SPP-01: Prevalence and attitudes of using herbal medicines during the COVID-19 pandemic among adults residing in Western Province, Sri Lanka

M. S. A. Deedat[1], M. M. K. De Silva[1], D. D. I. T Dehipitiya[1], U. Mannapperuma[2]

[1]Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

[2]Department of Pharmacology, Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

Introduction: Herbal medicines include herbs, herbal materials, herbal preparations and finished herbal products that contain parts of plants, other plant materials or combinations, as active ingredients. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of herbal remedies as a primary treatment, both in conjunction with prescription drugs and on their own, dramatically increased. Hence, this study was carried out to determine the prevalence and attitudes of using herbal medicines during the COVID-19 pandemic among adults in Western Province.

Methods: A descriptive cross-sectional study was done among 121 adults residing in Western Province, Sri Lanka. Stratified cluster sampling was used. An interviewer-administered telephone-based questionnaire was used to collect data.

Results: Among 121 participants, 89.3% had used herbal medicine during their lifetime. There was no association between herbal medicine use and socio-demographic factors. There was a 20.6% increase in the prevalence of usage of herbal medicine as a preventive measure against diseases from before to during the pandemic. The use of herbal medicine was considered to be harmless by 61.98%. Vast majority (99.07%) felt that using herbal medicine helped as a preventive measure against any diseases during the pandemic, while 96.25% (n=77) felt it helped in relieving symptoms like cough, cold, fever and pain during the pandemic. The participants mainly used herbal medicine due to its previously reported or self-perceived effectiveness (64.81%). The majority (78.05%) that did not disclose their use of herbal medicines to their physicians did not do so as the doctor did not ask.

Conclusions: The study findings point out that regardless of the facet of life that patients belong to, most use herbal medicines. Based on these current findings, it is good practice for doctors to ask their patients regarding their use of herbal medicines and for patients to disclose their use which may minimise potential harm due to interactions with western medicines.

Keywords: herbal medicines, COVID-19 pandemic, Sri Lanka

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