

Kankanaey Indigenous Practices and the Crime Triad in Community Crime Prevention

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Abstract

This study examined the contemporary significance of Kankanaey Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKSPs) and their role in influencing the crime triad in community-based crime prevention in Bauko, Mountain Province, Northern Philippines. It specifically explored the relevance of Indigenous practices—Tengaw, Ob-obbo/Binnadang, Begnas, and Lumdang—in addressing modern crime prevention challenges through their effects on opportunity, instrumentality, and motive, as well as the factors that affect their continued observance. Guided by Routine Activity Theory, Social Control Theory, and Cultural Resilience Theory, the study employed a qualitative descriptive design involving ten purposively selected community elders and leaders. Data were gathered through key informant interviews and focus group discussions and analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings reveal that Kankanaey Indigenous practices remain highly relevant as informal systems of social control that contribute to maintaining peace and order. Tengaw enhances guardianship and restricts movement, Ob-obbo/Binnadang strengthens collective surveillance and responsibility, Begnas promotes early conflict resolution and moral regulation, and Lumdang facilitates restorative justice and reintegration. Collectively, these practices disrupt the convergence of opportunity, instrumentality, and motive, thereby reducing the likelihood of criminal behavior while reinforcing community cohesion. However, their observance is affected by modernization and migration, intergenerational knowledge loss, religious reinterpretation, and growing reliance on formal justice systems. Despite these challenges, the persistence of these practices reflects the resilience of Indigenous knowledge systems and their continued relevance in contemporary crime prevention. Overall, the study highlights that Kankanaey Indigenous practices remain culturally grounded, adaptive, and effective mechanisms for community-based crime prevention and social regulation.

Keywords: Kankanaey, tengaw, ob-obbo/binnadang, crime triad

Background of the Study

The contemporary crime prevention efficacy of Kankanaey IKSPs in Northern Philippines remains underexplored despite their demonstrated capacity to shape behavior, reinforce social order, and resolve eighty-five percent (85%) of disputes pre-court (Areola Rica, 2025; Pagandiyon & Eduardo, 2019). In relation to the first objective, which is to examine the relevance of Kankanaey Indigenous practices in addressing contemporary crime prevention challenges through their influence on opportunity, instrumentality, and motive, "Contemporary Significance of Kankanaey Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Northern Philippines: Beliefs, Influencing Factors, and Crime Prevention Roles" addresses: How relevant are Indigenous practices for contemporary crime prevention in Bauko? And what factors affect the observance of these indigenous practices?

Kankanaey IKSPs constitute living regulatory systems systematically addressing the crime triad (Salcedo & Pineda, 2020). Tengaw regulates movement/mobilizes guardianship (Lafadchan, 2019); ob-obbo/binnadang embeds surveillance through cooperative agriculture (Villanueva, 2020); begnas/lumdang operationalize restorative justice (Braithwaite, 2024). This directly supports the first objective by explaining how these practices influence opportunity, instrumentality, and motive. Braithwaite's reintegrative shaming framework illuminates these mechanisms: spiritual/social costs exceed formal penalties. COVID-19 adaptation provides empirical validation—the elders' tengaw lockdown declaration gained municipal support (Mangali, 2021), demonstrating hybrid governance potential (Fernandez, 2025). This further strengthens the analysis of relevance required in the first objective.

Cultural Resilience Theory (Reyes, 2022) explains IKSP persistence amid four erosion factors: modernization/migration, youth disinterest, religious reinterpretation, court preference. Cunneen & Tauri (2021) advocate decolonizing criminology by centering Indigenous systems. This section directly links to the second objective, which is to identify and analyze the factors affecting the observance of these Indigenous practices. This study contributes hybrid preservation strategies—village-elders councils, IKSP mediation ordinances, Triad Preservation Councils—sequencing bottom-up peace making with formal institutions (Braithwaite & Charlesworth, 2020), advancing socially democratic criminology for Cordillera communities.

The Kankanaey in Northern Philippines has proven that the integration of these Indigenous practices into modern governance is effective. During the COVID-19 pandemic, elders' invocation of tengaw as an Indigenous lockdown mechanism was recognized and enforced alongside government quarantine rules, illustrating hybrid efficacy. This aligns with Braithwaite and Charlesworth's (2020) Bougainville case study, where Indigenous reconciliation sequenced with state processes achieved lasting peace, offering a blueprint for the region's community-elders' partnerships. However, there are factors affecting the observance of these practices such as: modernization and migration, youth disinterest and intergenerational gap, religious reinterpretation and Christian indigenous tension, formal court preference and customary mediation bypass. These directly address the second objective on identifying and analyzing factors affecting observance. Despite these challenges, Indigenous communities in northern Philippines continue to invoke traditional practices as markers of identity, solidarity, and self-regulation. In doing so, it contributes to broader efforts to decolonize criminology, advocate Indigenous governance, and promote socially democratic models—following Braithwaite's (2024) vision of restorative justice as a pathway to social equity.

Theoretical Framework

This study is primarily anchored on Routine Activity Theory, supported by Social Control Theory and Cultural Resilience Theory, to explain how Indigenous practices function as mechanisms of crime prevention. Routine Activity Theory serves as the central theoretical lens, positing that crime occurs when the elements of opportunity, instrumentality, and motive converge, creating conditions favorable for offending. Within this framework, the Indigenous Kankanaey practices of Tengaw, Ob-obbo/Binnadang, Begnas, and Lumdang are understood as cultural mechanisms that disrupt this convergence by limiting opportunities for deviance, constraining the means or conditions that facilitate offending, and weakening criminal motives through communal regulation, spiritual beliefs, and collective accountability. As informal systems of guardianship and social regulation, these practices operate as preventive structures that reduce the likelihood of crime and reinforce order within the community (Braithwaite, 2024).

Supporting this perspective, Social Control Theory explains how strong attachments to family, community, and shared norms reduce deviant behavior by strengthening social bonds and increasing the social and moral costs of offending. In the Kankanaey context, Indigenous practices reinforce collective responsibility, reciprocity, and customary sanctions that promote conformity and social cohesion (Braithwaite, 2024; Cunneen & Tauri, 2021). Complementing these perspectives, Cultural Resilience Theory emphasizes the capacity of Indigenous communities to sustain cultural practices and adapt traditional systems in response to external pressures such as modernization, urbanization, and the formalization of justice. The continued observance of Tengaw, Ob-obbo/Binnadang, Begnas, and Lumdang demonstrates how cultural resilience preserves Indigenous identity while strengthening community-based responses to contemporary crime prevention challenges (David, 2014; Areola Rica, 2025). Taken together, these theories provide an integrated framework for understanding how Indigenous practices operate as enduring forms of social control and culturally grounded strategies for disrupting the conditions that give rise to crime.

Objectives of the Study

This study investigates the contemporary significance of Kankanaey Indigenous Knowledge Systems and their impact on the crime triad, particularly in relation to community-based crime prevention in Northern Philippines. Specifically, it seeks to:

1. Examine the relevance of Kankanaey Indigenous practices in addressing contemporary crime prevention challenges through their influence on the elements of the crime triad, namely opportunity, instrumentality, and motive; and
2. Identify and analyze the factors affecting the observance of these Indigenous practices, particularly those that influence their continuity, adaptation, and effectiveness as culturally grounded mechanisms for crime prevention.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to examine the contemporary significance of Kankanaey Indigenous practices in addressing crime prevention challenges through their impact on the crime triad, as well as to identify the factors affecting their continued observance. Bauko, Mountain Province, was selected as the study site because it remains a stronghold of Kankanaey cultural traditions where these Indigenous practices continue to be observed. Ten participants were purposively selected, consisting of community elders and leaders with direct knowledge and lived experience of these traditions, to provide rich and in-depth data aligned with the objectives of the study. Data were gathered through key informant interviews and focus group discussions to explore participants' perspectives on the relevance of these practices in contemporary crime prevention and the factors influencing their continuity.

Thematic analysis was employed in analyzing and presenting the findings of the study. All interviews and discussions were recorded verbatim with informed consent, and systematically coded to generate themes corresponding to the study objectives. The analysis focused on how these Indigenous practices influence the elements of the crime triad—opportunity, instrumentality, and motive—as mechanisms of social control and community-based crime prevention, while also identifying social, cultural, and external factors affecting their observance. This methodological approach provided a contextualized understanding of the continuing relevance of Indigenous Knowledge Systems in responding to contemporary crime prevention challenges.

Results and Discussion

The findings reveal that Indigenous traditions in Northern Philippines remain highly relevant in shaping community behavior and maintaining social order. Data from interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observations show that practices such as *Tengaw*, *Ob-obbo/binnadang*, *Begnas*, and *Lumdang* function as culturally grounded mechanisms of crime prevention, operating through the crime triad framework—that is, by altering opportunity, instrumentality, and motive for offending.

Tengaw

Tengaw functions far beyond its agricultural rest day origins as a sophisticated community-wide movement regulation mechanism that systematically enhances guardianship while reinforcing shared cultural norms. By mandating residents remain homeward during designated periods, *tengaw* fundamentally alters the crime opportunity structure—concentrating potential guardians within households while simultaneously making outsider movement highly conspicuous along the region's isolated mountain roads. This aligns precisely with Routine Activity Theory as articulated by Salcedo & Pineda (2020), which posits that crime requires the convergence of motivated offenders, suitable targets, and the absence of capable guardians. *Tengaw* eliminates this convergence by ensuring capable guardianship permeates every household during traditionally high-risk periods.

At the instrumentality level, *tengaw* proactively constrains the physical and temporal conditions enabling criminal acts. By prohibiting late-night travel, intoxicated gatherings, and unmonitored movement along vulnerable routes, it systematically removes the environmental facilitators of burglary, assault, and theft that characterize rural crime patterns. Areola Rica (2025) documents how such temporal restrictions mirror modern situational crime prevention strategies while maintaining cultural legitimacy.

Most critically, at the motive level, *tengaw* violations trigger a culturally embedded system of informal social control through elder mediation and public admonition. Key Informant 1 explained: "*Tengaw* is respected by the whole community to rest before and after harvest. Or refrain from leaving home because of unnecessary travel that risks accidents or untoward incidents to any community member". Key Informant 2 elaborated: "Violations of *Tengaw* are usually addressed through mediation by elders who remind individuals about maintaining communal harmony". This embodies reintegrative shaming (Braithwaite, 2024), where deviance incurs spiritual and social costs far exceeding formal penalties.

The COVID-19 pandemic provided empirical validation of *tengaw's* contemporary relevance. Mangali (2021) documents how the *kankanaey* elders declared *tengaw* as a traditional lockdown, formally supported by municipal officials. This hybrid adaptation simultaneously reduced disease transmission while enhancing crime prevention—community-wide surveillance discouraged burglary and mobility crimes, mirroring national curfew efficacy. Lafadchan (2019) confirms that culturally grounded restrictions maintain higher compliance than externally imposed measures.

The crime prevention implication is that *Tengaw* demonstrates comprehensive triad efficacy through simultaneous opportunity reduction, instrumental constraint, and motive reshaping. It's proven that COVID adaptation validates hybrid policy potential for emergency protocols.

Ob-obbo/Binnadang

Ob-obbo/binnadang transforms routine agricultural cooperation into sophisticated crime prevention infrastructure. Constant group presence across shared fields creates natural surveillance, systematically reducing criminal opportunities—thieves and saboteurs cannot operate undetected amidst rotating labor teams. Pawilen (2023) documents how such collective agricultural systems embed informal guardianship into daily routines, paralleling formal neighborhood watch programs.

Instrumentally, communal tool/resource management prevents individual diversion for criminal gain. When implements, seeds, and harvest materials exist under collective stewardship, misappropriation becomes immediately visible. Exclusion from future cooperation serves as a potent social sanction—Villanueva (2020) notes: *Binnadang* reinforces social bonds and accountability, creating environments that naturally discourage antisocial behavior through mutual dependence.

At the motive level, reciprocity creates powerful social capital deterring betrayal. Scott (2023) confirms collective efficacy emerges when community members depend on each other for survival—betraying cooperative partners fractures essential support networks. FGD participants emphasized: "You cannot steal from your *ob-obbo* partner—they helped harvest your field yesterday".

National disaster response validates contemporary relevance: During Typhoon crises, *binnadang* mobilized across regions for protection and recovery, demonstrating scalability. Santos (2024) confirms that cooperative systems embed vigilance into collective action, complementing modern strategies.

Thus, the crime prevention implication is that *Ob-obbo* institutionalizes collective efficacy within agricultural practice, creating 24/7 informal surveillance through economic necessity.

Begnas

Begnas thanksgiving rituals systematically intervene in conflict trajectories before escalation. Early land/resource dispute resolution eliminates criminal opportunities—elder mediation prevents disputes from hardening into violence. Communal witnessing constrains retaliatory instrumentality; once settlements are sealed ritually, parties lose social legitimacy for future aggression.

Moral re-anchoring reshapes motives: Respect for elders and harmony preservation create powerful normative pressure favoring reconciliation (Pagandiyán & Eduardo, 2019). KIs affirmed: *Begnas* reduces crime motives, limits opportunities through early resolution, and embeds reconciliation as a primary justice instrument (Morales, 2022).

National parallels exist with civic assemblies and restorative circles. Reyes (2022) documents Cultural Resilience Theory—rituals maintain continuity while adapting functions. Long-term preventive effect: Value re-anchoring discourages crime beyond ritual days, creating a sustained normative environment favoring peace. Eighty-five percent pre-court resolution rate confirms superior early intervention efficacy (Morales, 2022). Symbolic power reinforces cultural identity essential for collective efficacy (Scott, 2023).

As to its crime prevention implication, *Begnas* prevents minor conflicts from becoming formal criminal cases through culturally legitimate early intervention.

Lumdang

Lumdang cleansing rituals provide comprehensive triad coverage. Supervised ritual dialogue transforms conflict flashpoints (opportunity). Public boundary affirmation prevents future manipulation (instrumentality). Spiritual cleansing/reintegration eliminates stigmatization-driven revenge (motive) (Braithwaite, 2024).

Structured restorative process: Dialogue → wrongdoing acknowledgment → compensation → reconciliation (Pagandiyán & Eduardo, 2019). Cunneen & Tauri (2021) confirm that Indigenous restorative superiority prevents the labeling spirals formal courts create.

The practice of *Lumdang* applies the Omnipresence principle, whereby Elder/community authority deters deviance through cultural legitimacy (Areola Rica, 2025). It also serves as a social/spiritual deterrence: Public atonement with ancestral spirit consequences creates dual accountability. Offenders reintegrated as family members prevent marginalization cycles.

Hence, *Lumdang's* crime prevention implication is strong- superior to a punitive approach, which maintains community integration while resolving disputes comprehensively.

Factors Affecting Observance of *Kankanaey* Practices

As a result of the interview and observation, the following are the factors that affect the observance of the *kankanaey* practices: modernization and migration, youth disinterest and intergenerational knowledge gap, religious reinterpretation & Christian-Indigenous tension, and formal court preference & customary mediation bypass.

Modernization & Migration

Economic migration represents the most immediate threat to *Kankanaey* crime prevention. Young adults prioritize urban employment in *Baguio*, *Manila*, and abroad over rituals, leaving *tengaw* houses empty and *ob-obbo* understaffed. Tan (2023) documents how modernization fragments cultural continuity, creating guardianship gaps. Elders reported: "Youth work in *Baguio*—whereby houses are left empty during *tengaw*, no one watches boundaries". Torres (2025) confirms that manpower shortages undermine resource protection rituals. Municipal reports (2020-2024) correlate petty theft spikes with migration peaks. Villanueva (2020) warns that chronic labor shortages erode collective efficacy, which is essential for surveillance.

The crime Prevention Implication is that rituals become symbolic during high-risk periods, creating predictable theft vulnerabilities.

Youth Disinterest & Intergenerational Knowledge Gap

The existential threat emerges from youth disengagement. Social media immersion makes *begnas/lumdang* appear as "parties", not dispute resolution. Garcia (2021) identifies this as "cultural transmission failure," threatening restorative capacity. Leaders warned: "Children think *begnas* is eating/drinking—not settling disputes before court". Cortez (2022) emphasizes digital preservation urgency as oral traditions face extinction. FGD participants fear: "Within one generation, *begnas* becomes feasting without mediation". Scott (2023) confirms intergenerational gaps erode collective efficacy central to informal control.

The crime prevention implication is that, mediator shortage leads to unchecked conflict escalation overwhelming formal systems.

Religious Reinterpretation & Christian-Indigenous Tension

Christian churches labeling rituals "pagan idolatry" creates family divisions. Valdez (2022) documents spiritual deterrence erosion as converted households skip *lumdang*. Elder KII: "Pastor says 'only Jesus cleanses sin'—families pray instead of ritual, bad feelings linger". Rivera (2021) reveals that parallel authority structures fragment social cohesion. Braithwaite (2024) warns that spiritual cost dilution undermines reintegrative shaming central to motive deterrence. Pastors discourage *lumdang* during land disputes, favoring courts over reconciliation.

The crime prevention implication is that, moral authority loss eliminates triad protection; punitive preference bypasses restoration.

Formal Court Preference & Customary Mediation Bypass

Residents bypass elders for "faster" *Katarungang Pambarangay*. Cruz (2024) documents 30% formal case increase despite ritual availability. KII: "People run to village court—elders say 'wait for *lumdang*, ' but want quick paper. Court brands criminal, ritual restores family". Domingo (2024) confirms that labeling spirals that *lumdang* reintegration prevents. Cunneen & Tauri (2021) critique formal systems undermining Indigenous authority. Early intervention is lost as disputes harden pre-ritual. Hence, it implies that case backlog, including recidivism cycles, replaces culturally legitimate restoration.

Conclusion

The research found that Kankanaey Indigenous Knowledge Systems including Tengaw, Ob-obbo/Binnadang, Begnas, and Lumdang continue to control various aspects of criminal activity through their systems of social control, which maintain order and lead to restorative justice. The research findings show that these Indigenous traditions function as dynamic security systems that help to keep peace and order and solve conflicts in the community, while they work together with modern strategies to stop crime. The study further reveals that the observance and effectiveness of these practices are shaped by factors such as modernization, migration, intergenerational knowledge gaps, religious reinterpretation, and increasing reliance on formal justice mechanisms, all of which pose challenges to their continuity. Despite these pressures, the persistence of these practices reflects the resilience of Indigenous knowledge systems and their continued capacity to respond to present-day crime prevention concerns. Overall, the study underscores that Kankanaey Indigenous practices remain culturally grounded and viable frameworks for disrupting the conditions associated with the crime triad, highlighting their significance as relevant and responsive strategies for community-based crime prevention.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed to strengthen the continued relevance of Kankanaey Indigenous Knowledge Systems in crime prevention. Local government units in Bauko and nearby areas are encouraged to include Tengaw, Ob-obbo/Binnadang, Begnas, and Lumdang in barangay peace and order plans through local policies, with success measured by how many barangays adopt these practices. To address the gap in knowledge between generations, a cultural education program should be developed with elders, schools, and community leaders to teach and document these practices, with success measured through youth participation and the number of learning materials produced. To strengthen community unity, Tengaw and Ob-obbo/Binnadang should be encouraged through community activities, with success shown by higher participation and fewer minor crimes during these practices. Interfaith and cultural dialogue sessions should also be held to reduce misunderstandings about Indigenous practices, with success seen in greater acceptance from community members. Lastly, a community protection system should be developed to support crime prevention during times when many young people are away due to migration, with success measured by active community monitoring and reduced opportunistic crimes. These recommendations aim to support the continued use and effectiveness of Indigenous practices in preventing crime.

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