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Community Attitudes and Awareness of Herbal Use in Traditional Malay Medicine in Selangor

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Abstract

Traditional medicine is a system rooted in cultural practices, knowledge, and beliefs vital to the health of Malay society. However, Malays have varying levels of understanding regarding treating illnesses in this area of medicine. This study will determine the community's experience and perspective on Malay traditional medicine. Data were gathered using a qualitative research methodology that included a thorough literature review, surveys of 327 respondents, and interviews with seven individuals. The findings indicate a mean score of 4.48, with the community suggesting that herbal plants do not cause any side effects. The results demonstrated that approximately 45.9% of the community regarded herbal treatment as adequate, as evidenced by mean scores of 4.02 and 4.13. This suggests a widespread acceptance of various herbs and a significant endorsement of their use within the community. The results also showed that, in influencing individuals to use herbs, there was a mean score of 4.13. In conclusion, the community's understanding of the benefits of herbs influenced the control of traditional treatments and the promotion of ongoing herbal practices in modern society. Most respondents possess a level of knowledge and understanding regarding the use of herbs in treatment.

Keywords: Community Understanding, Role of Herbs, Traditional Herbs.

Introduction

In today's culture, some individuals possess specialized knowledge and skills in utilizing herbs and plants to treat ailments. The Malay community has embraced traditional medical practices as part of its cultural heritage. Gathering information, ensuring its quality, and delivering it effectively enhance individual understanding. Mustapha (2022) notes that in 1638, Sheikh Nuruddin Ar-Raniri defined medicine as the knowledge that covers all aspects of the human body, maintaining its health, and treating all ailments in various forms. This highlights the importance of understanding and diagnosing diseases in traditional Malay medicine. This study aims to explore the community's perspective on Malay traditional medicine. medicine, Hamid (2012:153), is a group of procedures developed to address issues that people may encounter in a healthy state or when they are ill. Some individuals carry on this way of life from generation to generation. Traditional medical practices are now part of the Malay community's inherited legacy and long-standing traditions. Due to ongoing challenges in embracing and widely sharing medical practices, the Malay region exhibits diverse levels of understanding regarding the importance of medicine in treating illnesses.

Literature Review

Drawing from the research in the book "Khasiat Herba Dalam Kitab Melayu Tib" authored by Aziz and Yunos (2019), this study focuses on the wealth of information found in traditional Malay medical manuscripts, which are invaluable assets for the medical field. This investigation illuminates the ancient healthcare and medical practices of the Malay community. The primary aim of this research is to identify the diverse array of herbs documented in the Tib MS 174 manuscript, which reflects the traditional wisdom of the Malay community, and to explain the benefits and varied techniques used by the Malay

community in treating illnesses with herbs. The researcher of this study employs a philological approach that is closely connected to the transliteration process of the text.

The outcomes of this composition were derived through a qualitative approach, which involved analyzing data found in the Malay Tib book. Data collection occurred by defining the research focus, organizing the information, and obtaining texts from the resources of the University of Malaya Library. This library-based research method includes three main aspects: the primary segment consisting of manuscripts, additional materials comprising relevant books, and supplementary components featuring interviews with experts in the field of traditional Malay medicine.

The results of this research explore the benefits of various herbs, analyze their medicinal properties, and investigate their application in treating different ailments as described in the Malay Tib book. Furthermore, the researcher conducted fieldwork to examine aspects related to herbs and plants, including white turmeric roots, starfruit leaves, betel leaves, garlic, shallots, ginger, black cumin, oak galls, kaffir lime, and nutmeg. These components are thoroughly explained within the scope of this study.

Additionally, a study by Zahar et al. (2016) conducted a follow-up investigation into the role of turmeric in the medical field, covering scientific, cultural, social, and environmental aspects. Their research methodology involved a comprehensive literature review and electronic searches, particularly on curcumin, a component naturally found in turmeric (*Curcuma longa*). The primary objectives of this study were to examine the metabolic effects of curcumin as documented in scientific research and journal publications, as well as to enhance existing knowledge while gaining valuable insights through potentially influential research.

This study's primary focus centers on examining curcumin's impact and role in the context of obesity and related metabolic disorders that have previously been researched. The findings of this study present

compelling evidence of a scientific link between curcumin's effects, which support weight loss, and a reduction in obesity-related health issues. Furthermore, this investigation confirms curcumin's capacity to regulate lipid metabolism, a crucial factor in the development of obesity and its associated complications. Researchers also highlight curcumin's importance in its interaction with insulin and its effects on hyperglycemia, hyperlipidemia, and other symptoms often associated with obesity-related conditions. Additionally, curcumin is widely recognized for its various health benefits and is used in treating obesity, inflammation, cancer, diabetes, and arthritis (Grynkiewicz, 2012).

Upon completing the observational study that relied on clinical trial outcomes, it becomes clear that turmeric effectively treats conditions such as diabetes, irritable bowel syndrome, and cancer. At the molecular level, turmeric has a significant impact on regulating cellular signaling pathways. These insights are firmly grounded in clinical trial findings, which provide substantial evidence of turmeric's effectiveness in addressing major human ailments, including cancer, diabetes, and irritable bowel syndrome.

Methodology

This research focuses on individuals living in Selangor, a state with a population of 5,769,786 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020). Consequently, the collected and analyzed survey data follow the guidelines established by Krejcie & Morgan (1970), involving a sample size of 2,600 from 327 respondents. Therefore, it can be confirmed that the sampling methodology of this study aligns with validity and reliability standards. The data from respondents was gathered through the physical distribution of questionnaires and online surveys (Google Forms). Additionally, survey forms were distributed to 327 respondents. This study also utilized literature highlights and library methods. The data was analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 25.

Findings

Gaining Insights into Community Perspectives on Traditional Medical Practices

This research involved 327 respondents, including 7 individuals who participated in interviews. The researcher subsequently identified four distinct medical domains based on current circumstances and contemporary needs. As a result, 7 treatment methods were discerned, encompassing various commonly employed traditional care approaches within the Malay community today. These approaches include ingestion, immersion, topical application, oral consumption, cooking, and application. This emphasis on healthcare in Malay traditional medicine serves the dual purposes of maintaining well-being and preventing illnesses. Additionally, according to Kadher et al. (2019), it is reported that over 56% of the Malaysian population, particularly the Malay community, opt for traditional medical services as an alternative to modern treatments for managing their health conditions. The table below displays the percentage representing the understanding gained through community behavior control perceptions within the context of traditional treatment practices in this community.

Table 1: Determining the Community's Understanding of Treatment Method Perceptions

Bi l	Item	Response	Sampl e (n)	Percentag e (%)
1	Effects after herbal treatment	Effective Not Effective Improving Getting worse	150 21 153 3	45.9 5.4 46.8 9

2	Methods of treating common diseases with herbs	Consumed raw	97	29.7
		Consumed as a drink	57	17.4
		Cooked	100	30.6
		Soaked	24	10.4
3	Diseases suitable for the treatment of Asthma/Gastric with herbal plants		114	34.9
		High blood/ Low blood	86	26.3
		Obesity/gout/allergies/ joint inflammation	71	21.7
		None	56	17.1
4	Diseases that herbal plants can treat	Diabetes/eczema	78	23.9
		Cancer/Heart disease	50	15.3
		Stroke/High cholesterol	142	43.4
		None	57	17.4
5	Day of receiving treatment	same day	70	21.4
		next day	89	27.2
		2 days later	70	21.4
		3-7 days	78	23.9
		7 days>	15	4.6

		No treatment	5	1.5
6	Agree that herbs contain various beneficial properties suitable for supplement products.	Yes No	310 17	94.8 5.2

Referring to the table provided, it is evident that a significant portion of the participants, specifically 153 individuals, or roughly 46.8%, expressed a strong belief in the beneficial effects of herbal treatments on disease recovery. Moreover, the research results indicate a growing awareness among the public regarding the efficacy of herbal therapies following their use. In addition, approximately 150 respondents, accounting for around 45.9%, affirmed the effectiveness of herbal treatments. Conversely, only a tiny fraction, about 5.4% (21 respondents), and a mere 0.9% (3 respondents) of the total participants reported that herbal usage was ineffective.

To begin, in item 2, the primary preference among respondents was for direct herb consumption (raw ingestion), with 100 individuals, or 30.6%, selecting this option. Following closely, 97 respondents, representing 29.7%, favored the convenience of liquid herbal intake. The least preferred choice was the soaking method, chosen by 10.4% or 24 respondents. Turning to item 3, most respondents, specifically 114 individuals, or 34.9%, expressed their belief in the effectiveness of herbal remedies for conditions such as asthma and gastritis. The next prominent choice was hypertension, selected by 26.3%, or 86 respondents. Furthermore, 71 respondents, accounting for 21.7%,

believed that obesity, gout, allergies, and joint inflammation could be managed with herbal treatments. This underscores the community's substantial awareness of the efficacy of herbal remedies. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that 21.7% of respondents, equivalent to 57 individuals dealing with health issues, opted for herbal-based treatment methods.

Regarding item 4, most respondents indicated that herbal plants were suitable for treating diseases like stroke and high cholesterol. 142 respondents, representing 43.4%, believed that herbal plants were suitable for treatment. This was followed by diabetes and eczema, with 23.9%, or 78 respondents, considering them appropriate for herbal treatment. The lowest preferences were for cancer and heart disease, at 15.3%, or 50 respondents, and for having no illness, at 17.4%, or 57 respondents.

Additionally, most respondents, precisely 89 individuals, representing 27.2%, agreed that they would seek treatment the day after recognizing symptoms of an illness. The lowest preference was waiting for 7 days, chosen by 15 respondents, accounting for 1.5%.

In addition, referring to item 5, the prevailing sentiment among respondents was that asthma and gastritis were conditions well-suited for treatment with herbal remedies, as expressed by 114 individuals, or 34.9%. This was followed by high and low blood pressure, selected by 26.3%, represented by 86 respondents. Conditions such as obesity, gout, allergies, and joint inflammation garnered a preference of 21.7%, accounting for 71 respondents. Moreover, 17.1%, equivalent to 56 respondents, reported having no health issues, while a further 1.5%, represented by 5 respondents, did not respond.

Regarding item 6, the consensus among the majority of respondents, specifically 310 individuals, or 94.8%, agreed that herbs possess a wide range of valuable properties suitable for incorporation into supplemental products. Conversely, 5.2%, represented by 17 respondents, disagreed with using herbs as supplement ingredients. This highlights that, although a significant portion of the population seems well-informed about the advantages of herbal plants, a segment of the

Selangor community with limited exposure or knowledge regarding herbs as remedies for both external and internal health issues remains.

In summary, these results suggest that most respondents have a solid grasp of the advantages and efficacy of utilizing herbs as a treatment method, with convenience being the foremost factor in their herbal usage. Nonetheless, some respondents encountered specific situations or challenges when using herbs.

In addition, some medical conditions are untreated by modern medicine but can be effectively managed through traditional approaches involving herbal remedies. Yasran (2022) asserts that drugs such as painkillers, ibuprofen, and paracetamol are inclined to manage and relieve transient symptoms rather than providing a comprehensive cure for the disease. Consequently, herbs' utilization is vital in addressing physical and spiritual ailments. These findings are based on the perspective of Yasran (2022), who observed that herbal utilization has been adapted into various forms, including dietary supplements or health supplements like tablets, liquids, medicinal products, and more.

Table 2: Descriptive Analysis of the Percentage of Understanding and Knowledge about Herbs among the Community in the Central Zone of Selangor District.

Level	(n)	(%)
High	23	7.0
Moderate	230	70.3
Low	74	22.6
Total	327	100.0

The table above has been divided into three knowledge levels: high, moderate, and low. Most respondents fell into the moderate

knowledge category, making up 70.3%, or 230 respondents, out of 327. These findings suggest that a significant portion of the Selangor community participating in this study has limited exposure to herbal knowledge, including its content, benefits, and applications in Malay traditional medicine. Furthermore, there is still room for them to develop a deeper understanding of the scientific aspects of this field. Azwani (2007) noted that in Western nations, consumers have begun to place trust in and transition toward plant-based herbal medicine due to its perceived safety, fewer side effects, and cost-effectiveness compared to modern medicine.

In this context, the moderate knowledge level can be attributed to the community's tendency to seek information about modern medicine at hospitals before exploring additional treatment options through traditional methods. This observation aligns with the insights from an interview with Yasran (2022), an expert in Islamic and conventional medicine, who categorized contemporary society into two distinct groups. The interview transcript is provided below.

When it comes to the utilization of herbal remedies and their knowledge levels as a treatment approach, our population can generally be categorized into two distinct groups. Firstly, there are individuals who actively pursue knowledge through diverse avenues to gain insights into the constituents, advantages, treatment techniques, and the application of herbal plants in the realm of medicine. The second group consists of individuals who adopt a more passive stance, preferring to await the outcomes and effects of the treatment before initiating any action.

These factors influence individual intentions and actions regarding the use of herbal treatments. Integrating herbal plants into the daily routines of the community has significantly contributed to harnessing the therapeutic benefits offered by these herbs for creating natural remedies.

According to Braun (2010), family and close friends in one's immediate environment also play a crucial role in influencing individuals' adoption of herbal remedies.

When family members or close friends have tried herbal remedies and witnessed positive outcomes, this motivates individuals to embrace them. The attitudes and actions of individuals can be connected to the intensity of their intentions, as manifested in their attitudes towards behaviors, such as the search for suitable herbal plants to address specific ailments. According to Wahidah (2012), the World Health Organization (WHO) has recorded that nearly 70% of the world's population employs herbal remedies, particularly in developing and underdeveloped nations, primarily because of ease of access and lower costs. In developed countries, users also perceive herbal usage as an alternative to conventional treatments.

In the state of Selangor, it is evident that traditional medicine, alongside the advancement of modern medicine, serves as a complementary alternative treatment. Therefore, the combined effects of these two types of medicine complement each other in contributing to the recovery of patients from illnesses. Additionally, the availability of various herbs and plants in the community environment is limited, except in areas designated as centers for herbal farming and cultivation. According to Ahmad (2019), a specialist in social anthropology, the primary factor contributing to the community's moderate level of knowledge is changes in lifestyle patterns and social environments.

These factors influence the decisions and actions of individuals concerning the use of herbal treatments. In Selangor, it's evident that traditional medicine and advancements in modern medicine serve as supplementary treatment alternatives. Consequently, the synergistic effect of these two medical approaches enhances patient recovery from illnesses. Furthermore, the availability of various herbs and plants within the community is limited, with exceptions in designated areas for herbal farming and cultivation. Ahmad (2019), a social anthropology expert, states that the primary factor contributing to the community's

moderate level of knowledge is the changes in lifestyle and social environments. Nevertheless, with evolving times and technological advancements, contemporary societies rely heavily on modern medicine while reducing their engagement with traditional herbal remedies. As emphasized by Aziz (2020), a conventional medicine specialist, highlights how globalization and urbanization impact the erosion of society's understanding of herbs and plants. She argues that as cities rapidly grow and modern lifestyles take hold, traditional herbal knowledge is increasingly overlooked and receives less attention. Individuals often seek immediate and convenient solutions, such as modern pharmaceuticals, frequently disregarding the rich reservoir of traditional wisdom. The general populace is usually viewed as having substantial knowledge and experience. On average, they demonstrate proficiency in performing specific medical procedures through traditional techniques and their unique approaches to specific health conditions. In conclusion, the community's awareness of the benefits of herbal remedies will influence their perspective on the societal impact on traditional healing practices, thereby promoting the continued use of herbal treatments in modern community life.

Conclusion

Some individuals use herbs based on knowledge gained from personal experiences. Others gain herbal expertise through research, studies, reading materials, testimonials from the local community, or websites. In summary, most respondents have moderate herbal knowledge supported by several justifications outlined.

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