

NEGOTIATING HERITAGE AND FAITH: YOUNGER GENERATIONS AND THE SUSTAINABILITY OF TRADITIONAL MALAY MIDWIFERY IN ISLAMIC CONTEXTS

Jashira Jamin^{1*}

¹Faculty of Information Science, Universiti Teknologi MARA Negeri Sembilan Branch, Rembau Campus, Malaysia
Email: jashira@uitm.edu.my; <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1131-4438>

Article history

Received date : 5-8-2026
Revised date : 6-8-2026
Accepted date : 12-9-2026
Published date : 17-9-2026

To cite this document:

Jamin, J. (2026). Negotiating heritage and faith: Younger generations and the sustainability of traditional Malay midwifery in Islamic contexts. *Journal of Islamic, Social, Economics and Development (JISED)*, 11 (86), 90 – 103.

Abstract: *Traditional Malay Midwifery (TMM) constitutes a vital yet increasingly contested domain of Malay intangible cultural heritage, historically shaped by the interplay of indigenous knowledge and Islamic values. In the face of expanding biomedical authority and shifting religious interpretations, its sustainability depends not on preservation alone, but on how younger generations actively reinterpret its relevance. This study critically examines how youth engagement mediates the continuity, transformation, or decline of TMM within contemporary Islamic contexts. Drawing on qualitative data from oral histories and participant observation in Peninsular Malaysia, the study foregrounds intergenerational knowledge transmission as a site of negotiation, whereas authority, authenticity, and religious legitimacy are continuously contested. The findings demonstrate that younger actor's function not as passive recipients but as epistemic agents who selectively validate, reframe, or discard practices based on their alignment with Islamic principles and modern healthcare rationalities. This results in a reconfiguration of TMM as a hybrid knowledge system that is simultaneously rooted in tradition and responsive to present-day religious and institutional demands. By advancing a conceptualization of TMM as a dynamic and negotiated heritage, this study contributes to the discourse on Islamic civilization and cultural sustainability by challenging static models of preservation. It argues that sustainable heritage within Islamic societies emerges through processes of critical engagement, adaptation, and epistemic negotiation*

Keywords: *Epistemic Negotiation, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Intergenerational Transmission, Islamic Knowledge Systems, Traditional Malay Midwifery*

Introduction

Traditional Malay Midwifery (TMM) is an important part of the Malay intangible cultural heritage consisting of indigenous healing knowledge, spiritual practices, women's reproductive care, and community-based health traditions passed down from generations. Traditionally, TMM has been a practice of health care, as well as being a knowledge system embedded in culture influenced by Malay customs, local cosmology and Islamic values (Jamin et al., 2025; Ramya et al., 2022). Bidan kampung (traditional midwives) have played important roles as caregivers, spiritual mediators and custodians of reproductive knowledge within traditional Malay society especially in matters relating to pregnancy, childbirth and postnatal care (Jamin et al., 2025; Ramya et al., 2022; Adnan et al., 2025).

But the historical relevance of TMM is increasingly challenged to its continuance. This is because of the rise of biomedical healthcare systems, institutional medical authority, urbanization and evolving theological interpretations in present Muslim communities, notwithstanding its historical importance (Jamin et al., 2025; Ramya et al., 2022; Adnan et al., 2025; Park et al., 2022). The advent of modern medicine has gradually rendered traditional therapeutic practices obsolete, unscientific or illegitimate from an institutional standpoint (Park, 2022). While also some of the ceremonial and spiritual sides of TMM have been questioned in the field of religion, notably with issues of Islamic permissibility, superstition and syncretic rituals. Hence, TMM is situated in a disputed cultural realm where tradition, religion and modernity are always crossing and competing for legitimacy (Jamin et al., 2025; AlRawi et al., 2017).

An important issue, in recent years, is cultural sustainability, which emphasizes the urgent need to protect indigenous and intangible heritage practices that are lost owing to rapid socio-cultural transition (Jamin et al., 2025; Ramya et al., 2022; Awang et al., 2022). However, many current approaches to preservation tend to see legacy as static cultural knowledge to be archived or protected in its original form. These ideas typically do not acknowledge the changing nature of cultural traditions and the active participation of newer generations in revising inherited knowledge considering present-day values, religious views and social realities. Sustainability in the context of TMM is not just about documenting or preservation but also about the interpretation, negotiation and reconstruction of the relevance of these practices in current society by the younger Malay Muslims (Jamin et al., 2025). Research on Traditional Malay Midwifery has mainly focused on ethnomedicine, herbal knowledge, maternal healthcare practices and cultural documentation (Ramya et al., 2022; Awang et al., 2022). Relatively little attention has been paid to the role of youth engagement in mediating the continuity, transformation or decline of TMM, especially in contemporary Islamic contexts (Jamin et al., 2025; Awang et al., 2022). Moreover, the role of intergenerational knowledge transmission as a site of epistemic negotiation around issues of authenticity, religious legitimacy and modern rationality has not received sufficient attention from scholars.

Therefore, this study investigates the younger generations' practice of Traditional Malay Midwifery in the current Malay Muslim communities in Peninsular Malaysia. It explores what young people make of inherited practices, what elements of TMM they choose or reject, and how they negotiate tensions among indigenous traditions, Islamic values, and biomedical modernity. This study aims to contribute to broader discussions on Islamic civilization, intangible cultural heritage and cultural sustainability in rapidly changing societies by conceptualising TMM as a dynamic and negotiated heritage system rather than a fixed cultural tradition.

Literature Review

Traditional Malay Midwifery as Intangible Cultural Heritage

Traditional Malay Midwifery (TMM) is an important part of Malay intangible cultural heritage that includes reproductive healthcare knowledge; ritual practices; spiritual healing, massage techniques, herbal medicine and postpartum care that has been passed down from generation to generation (Jamin et al., 2025; Ramya et al., 2022; Awang et al., 2025). TMM has historically been a community-based healthcare system that is deeply embedded in the fabric of Malay social organization and cultural life, especially in rural areas where *bidan kampung* (traditional midwives) served as trusted custodians of women's reproductive well-being (Jamin et al., 2025; Ramya et al., 2022; Awang et al., 2025). Beyond their medical functions, traditional midwives had considerable social and spiritual power based on their experiential knowledge, ritual skills, and knowledge of local customs.

As an intangible cultural heritage, TMM is characterised by tacit, embodied, and experiential forms of knowledge that are often transmitted orally through observation, apprenticeship, and lived practice rather than formal documentation (Jamin et al., Ramya et al., 2022). Much of the knowledge associated with TMM is context-dependent and closely tied to cultural meanings, symbolic rituals, and community beliefs surrounding childbirth, fertility, womanhood, and spiritual protection (Ariffin, 2025; Jamin et al., 2025; Ramya et al., 2022; Awang et al., 2022). Consequently, the preservation of TMM involves not only safeguarding medical techniques but also maintaining the cultural worldview and social relationships that sustain the practice.

However, the continuity of TMM has become increasingly vulnerable in contemporary society due to urbanisation, generational shifts, institutional healthcare expansion, and changing perceptions toward traditional healing practices (Jamin et al., 2025; Ramya et al., 2022; Awang et al., 2022). While heritage preservation initiatives have attempted to document aspects of indigenous medical knowledge, many approaches remain focused on archiving cultural elements rather than understanding how traditions adapt and transform over time. This highlights the need to examine TMM not as a static cultural artefact, but as a dynamic knowledge system continuously reshaped by social, religious, and institutional changes.

Islam and Traditional Healing Practices

Historically, the relationship between Islam and traditional Malay medicine shows that it is complex and shifting. The Islamisation of Malay culture did not eliminate indigenous traditions but initiated a process of cultural integration where local rituals and healing practices were reinterpreted through the prism of Islamic values and theological frameworks (Jamin et al., 2025; Solihah et al., 2023). In this way, TMM blends various Islamic elements such as Quran recitation, prayers, supplications and spiritual purification rituals with indigenous medicinal knowledge and local cultural beliefs (Jamin et al., 2025).

However, some of the more ritualistic and mystical aspects of traditional healing practices are increasingly being challenged in the present-day Islamic discourse. Practices that involve spiritual intermediaries, supernatural beliefs or ritual symbolism are sometimes criticised as being inconsistent with orthodox Islamic teaching, or as being perhaps associated with superstition and syncretism (Adeyemi & Alabi, 2025). Engagements on halal and haram practices, religious authenticity and Islamic legitimacy in contemporary Muslim communities have played a crucial role in the formation of public opinions on traditional medicine and cultural rituals (Jamin et al., 2025).

These religious negotiations have played a role in a re-assessment of TMM among younger Malay Muslims who have more contact with formal religious education, digital Islamic content, and modern reformist explanations (Yang Marya Abdul Khahar et al., 2025).

As a result, the younger generation tends to be selective about traditional practices, retaining those deemed compatible with Islamic teachings and discarding those considered contrary to religious principles. This implies that the survival of TMM is closely associated with the current processes of religious reinterpretation and cultural negotiation in the contemporary Islamic society (Jamin et al., 2025).

Biomedical Modernity and the Decline of Traditional Practices

The growth of biomedical health care systems has altered the practices of health care and the public's view of traditional medicine in many postcolonial societies, including Malaysia. The modern health-care institution is generally associated with scientific legitimacy, professional regulation, technological progress and standardisation of practice. With the growing dominance of the biomedical systems through state healthcare policies and institutional infrastructures, the mainstream healthcare discourse began to marginalize the authority of traditional medical practices (Jamin et al., 2025; Park et al., 2022; Ramya et al., 2022).

In the context of TMM, biomedical modernity has been implicated in the marginalisation of traditional midwives and indigenous reproductive knowledge. The change to hospital-based birth, formal maternal health care, and medical regulation has diminished the social and functional roles that the *bidan kampung* used to play (Jamin et al., 2025). In urban and educated communities, traditional practices are often depicted as outdated, unsafe or unscientifically validated (Park et al., 2022). This change has reduced processes of intergenerational transmission and curtailed opportunities for younger generations to participate directly in traditional midwifery knowledge (Ismi Yaumil Rachmah et al., 2022). But the decline of TMM cannot be attributed solely to scientific progress or technological development. Rather, it reflects deeper shifts in institutional authority, social trust and cultural legitimacy (Jamin et al., 2025). The growing dominance of biomedical rationality has altered the criteria of knowledge in society, where more weight is given to formalized institutionalized systems than to experiential and community-based knowledge systems (Jamin et al., 2025; Park et al., 2022). As a result, traditional practices are increasingly found in contested spaces where their legitimacy is always being negotiated against the standards of modern health care and religious expectations.

Intergenerational Knowledge Transmission and Tacit Knowledge

The transmission of knowledge is key in ensuring the sustainability of indigenous and traditional knowledge systems. In the context of knowledge management, knowledge is classified into two types which is explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge. Explicit knowledge is codified, formally documented and transferred easily. Tacit knowledge, on the other hand, is experiential, embodied and hard to codify (Remya Lathabhavan et al., 2024). In the TMM context, much of the knowledge that traditional midwives have been tacit knowledge gained through long-term practice, observation, intuition and interpersonal interaction (Ramya et al., 2022; Awang et al., 2022; Jamin et al., 2025).

Traditionally TMM knowledge was transferred through oral communication, apprenticeship, family ties and community participation (Jamin et al., 2026; Ramya et al., 2022). Younger generations learned technical skills like massage techniques, herbal preparation and postpartum

care, but also the cultural ethics, spiritual understandings, and social responsibility connected to caregiving practices. This mode of transmission relied on trust, sustained interaction and experiential learning directly within community settings but the changes in lifestyles, the urban migration, the formal education systems and the loss of interest from the younger generations have led to the increasing fragmentation of intergenerational transmission processes. In addition, younger generations are not passive recipients of traditional knowledge. Rather they are actively interpreting, assessing and negotiating inherited practices in the light of contemporary social values, religious understandings and rationalities. This suggests that the transmission of knowledge is not only a process of conservation, but also a process of adaptation, reinterpretation and selective continuity (Jamin et al., 2025).

Youth Engagement and Heritage Negotiation

Contemporary heritage studies increasingly acknowledge the role of younger generations as active agents of the process of continuity and transformation of cultural traditions. Rather than passive recipients of inherited knowledge, youth are cultural agents who interpret heritage through their changing identities, belief systems and social environments (Jamin et.al., 2025; Kartini and Nurshuhada, 2020). In fast modernising societies younger generations often negotiate multiple influences at the same time, religious reformism, globalisation, digital media, formal education and biomedical rationality. Youth participation in the context of TMM is a complex process of negotiation between tradition, religion and modernity (Jamin et.al., 2025). Young Malay Muslims, however, may still appreciate some aspects of traditional midwifery, in particular herbal care, massage therapy, practices associated with maternal wellbeing and preservation of cultural identity (Kartini and Nurshuhadah, 2020). At the same time practices related to mystical beliefs or religious ambiguity may be challenged, transformed or rejected. Such selective engagement suggests that the sustainability of heritage is less about copying what has been handed down and more about reinventing it.

The concept of negotiated heritage is particularly relevant for the understanding of the development of TMM in contemporary society (Jamin et al., 2025). Heritage practices are not handed down between generations but are constantly being reconstructed by way of social interaction, ideological contestation and shifting institutional contexts. In this way, younger generations are crucial in shaping the kinds of knowledge that will be culturally meaningful, religiously authoritative and socially significant in contemporary Muslim communities.

Conceptual Gap and Theoretical Positioning

The literature on Traditional Malay Midwifery has so far focused on ethnomedicine, herbal knowledge, women's healthcare practices and cultural documentation. These studies have contributed to an understanding of the historical and medical importance of TMM, but relatively little attention has been paid to how the participation of youth shapes the continuity and transformation of traditional midwifery practices in contemporary Islamic settings.

Moreover, different methods of heritage conservation tend to treat cultural traditions as fixed entities to be preserved in their original form. Such views often fail to take account of the dynamic and negotiated nature of heritage practices, especially in societies undergoing rapid religious, institutional and social transformations. Another neglected aspect is the study of intergenerational transmission as a space of epistemic negotiation, where authenticity, legitimacy and modern rationality are constantly contested.

Thus, this study presents TMM as a fluid and negotiated heritage system, constructed through continuous interactions among indigenous traditions, Islamic discourses, biomedical authority, and youth agency. In foregrounding processes of reinterpretation, adaptation and selective continuity, the study contributes to broader discussions on cultural sustainability, Islamic civilisation and the changing nature of indigenous knowledge systems in contemporary society.

Methodology

Research Design

This paper used a qualitative research design to examine the relationship of the younger generations to Traditional Malay Midwifery (TMM) in contemporary Malay Muslim communities in Peninsular Malaysia. The qualitative approach was deemed appropriate given the study is aimed at exploring meanings, perceptions, lived experiences and intergenerational interpretations around TMM rather than measuring variables quantitatively. As TMM is grounded in culturally embedded, experiential, and spiritually informed knowledge systems, qualitative inquiry enables a more nuanced understanding of how individuals negotiate tradition, religion and modernity in everyday social contexts. The study is further informed by an interpretive research orientation, which emphasizes the subjective meanings that individuals assign to social realities and cultural practices. This approach allows the research to explore how younger generations construct legitimacy, authenticity and relevance towards traditional midwifery practices within changing Islamic and biomedical environments.

Population and Sampling

The study was carried out among selected Malay communities in Peninsular Malaysia where traditional midwifery practices still exist, either in active practice or in cultural memory and intergenerational transmission. Peninsular Malaysia was selected due to historical links with Malay traditional healing systems, and the continued influence of Islam in the development of local cultural practices and perceptions of healthcare. The communities selected provide relevant settings to study how TMM is negotiated in contemporary society, particularly concerning changing healthcare systems, religious understandings and attitudes towards indigenous knowledge over time.

The participants of this study are person who directly or indirectly related to Traditional Malay Midwifery practice. These included traditional midwives (*bidan kampung*), younger members of Malay Muslim communities, mothers who had experienced traditional maternal care and some community members conversant with local cultural practices. Participant with experience and knowledge relevant to TMM were selected through purposive sampling. The study focused particularly on younger participants because they are the generation currently negotiating the relevance, legitimacy and continuity of traditional practices in modern social settings. Traditional midwives' involvement contributed to understanding the transfer of knowledge, changing perceptions within the community and the challenges in sustaining the traditional practice.

Data Collection Methods

Oral Histories

Oral history interviews were adopted as the primary method of data collection to obtain personal experiences, cultural memories, and intergenerational narratives related to TMM. Through this approach, participants were able to express reflections on the changing role of traditional

midwifery, attitudes towards Islamic legitimacy, and experiences of knowledge transfer across generations. Question asked of TMM on their practices, how they learned, and their observations of generational shifts in community attitudes towards TMM. Younger participants were invited to share their perception of traditional practices, the elements they find acceptable or relevant, and how their views are shaped by religious and biomedical perspectives.

Participant Observation

Participant observation was employed to understand how TMM-related practices, interactions, and cultural meanings operate in community settings. The researcher was able to observe social interaction, ritual practices, communication styles and community responses surrounding traditional maternal care and healing traditions through observation. The field observations also helped to understand how traditional knowledge is enacted, negotiated or adjusted in everyday settings, particularly in the light of religious sensitivities and modern health care influences.

Field Notes and Informal Conversations

Field notes were maintained throughout the research process to document observations, participant interactions, reflexive insights, and contextual details relevant to the study. Informal conversations with community members further enriched the data by capturing spontaneous perspectives and everyday interpretations regarding TMM and cultural change.

Data Analysis

The data collected was analysed using thematic analysis. The rationale for selecting this approach is that it facilitates the identification, interpretation and organisation of common themes and patterns within qualitative data. Interview transcripts, observational notes and field records were systematically analysed and coded to identify themes related to cultural continuity, religious legitimacy, biomedical modernity, youth engagement and intergenerational negotiation. The analysis focused on younger generations' selective retention, reinterpretation or rejection of TMM in relation to Islamic values, modern healthcare rationalities and contemporary social expectations. The aim of the study is to interpret TMM as a system of heritage in motion and negotiation, rather than as a fixed cultural tradition, through thematic interpretation.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were prioritised throughout the research process due to the cultural and personal nature of the knowledge shared by participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection, and participants were informed about the objectives and scope of the study. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained to protect participants' identities and personal experiences.

The study also emphasised cultural sensitivity and respectful engagement with indigenous and community-based knowledge systems. Care was taken to avoid misrepresentation of traditional practices and religious beliefs, especially given the sensitive intersections between cultural heritage, spirituality, and Islamic interpretations.

Findings and Discussion

Traditional Malay Midwifery as a Contested Heritage

The findings demonstrate that Traditional Malay Midwifery (TMM) is increasingly located in a contested socio-cultural and religious landscape, influenced by both biomedical modernity and contemporary Islamic interpretations. Participants acknowledged that TMM is still culturally relevant in Malay communities, especially in the domain of maternal care, women's wellbeing and family tradition. But many of the participants also acknowledged that nowadays traditional practices are often challenged on the grounds of scientific credibility, religious legitimacy and practical relevance in modern society.

As institutional health care systems and hospital-based childbirth services grew, traditional midwives describe their work as gradually being taken away. Several participants noted that younger generations often perceive biomedical healthcare as safer, more reliable and socially legitimate because of its association with professional expertise and scientific validation. As mentioned by one of the participants

"Nowadays, most people prefer to seek treatment at hospitals. However, some still visit traditional midwives for services such as postnatal massage. For more complex or serious conditions, they are usually advised to seek further treatment at the hospital." (P01)

As a result, traditional midwifery is increasingly regarded as a supplement to, rather than a primary form of, maternal health care. Another important theme in the study was religious contestation. Ritualistic elements associated with TMM were seen by younger participants as incompatible with Islamic teachings, especially those that seemed to involve mystical beliefs, spiritual intermediaries or symbolic rituals lacking a clear religious foundation. At the same time, recitations of the Quran, prayer, and herbal care were generally considered more acceptable due to their perceived compatibility with Islamic values. As mentioned by one of the participants:

"Practices that are considered religiously prohibited are no longer performed. In some cases, traditional rituals have been modified to align with Islamic teachings; for example, the "melenggang perut" ritual is now often replaced with a simple bathing practice accompanied by prayers." (P04)

In this way the findings show that TMM is not rejected across the board but that its acceptance is dependent on ongoing negotiations about religious authenticity and cultural legitimacy.

Youth as Epistemic Agents in Heritage Negotiation

One of the main findings of this study is that younger generations are not passive receivers of traditional knowledge, but active epistemic agents who critically evaluate and re-interpret inherited practices. Younger participants were more consistently selective in their engagement with TMM, making choices about what to keep, change or discard based on current religious understandings, biomedical reasoning and personal belief.

"As we continue to learn from religious teachings and sermons, practices that are prohibited in Islam are no longer performed. Nevertheless, there are still some individuals who continue to request such practices." (p09)

Many of the younger participants appreciated aspects of TMM related to holistic care, postpartum recovery, traditional massage and herbal remedies. These practices were often viewed as valuable cultural know-how that could add to contemporary health care strategies.

However, younger participants were generally more critical towards practices considered as without scientific explanation or possibly contradictory to Islamic principles. As mentioned, by p03;

“Nowadays, questionable or unusual practices are no longer carried out, as there is concern over potential consequences and accountability” (p03)

Moreover, the findings indicate that the younger generations are the active mediators of the continuity of TMM through the process of reinterpretation and not direct replication.

Rather than preserving practices in their original form, participants often reinterpreted traditional knowledge in ways that are relevant to contemporary Islamic discourse and modern expectations of healthcare. Some of the rites of spiritual protection were supplanted by Islamic prayers or diminished to symbolic rites that were cultural rather than mystic. One of the participants mentioned that

“Certain practices can still be preserved, while others that are considered inappropriate or religiously prohibited are no longer followed. Traditional practices should therefore be carefully examined and evaluated before being continued or practised.” (p06)

This selective process of validation is one instance of how younger generations negotiate authority between traditional midwives, religious teachings, and biomedical institutions. Findings show that the sustainability of heritage is increasingly dependent on the ability of traditional knowledge systems to adapt to changing epistemic paradigms, rather than remaining fixed across generations.

Reconfiguration of TMM as a Hybrid Knowledge System

The study found that TMM is undergoing a major transformation into a hybrid knowledge system of indigenous tradition, Islamic values and biomedical modernity. Many practices are being reconstructed in what are considered more religiously acceptable and socially relevant forms for today's society, though not disappearing altogether. Participants described how some traditional practices have been retained because they are perceived to be practical, culturally meaningful or beneficial to maternal well-being. Traditional knowledge that was still appreciated by younger generations included herbal remedies, massage techniques, dietary care and postnatal recovery practices. However, these practices are increasingly characterized in terms of biomedical or wellness-oriented rather than purely traditional cosmological terms. For instance, the advice given to the newly mothered as mentioned below:

“For breastfeeding, the Ministry of Health (KKM) recommends exclusive breastfeeding for up to six months. I also give the same advice, encouraging mothers not to introduce solid food too early and to wait until the child is ready.” (p04)

At the same time, Islamic reinterpretation is important in shaping which aspects of TMM continue to survive. Participants frequently distinguished between practices that were seen as “cultural” and those that were seen as “religiously problematic.” The distinction shows how younger Malay Muslims negotiate boundaries between acceptable heritage practices and perceived religious deviations. As mentioned by p01;

“Not everything can be followed as it was in the past. Previously, practices were based on what was accepted at that time, without formal research or studies, relying mainly on intuition and experience.” (p11)

The emergence of such a hybridised form of TMM indicates wider processes of cultural adaptation within modern Muslim societies. The results indicate that traditional knowledge systems are not static but are constantly negotiated with dominant institutional, religious and social discourses.

Negotiating Authority, Authenticity, and Legitimacy

Another important finding is the changing authority dynamics of TMM. Bidan kampung were powerful old people, custodians of maternal knowledge and community wellbeing. However, modern participants were more likely than traditional participants to link legitimacy with formal medical institutions and religious authorities rather than traditional knowledge by experience.

Younger informants, in turn, often challenged traditional practices in two key areas: Islamic legitimacy and biomedical rationality. Practices that seemed consistent with religious doctrine and with the logic of modern health care were more likely to be accepted, while practices that had neither kind of legitimacy were questioned or rejected. This implies that the power of cultural knowledge is not just a question of tradition or community inheritance, but increasingly a question of institutional and ideological structures.

“I also continue to learn, and I still adopt certain practices, such as massage, when they are found to provide comfort.” (p05)

It was the traditional midwives who saw the need to modify their practices to meet the demands of changing community expectations and religious sensitivities. Some participants said that certain rituals have already been modified, simplified or abandoned, to be socially acceptable in contemporary Muslim communities. These adaptations illustrate how traditional practitioners actively negotiate survival strategies in changing socio-religious environments.

The findings thus hint that authenticity in TMM is not pre-determined or consensual. Instead, authenticity is constantly (re)created through a negotiation between cultural memory, religious discourse, health-care institutions and generational interpretation.

Rethinking Cultural Sustainability in Islamic Societies

The findings challenge prevailing heritage-conservation-based concepts of cultural sustainability that assumes heritage should be invariant over time. For TMM sustainability is not about preservation, but about constant adaptation, reinterpretation and critical engagement of the younger generations.

The participants showed that the sustainability of TMM is highly dependent on its perceived relevance in the current Islamic and modern social settings. Practices perceived as incompatible

with the paradigms of Islamic values and modern health rationalities tend to decline, while practices perceived as compatible with both tend to survive. This means that the cultural sustainability of Islamic societies is not static but dynamic and negotiated.

The study therefore conceptualises TMM as a living heritage system which is continuously shaped by epistemic negotiation between tradition, religion and modernity. Younger generations play a crucial role in this process, selectively reconstructing inherited knowledge in accordance with contemporary cultural, spiritual and institutional expectation. The findings through the emphasis on youth agency and negotiated continuity contribute to broader discussions on Islamic civilisation, intangible cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge sustainability. The research argues that sustainable heritage in contemporary Muslim societies should not be viewed only as preservation of the past but as the ability of systems of cultural knowledge to adapt in a meaningful way in changing social realities.

Conclusion

This study explores the participation of the younger generations with Traditional Malay Midwifery (TMM) in contemporary Malay Muslim communities in Peninsular Malaysia. The findings indicate that TMM continues to be an important form of intangible cultural heritage but one that is increasingly affected by biomedical modernity, changing religious interpretation and changing generational perspectives. Instead of simply inheriting traditional practices, younger generations assess, reinterpret and negotiate the relevance of TMM in relation to contemporary Islamic values and modern healthcare rationalities.

The study also suggests that TMM is now located in a contested cultural space where issues of legitimacy, authenticity and religious acceptability are always at stake in its acceptance and transformation. Other practices are being rejected or modified, especially those with mystical beliefs or without scientific justification. Practices deemed to be in line with Islamic tenets and modern notions of healthcare are more likely to be sustained. So TMM is not going away but is being converted into a hybrid knowledge system that combines indigenous traditions, Islamic principles and modern health perspectives.

Theoretically, this study contributes to discussions on cultural sustainability and Islamic civilisation by challenging static preservation-oriented approaches to heritage. The findings suggest that heritage sustainability within contemporary Islamic societies should not be understood solely as the protection of fixed cultural traditions, but rather as a dynamic process of adaptation, reinterpretation, and epistemic negotiation. By foregrounding youth agency, the study highlights how younger generations function as key factors in determining the future continuity and transformation of indigenous knowledge systems.

This study also contributes to the wider scholarship on intangible cultural heritage by positioning intergenerational knowledge transmission as an active site of negotiation, rather than as a linear process of cultural inheritance. With TMM, sustainability means the preservation of traditional knowledge, along with its ongoing cultural importance, religious legitimisation and social relevance in changing societal conditions.

However, this study is limited to the selected communities in Peninsular Malaysia and may not fully represent the diversity of Traditional Malay Midwifery practices in different regional contexts. Further studies might also be conducted on comparative regional perspectives, digital

preservation strategies, gendered experiences of traditional healthcare practices, and the use of emerging technologies to protect indigenous cultural knowledge.

This study concludes that the future of Traditional Malay Midwifery does not lie in the rigid maintenance of the past but in the ability of a community to interpret critically and to reconstruct inherited traditions in ways that are relevant in the contemporary Islamic society, especially among the younger generations.

Acknowledgements:	The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, Department of Library and Information Science, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Universiti Malaya and Faculty of Information Science, UiTM Negeri Sembilan Rembau Branch for providing the necessary resources and support throughout the course of this research. Special appreciation is extended to colleagues and peers who contributed valuable insights and constructive feedback, which greatly enhanced the quality of this paper.
Funding Statement:	This research received financial support from Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia and Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) under SLAB/SLAI. The funding body had no role in the design of the study, data collection, analysis, interpretation of results, or the decision to publish this manuscript.
Conflict of Interest Statement:	The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper. All authors have contributed to this work and approved the final version of the manuscript for submission to the Journal of Islamic, Social, Economics and Development (JISED).
Ethics Statement:	This study was conducted in accordance with ethical research standards. All procedures involving human participants were reviewed and approved by the Universiti Malaya Research Ethics Committee (UMREC), approval number [UM.TNC2/UMREC_2789]. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. The data collected were used solely for academic purposes.
Author Contribution Statement:	All authors contributed significantly to the development of this manuscript. Jashira Jamin was responsible for the conceptualization, methodology, and overall supervision of the study. handled data collection, analysis, and interpretation of results and contributed to the literature review, drafting, and critical revision of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript prior to submission.

References

- Adeyemi, Adeola Waliyullahi, and Alabi Abdulhakeem Omotosho (2025). Ethnographic study of Islamic therapy and sorcerous herbal practices in Illorin Emirate, Nigeria. *International Journal of 'Umranc Studies*, 8 (1), p75-90.
- Adnan, A. H., Hasbollah, H. R., Mukhtar, D., & Azmi, A. (2025). Exploring Malaysian Traditional Postpartum Care Practices Among Practitioners. *Journal of Tourism Hospitality and Environment Management*, 10 (39), 93-109.
- AlRawi, S. N., Khidir, A., Elnashar, M. S., Abdelrahim, H. A., Killawi, A. K., Hammoud, M. M., & Fetters, M. D. (2017). Traditional Arabic & Islamic medicine: validation and empirical assessment of a conceptual model in Qatar. *BMC complementary and alternative medicine*, 17(1), 157. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12906017-1639-x>
- Ariffin, A. (2025, December 5). Traditional Malay Postnatal Care [Review of Traditional Malay Postnatal Care]. Global Information Hub on Integrated Medicine; Global Information Hub on Integrated Medicine . <https://globinmed.com/>
- Awang Rozaimie, R., Bolhassan, R., & Johari, A. (2022). Preserving the conventional indigenous postnatal care: A case of Sarawak's Malay practices. *Sarawak Museum Journal*, LXXXV(106), 45–56. <https://doi.org/10.61507/TSMJ-2022-1XED-01>
- Ismi Yaumil Rachmah, Risza Choirunissa, & Retno Widowati. (2022). Postpartum Care According to Sundanese Culture In Weru Village Sukaresmi District, Pandeglang Regency. *International Journal of Multi Science*, 3(02), 45–54. <https://multisciencejournal.com/index.php/ijm/article/view/286>
- Jamin J., Mohd Khalid, Y.I.A, & Ahmad, M. (2025). Preserving Malay Midwifery Traditions: The Role of Islam and Local Wisdom in Sustaining Intangible Heritage. *Global Journal Al-Thaqafah*, 14–27. <https://doi.org/10.7187/GJATSI112025-2>
- Kartini Aboo Talib @ Khalid and Nurshuhada Mohamed. 2020. Midwives and herbal remedies: The sustainable ethnoscience. *Kajian Malaysia* 38(Supp.1): 109–131. <https://doi.org/10.21315/km2020.38.s1.7>
- Othman, R., & Khiruddin, S. A. (2018). Landscape ethnobotanical study of Malay midwifery plant species: A case study of Kelantan. *Journal of Architecture, Planning & Construction Management*, 8(1). <https://journals.iium.edu.my>
- Park, J. E., Yi, J., & Kwon, O. (2022). Twenty years of traditional and complementary medicine regulation and its impact in Malaysia: achievements and policy lessons. *BMC health services research*, 22(1), 102. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-022-07497-2>
- Ramli, R., & Zain, R. B. (2017). Traditional birth attendants in Malaysia: A review of the literature. *Journal of Biosocial Science*, 49(5), 557–571. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021932016000737>
- Ramya, R., et al. (2022). Ethnobotanical study of traditional Malay midwifery practices: Prenatal and postnatal care treatment. *International Journal of Chemical and Biochemical Sciences*, 21, 167–174. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/362908760>
- Remya Lathabhavan, Padhy, P. C., & Panda, S. (2024). Knowledge Management. Elsevier EBooks. <https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-0-443-13701-3.00334-0>
- Solihah Haji Yahya Zikri, Khalid Ismail, Nadiyah Hashim & Aziani Ahmad. (2024). Islam in the Malay History and Culture: Its Impacts on the Malay Culture, Language & Literature. *International Journal Of Modern Education (IJMOE)*, 5(17). Retrieved from <https://gaexcellence.com/ijmoe/article/view/1817>
- Theingi, M.M., Sherly D. G., Aye, A.T. (2019). Traditional medicine vs modern medicine in rural area of Kedah state, Malaysia. *IOSR Journal Of Pharmacy and Biological Sciences (IOSR-JPBS)* 14(1) pp05-08. DOI: 10.9790/3008-1401050508

Yang Marya Abd Khahar et al. (2025). UMRAN – International Journal of Islamic and Civilizational Studies. 12(3)pp. 69- 88. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11113/umran2025.12n3.82>