefits for children, and their views on the cultural value and safety of the practice. Interviews were conducted face-to-face by the researchers at locations agreed upon by the participants. Field observations were also carried out to document the context of *bapukung* practice, caregiver involvement, and the ways in which the tradition was implemented in the community.

Data Analysis

All interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis with the assistance of NVivo software. The analytical process included data familiarization, open coding, categorization of similar codes, and theme development. The researchers repeatedly reviewed transcripts and field notes to identify recurring meanings and patterns across participants' accounts (Naeem et al., 2023) (Saunders et al., 2023). The final themes were developed through an iterative process of coding, categorization, and comparison across interviews. Although direct participant quotations are not extensively presented in this article, the themes reported in the findings were derived from verbatim transcripts, repeated coding, and cross-checking of patterns across interviews and field observations.

Trustworthiness

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, the researchers used source triangulation by comparing information across participants with different roles and experiences related to *bapukung*. Field notes were also used to support interpretation of the interview data. The researchers maintained consistency in coding and theme

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development by reviewing and discussing emerging categories throughout the analysis process, consistent with principles of credibility and trustworthiness in qualitative inquiry (Johnson et al., 2020) (Noble & Smith, 2025).

Result and Discussion

1. Results

Participant Characteristics

A total of 17 informants participated in this study. Most participants were mothers who had direct experience practicing *bapukung* with their children, while others included caregivers, grandmothers, a community member, and a community elder familiar with the tradition. Participants ranged in age from 24 to 56 years, and the children cared for by participating mothers were between 6 and 24 months old. This diversity of participants provided a broad range of lived experiences and perspectives regarding the implementation and meaning of the *bapukung* tradition within the Banjar community.

Table 1
Feeding Characteristics of Informants (n = 17)

Informant Code	Role/Relationship	Age (Years)	Child Age (Months)	Experience with <i>Bapukung</i>
P1	Mother	27	8	Practiced <i>bapukung</i> directly
P2	Mother	30	12	Practiced <i>bapukung</i> directly
P3	Mother	29	10	Practiced <i>bapukung</i> directly
P4	Grandmother / Caregiver	51	14	Experienced in traditional practice
P5	Mother	25	9	Practiced <i>bapukung</i> directly
P6	Community Member	44	-	Familiar with Banjar child-care traditions
P7	Mother	32	18	Practiced <i>bapukung</i> directly
P8	Mother	26	7	Practiced <i>bapukung</i> directly
P9	Mother	35	24	Practiced <i>bapukung</i> directly
P10	Caregiver	40	11	Familiar with <i>bapukung</i>
P11	Mother	28	13	Practiced <i>bapukung</i> directly
P12	Mother	33	16	Practiced <i>bapukung</i> directly
P13	Community Elder	56	-	Familiar with <i>bapukung</i>
P14	Mother	24	6	Practiced <i>bapukung</i> directly
P15	Mother	31	20	Practiced <i>bapukung</i> directly
P16	Grandmother / Caregiver	49	15	Experienced in traditional practice
P17	Mother	29	19	Practiced <i>bapukung</i> directly

Source: Primary Data, 2026

Overview of Findings

The phenomenological analysis revealed four interrelated themes describing participants' lived experiences regarding the Banjar *bapukung* tradition. Participants did not perceive *bapukung* merely as a traditional infant-care practice but as a meaningful caregiving experience that contributed to children's comfort, emotional security, and family well-being. The four themes identified were:

1. *Bapukung* is perceived to improve children's sleep quality.
2. *Bapukung* helps calm children and reduce fussiness.
3. *Bapukung* strengthens emotional bonding between mother and child.
4. *Bapukung* represents valuable cultural heritage that should be practiced safely.

Theme 1. *Bapukung* is perceived to improve children's sleep quality

Participants consistently experienced *bapukung* as a caregiving practice that facilitated a smoother transition from wakefulness to sleep. Rather than simply serving as a traditional rocking technique, *bapukung* was perceived as creating a feeling of comfort and security that enabled children to relax naturally before sleeping. Within participants' experiences, good sleep was understood not only as sleeping longer but also as sleeping more peacefully, waking less frequently, and appearing calmer after resting.

The rhythmic movement of the swing, together with the secure positioning of the child, was interpreted as creating an environment that supported physical relaxation and emotional comfort. Participants described these experiences as reducing the effort required to settle children before bedtime and making daily caregiving routines more manageable. These shared experiences reveal that participants understood *bapukung* as an important caregiving practice that promoted children's comfort while supporting healthy sleep routines within everyday family life.

Theme 2. *Bapukung* helps calm children and reduce fussiness

Participants experienced *bapukung* as a traditional caregiving practice that restored children's emotional calmness during periods of crying, restlessness, or irritability. Rather than viewing the practice solely as a method for helping children sleep, participants understood *bapukung* as creating a soothing atmosphere through gentle rocking, continuous attention, and a reassuring physical environment.

The experience of seeing children gradually become calmer after being placed in the swing contributed to participants' confidence in the effectiveness of the practice. Many caregivers also perceived that calmer children allowed household routines to proceed more smoothly while reducing emotional stress experienced during childcare. These lived experiences indicate that *bapukung* was perceived not only as a practical childcare technique but also as a culturally meaningful approach to emotional soothing that benefited both children and caregivers.

Theme 3. *Bapukung* is considered to strengthen emotional bonding between mother and child

Participants described *bapukung* as an intimate caregiving experience characterized by physical closeness, continuous attention, and affectionate interaction between mother and child. The process of gently rocking the child while remaining physically present was perceived as strengthening emotional attachment and creating opportunities for nurturing interaction during daily caregiving.

Participants experienced *bapukung* as more than a strategy to help children sleep. Instead, it represented a meaningful expression of maternal care in which patience, tenderness, and emotional presence were continuously demonstrated throughout the caregiving process. These interactions were perceived as reinforcing trust and emotional security between caregiver and child. From a phenomenological perspective, *bapukung* emerged as an experience through which caregiving relationships were strengthened, allowing emotional connection to develop naturally through repeated everyday interaction

Theme 4. *Bapukung* is viewed as a valuable cultural heritage that should be practiced safely

Participants perceived *bapukung* as an enduring cultural tradition inherited from previous generations and closely associated with Banjar identity. The practice was experienced as a form of local wisdom that embodied traditional knowledge regarding childcare and family caregiving. Participants considered preserving *bapukung* important because it represented continuity of cultural values while maintaining close family relationships across generations.

At the same time, participants recognized that the continuation of the tradition should be accompanied by careful attention to children's safety. Appropriate positioning, continuous supervision, comfortable wrapping, and unobstructed breathing were considered essential components of safe practice. Participants therefore viewed cultural preservation and child safety as complementary rather than contradictory aspects of contemporary childcare. These findings demonstrate that participants experienced *bapukung* not only as inherited cultural knowledge but also as a living tradition capable of adapting to modern child-health and safety principles.

Table 2

Summary of Themes and the Essence of Participants' Lived Experiences

Theme	Essence of Participants' Lived Experiences
<i>Bapukung</i> improves children's sleep quality	Participants experienced <i>bapukung</i> as creating comfort, security, and more peaceful sleep, making children's transition to sleep easier and supporting daily caregiving.
<i>Bapukung</i> helps calm children and reduce fussiness	Participants perceived <i>bapukung</i> as providing emotional reassurance through rhythmic rocking, resulting in calmer children and reduced caregiver stress.
<i>Bapukung</i> strengthens emotional bonding	Participants experienced <i>bapukung</i> as an intimate caregiving interaction characterized by affection, attention, and emotional closeness between mother and child.
<i>Bapukung</i> is valuable cultural heritage	Participants viewed <i>bapukung</i> as an important expression of Banjar identity that should be preserved while ensuring children's safety through appropriate caregiving practices.

Source: Primary Data, 2026

2. Discussion

This study explored community perspectives on the perceived benefits of the Banjar *bapukung* tradition for children's health in Palam Village, South Kalimantan. The findings indicate that *bapukung* is perceived not merely as a cultural ritual or a traditional sleeping technique, but as a meaningful caregiving practice associated with children's sleep quality, emotional comfort, calmness, and mother-child bonding. At the same time, participants emphasized that the practice should be carried out carefully and safely.

The first major finding was that *bapukung* was perceived to improve children's sleep quality. Most participants described *bapukung* as helping children fall asleep more easily and remain calmer during rest. This perception is consistent with previous studies of *bapukung* in Banjar communities, which describe the practice as a traditional method of helping infants sleep more comfortably through rhythmic rocking and close physical soothing (Rahmawati et al., 2022) (Najwa et al., 2024). It is also in line with the qualitative review by (Zanetti et al., 2023), which found that caregivers often define good infant sleep not only by duration, but also by comfort, calmness, and ease of settling.

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The second major finding was that *bapukung* was perceived to calm children and reduce fussiness. Informants described the practice as particularly useful when children were crying, restless, or difficult to soothe. This finding supports the view that traditional rocking and close-contact caregiving practices may function as emotional regulation strategies in infancy and early childhood. Within the Banjar context, *bapukung* appears to serve as a culturally accepted form of soothing that responds to both the child's distress and the caregiver's need for practical child-care routines. Similar interpretations of *bapukung* as a soothing caregiving practice have been reported by (Rahmawati et al., 2022) and (Puteri et al., 2026).

The third theme showed that *bapukung* was considered to strengthen emotional bonding between mother and child. Participants viewed *bapukung* as a moment of closeness characterized by touch, patience, attention, and soothing interaction. This suggests that the perceived value of *bapukung* extends beyond sleep or calming effects and includes relational aspects of caregiving. (Rahmawati et al., 2022) similarly described *bapukung* as part of nurturing interaction within Banjar parenting, while (Andrian, 2024) emphasized its symbolic role in maintaining emotional closeness and Banjar cultural identity.

The final theme emphasized *bapukung* as a valuable form of Banjar cultural heritage that should be preserved but practiced safely. This finding is particularly important because it demonstrates that community members do not regard tradition as something to be preserved without reflection. Rather, participants acknowledged that the benefits of *bapukung* depend on proper implementation, including attention to positioning, comfort, supervision, and the child's safety while in the swing. This interpretation is relevant to current safe-sleep literature, which shows that family traditions and caregiver beliefs strongly shape infant sleep practices, and that culturally responsive education is more effective than simply opposing local caregiving traditions (Cole et al., 2022) (Aggelou et al., 2024). Overall, this study contributes to the literature by documenting *bapukung* as both a cultural and health-related caregiving practice from the perspective of community members. The findings highlight that local wisdom in child care may continue to play an important role in shaping caregiving behavior, especially in communities where intergenerational practices remain meaningful. At the same time, the findings reinforce the need for health communication that respects cultural values while ensuring child safety.

This study has several limitations. First, it was conducted in a single village and involved a relatively small number of informants, which may limit the transferability of the findings to other Banjar communities. Second, the findings reflect perceived benefits rather than objectively measured health outcomes. Therefore, the study does not establish clinical effectiveness of *bapukung* on sleep, growth, or development. Third, because the findings were based on interviews and field observations, they may have been influenced by cultural expectations or social desirability. Future research may expand this work by involving multiple Banjar communities, comparing intergenerational perspectives on *bapukung*, or combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to examine both community perceptions and measurable child outcomes such as sleep patterns, caregiver burden, or indicators of child comfort. Such studies would help clarify which elements of *bapukung* can be preserved as meaningful cultural practice while also meeting contemporary standards of safe child care.

Conclusion

The Banjar *bapukung* tradition is perceived by community members as a beneficial child-care practice that supports children's comfort, sleep quality, calmness, and emotional well-being. Participants also viewed *bapukung* as a meaningful expression of Banjar cultural heritage and maternal caregiving. In addition, the tradition was perceived to strengthen emotional bonding between mother and child through attentive, soothing interaction during the caregiving process. These findings suggest that *bapukung* remains relevant as a form of local wisdom in child care. However, its continued practice should be accompanied by appropriate attention to child safety, including correct positioning, comfort, supervision, and safe use of the swing. Culturally sensitive health education is therefore needed to help families preserve beneficial local traditions while minimizing potential risks.

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