
Use of Traditional, Complementary and Alternative Medicine in Sri Lanka; A Systematic Review

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Traditional, complementary and alternative medicine (TCAM) practices are well-known in Sri Lanka. We performed a systematic review on the usage of TCAM among Sri Lankans since this has not been adequately evaluated. A literature search was done in Pubmed, Google Scholar and Ovid using keywords “Ayurveda” or “Siddha” or “Unani” or “Desheeya Chikithsa” or “complimentary medicine” or “alternative medicine” and “Sri Lanka”. Primary studies describing the usage of TCAM among Sri Lankans were included in the analysis. Reviews, case reports and studies conducted among non-Sri Lankans were not included. Of the final 385 studies retrieved after the search only five studies were directly relevant. A study including 254 adults with diabetes attending a tertiary care hospital in the Central province found TCAM use among 76% patients. While 19% were on one type of CAM, 34%, 21% and 2.4% were on two, three or more than three preparations, respectively. Another group of researchers in 2010, found TCAM use in 67.4% cancer patients among 500 patients studied. 95% of those who used TCAM thought “it would cure their cancer” while others did not take mostly on doctors’ advice. According to another study 18% of the study participants used TCAM for oral conditions. Of them, 72%, 3% and 25% had used Ayurvedic, Unani and folk medicines respectively. In 2019, reported use of medicinal plants among 53.7% of subjects selected randomly from Pollonaruwa. A similar study by same researcher in 2018 found use of medicinal plants for inflammatory conditions among 50.7% of subjects in the Western province. Studies examining the use of TCAM among Sri Lankan are sparse. The available studies, however, indicate that a high proportion of patients/people use TCAM for their illnesses. More studies are needed to uncover the reasons for using TCAM among Sri Lankans.

Keywords: Complementary therapies, Medicine-traditional, Systematic review