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Indigenous herbal remedies for children ailments prevalent in Himachali homes

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Abstract

Traditionally, the rural women prefer plant medicines rather than modern medicines to cure common children ailments. Keeping in mind the tremendous importance of plants in traditional health care system, the present research work was carried out in four villages of district Kangra, Himachal Pradesh. The data was collected from 120 rural women using interview based survey along with informal discussions. The study indicates that rural women utilize locally available herbs/plant material to cure the children ailments. External application of the paste of certain plants was used for curing cold and cough while the ailments like diarrhoea, and stomachache were treated by feeding paste or boiled mixture of different plants to the suffering child. Since this indigenous knowledge system is fading out rapidly, therefore, there is an urgent need to document such knowledge.

Key words: Indigenous, medicinal plants, children ailments, Himachal Pradesh.

Introduction

The history of medicine and surgery dates back perhaps to the origin of human race. But, as no mode of recording events existed in pre historic times, there are no data on the methods of treatment practiced in that period. Every society has been following its own indigenous knowledge/wisdom for treatment of children suffering from common ailments.

The traditional Indian lifestyle is well acquainted with indigenous system of medicine. Banna (*Vitex negundu* Linn.) for healthy teeth and sprain, (Kanwar *et al.* 2006) and turmeric (*Curcuma longa* Linn.) for cuts and wound- these are some of the home remedies that we all know. These plants based medical traditions make a very significant contribution to the country's healthcare. Eighty percent of the rural population still depends on herbal medicines (Patil and Yadav, 2003). In Himachal Pradesh also, rural women have enormous knowledge about the medicinal usage of many plant species for curing different children ailments. But, much of the natural resources and wealth of knowledge is total becoming lost as traditional culture gradually disappears (Hamiltion, 1995). Thus it is necessary to document the indigenous knowledge for the welfare of mankind. Further, scientific assessment of these medicines may provide a lead in the development of drugs to be used in modern system of medicine. Keeping these facts in view, the present study was conducted with the objective to collect and document information regarding indigenous methods of treating the common children ailments.

Material and Methods

The present study was carried out in Nagrota Bagwan and Panchrukhi block of district Kangra situated in mid hill sub- montane zone of Himachal Pradesh. Two villages from each block were selected at random. Since rural women certainly constitute a storehouse of indigenous knowledge, therefore the desired information was documented from rural mothers. As regards selection of respondents, a list of rural women having at least one child below five years of age was prepared from the selected villages. From each village 30 rural women were selected randomly making a total sample of 120 respondents. Interview based survey along with informal discussion was used to procure the information.

Results and Discussion

Children are subject to numerous minor complaints and over coming them is a part and

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process by which body builds up its defenses against diseases. Generally ailments do not require medical attention but many illnesses of a serious nature may start with colic, diarrhoea, stomachache etc. In the state of Himachal Pradesh, rural mothers use indigenous medication to a considerable extent for curing various children ailments. Table 1 presents the indigenous medicines used by the rural mothers to cure diarrhoea, stomachache and cold & cough among infants along with the logic for practicing a particular treatment.

Diarrhoea: It is clear from the table that for curing diarrhoea, majority of the respondents i.e. 95.83 per cent give boiled mixture of chotti elaichi *(Elettaria cardamomum* Linn.), ajwain (*Trachyspermum ammi* Sprague) and jaiphal (*Myristica fragrans* Houtt.). According to them chotti elaichi (*E. cardamomum)* is considered to be carminative, thus helps in relieving flatulence. Ajwain (*T. ammi)* was added with the belief that it promotes digestion, while addition of jaiphal (*M. fragrans)* was made because of its constipatious nature which helps to control diarrhoeal problem. Data were compared with available literature on medicinal plants and was found that similar plants had also been reported for treatment of diarrhea among children (Raljan *et al.* 2002; Jain, 2003).Exactly ninety five percent of the respondents used to give extract of bahera (*Terminalia bellirica* Roxb.) by rubbing in cold water if faeces is yellow. For green faeces it is rubbed in hot water and is served 2-3 teaspoons twice a day. Almost similar percentage (93.33%) of the respondents suggested rubbing harad (*Terminalia chebula* Retz.), jaiphal *(M. fragrans)*, barein (*Acorus calamus* Linn.) and almond (*Prunus amygdalus* Batsch) in water and serving 2-3 teaspoons twice a day with hot or cold water according to the diahrroeal cause. All these items were believed to be constipatious in nature. Solution of salt, sugar and water was suggested by exactly 71.67 per cent of the respondents. They were not aware of the rationale behind this practice but were using it only because of doctor's advice and mass media emphasis.

Stomachache: With regard to treatment suggested by the rural women to cure stomachache (Table 1), a little more than eighty percent of the respondents reported to give a spoon of rubbed harad *(T. chebula)* in water. Exactly 72.50 per cent respondents prescribed to feed ajwain (*T. ammi*) boiled in water. They mentioned that both these herbs help in controlling the gas generated in stomach. Near about seventy per cent (71.67%) of the respondents used to give juice of fresh ginger (*Zinziber officinale* Rosc.) rhizome to the child to lick with honey. Ginger (*Z. officinale*) is given with a view that it clears the digestive system and helps in reducing pain.

Cold and Cough: For the treatment of cold and cough, exactly 71.67 per cent of the respondents applied paste of ground barein (*A. calamus*) along with mustard oil on chest of the patient (Table 1). According to them being hot in nature, barein (*A. calamus*) can cure cold. Half of the respondents preferred to feed one-fourth to half teaspoon of ground mixture of dried ginger (*Z. officinale*), black pepper (*Piper nigrum* L.*)* and mulathi. A little more than one-fourth of the respondents considered chotti elaichi (*E. cardamomum)* as stimulant thus used to feed a mixture of cardamom seeds boiled in water. Exactly 21.67 per cent of the respondents mentioned to feed rubbed barein (*A. calamus*) and clove (*Syzygium aromaticum* Merr & L.M.Perry) in mother's milk. Exactly 10.83 per cent of the respondents reported to wrap the ash of barein (*A. calamus*), bark of fig (*Ficus carica* Linn.) and pine (*Pinus roxburghii* Sarg.) in a cloth and tie around the chest of baby. They didn't have any specific logic behind this practice. Few of the respondents (5.83%) reported to feed decoction of tulsi (*Ocimum sanctum* Linn.) flowers with jaggery.

Alike Himachal Pradesh, people of Pakistan (Hamayun *et al.* 2006) also use barein (*A. calamus*) as an expectorant to relieve cough while in Uttar Pradesh tulsi (*O. sanctum)* leaf decoction with wheat bran, black pepper (*P. nigrum)* and sugar (Tripathi *et al.* 2004.) is given to cure cold and cough.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that local inhabitants have strong faith in indigenous/folk medicine and are well versed with the utilization of plants of their surrounding through trial and error methods. It was observed in the present study that most of the plants like harad (*T. chebula)*, barein (*A. calamus*), chotti elaichi *(E. cardamomum)* etc. have been utilized by the local people for treating more than one disease which indicates multiple use of a single plant. Thus, efforts are urgently required for conservation of such plants. Some of the plants reported for the treatment of various ailments from different parts of the country, have also been reported from the area to have similar uses. Documentation of such information can go a long way in developing new drugs through further research.

Table 1. Indigenous herbal medicines used to cure common children ailments

N=120

Ailment	Indigenous herbal medicines (Ingredients and quantity)	Method of preparation and consumption	F (%)	Logic as per respondents
Diarrhoea	Chotti elaichi (*Elattaria cardamomum* Linn.)-2 Ajwain (*Trachyspermum ammi* Sprague)- ¼ tsp Jaiphal (*Myristica fragrans* Houtt.)- ¼ piece	All the ingredients are boiled and fed to baby	115 (95.8)	Cardamom is carminative ajwain helps in digestion and jaiphal is constipatious in nature
	Bahera (*Terminalia bellirica* Roxb.)	Paste (2-3 tsp) prepared by rubbing bahera in water is given twice a day with cold or hot water depending upon diarrhoeal cause	114 (95.0)	Bahera is constipatious
	Harad (*Terminalia chebula* Retz.) ¼ piece Jaiphal (*M. fragrans*) ¼ piece Barein (*Acorus calamus* Linn.) ¼ piece Almonds (*Prunus amygdalus* Batsch)-half	All the four items are rubbed in water and are served 2-3 teaspoon twice a day	112 (93.3)	All are constipatious in nature
	Salt-1 handful Sugar-1 handful Water 1 glass	Solution of salt, sugar and water is given 7-8 times a day	86 (71.7)	Unknown
Stomachache	Harad (*T. chebula*)	Paste prepared by rubbing harad in water is given to cure stomachache	99 (82.5)	Control gas generated in stomach
	Ajwain (*T. ammi*)- half tsp Water-¼th glass	Ajwain boiled in water is served to the suffering child	87 (72.5)	Checks gas formation
	Ginger (*Zinziber officinale* Rosc.)-25 gm fresh rhizome	Half teaspoon ginger rhizome juice is employed	86 (71.7)	Clears digestive system
Cold and Cough	Barein (*A. calamus*)- 2 cm Mustard oil-½ teaspoon	A paste of ground barein and mustard oil is applied over the chest of the patient	86 (71.7)	Hot in nature thus believed best for curing cold and fever
	Dried ginger (*Z. officinale*), Black pepper (*Piper nigrum* Linn.), mulathi (*Glycyrrhiza glabra* Linn.)	Ground mixture (¼th to ½ teaspoon) prepared by mixing all the ingredients in equal quantities is administered two times a day with honey or milk	60 (50.0)	Preventive and curative remedy for cold
	Chotti elaichi (*E. cardamomum*) -2 to 3 seeds	A spoon of heated mixture of seeds and water is given for quick relief	41 (34.2)	Cardamom is stimulant
	Barein (*A. calamus*)-1 inch Bark of fig (*Ficus carica* Linn.) –1 inch Bark of pine (*Pinus roxburghii* Sarg.)-1inch	Ash of burnt mixture of all these ingredients is wrapped in a cloth and placed on the chest of the baby	13 (10.8)	Hot in nature
	Tulsi (*Ocimum sanctum* Linn.)-5 to 6 flowers Jaggery	Decoction of tulsi flowers and jaggery is given	07 (5.8)	Soothes the throat

* Frequency denotes multiples response

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