

DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF THERAPEUTIC PRACTICES AND TREATMENT MODALITIES AMONG TRADITIONAL PRACTITIONERS IN TIRUNELVELI DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

Background: Traditional medical systems employ diverse therapeutic practices including internal medicines, external applications, and manual treatment modalities. These practices continue to play a vital role in disease management at the community level. **Aim:** To document and analyze the therapeutic practices and treatment modalities followed by traditional practitioners in Tirunelveli district. **Materials and Methods:** A descriptive qualitative study was conducted among ten traditional practitioners using face-to-face interviews with a pre-planned questionnaire. Snowball sampling technique was employed. Data related to internal medicines, external therapies, and treatment modalities were documented and analyzed. **Results:** The majority of practitioners practiced both internal and external therapies. Herbal-based internal medicines such as karkam, kudineer, and choornam were predominantly used. External therapies including pattru, ennai application, and manual procedures such as varmam and thokkanam were commonly practiced for musculoskeletal, dermatological, and neurological disorders. **Conclusion:** Traditional practitioners follow a holistic therapeutic approach combining medicinal and manual therapies. Documentation and scientific validation of these practices are essential for ensuring safety, standardization, and integration into contemporary healthcare.

KEYWORDS: Traditional practitioners, Therapeutic practices, Treatment modalities, Siddha medicine.

INTRODUCTION

Traditional medicine has been an integral component of healthcare systems across civilizations from ancient times. In India, indigenous medical systems such as Siddha have evolved through centuries of observation, experience, and transmission of knowledge from one generation to another. These systems focus not only on the treatment of disease but also on the maintenance of health and prevention of illness.

The Siddha system of medicine adopts a holistic approach, emphasizing the balance of bodily humors through internal medicines, external applications, dietary regulations, and physical therapeutic procedures. Traditional practitioners play a significant role in delivering primary healthcare, particularly in regions where access to modern medical facilities is limited.

Despite their widespread use, many of these therapeutic practices remain inadequately documented.

Tirunelveli district is known for its rich heritage of traditional medical practices and availability of medicinal plants. The present study focuses on documenting the therapeutic practices and treatment modalities followed by traditional practitioners in this region, thereby contributing to the preservation and understanding of indigenous medical knowledge.

AIM

To document and analyze the therapeutic practices and treatment modalities followed by traditional health practitioners in Tirunelveli district.

OBJECTIVES

1. To document the internal medicinal practices followed by traditional practitioners.
2. To record external therapeutic applications used for disease management.
3. To document various treatment modalities such as varmam, thokkanam, nasiyam, and other procedures.
4. To study disease wise therapeutic approaches practiced by traditional healers.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study was designed as a descriptive qualitative study. Ten genuine traditional health practitioners practicing in Tirunelveli district were included in the study. Snowball sampling technique was adopted to identify practitioners actively involved in traditional medical practice.

Data were collected through in depth face to face interviews using a structured and pre planned questionnaire. Information regarding internal medicines, external therapies, treatment modalities, dosage forms, adjuvants, and disease specific therapeutic approaches was documented. Photo documentation was also carried out wherever applicable.

The collected data were compiled, tabulated, and analyzed using MS Excel and MS Word for descriptive interpretation.

RESULTS

The study revealed diverse therapeutic practices followed by traditional practitioners in Tirunelveli district. A majority of practitioners adopted a holistic treatment approach combining internal medicines, external applications, and manual therapeutic procedures.

Internal medicinal practices primarily involved herbal based formulations prepared in forms such as karkam, kudineer, and choornam. These medicines were commonly prescribed for gastrointestinal disorders, metabolic diseases, gynecological conditions, urinary

disorders, and reproductive health issues.

External therapeutic practices included pattru (poultice application) and ennai (oil application), widely used for skin diseases, burns, musculoskeletal disorders, arthritis, and fractures. Manual treatment modalities such as varmam, thokkanam, thattal, thadaval, nasiyam, pugai, and attaividal were also practiced either alone or in combination with medicinal therapy.

Nearly seventy percent of practitioners practiced both internal and external therapies, while a smaller proportion specialized exclusively in either internal or external treatment methods. Most practitioners prepared their medicines themselves, referring to ancestral palm leaf manuscripts and traditional texts.

Table 1: Distribution of Therapeutic Practices.

Type of Therapy	Number of Practitioners	Percentage
Both Internal & External	7	70%
Only Internal	1	10%
Only External	2	20%

Distribution of Therapeutic Practices

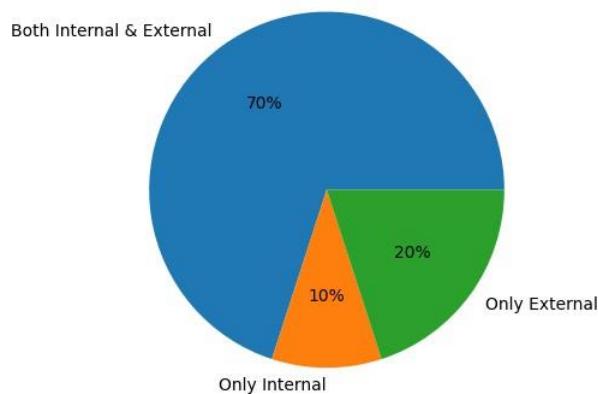


Figure 1: Distribution of Therapeutic Practices (Pie Chart).

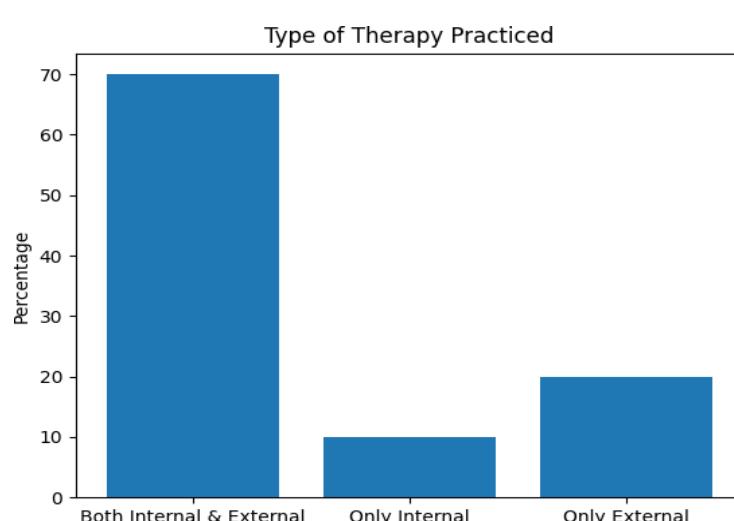


Figure 2: Type of Therapy Practiced (Bar Chart).

Most practitioners (70%) practiced a combination of internal and external therapies, indicating a holistic approach to treatment.

Treatment Modality	Usage Frequency
Internal herbal medicines (Karkam, Kudineer, Choornam)	High
External applications (Pattru, Ennai)	High
Varmam therapy	Moderate
Thokkanam therapy	Moderate
Nasiyam and other procedures	Low

Herbal-based internal medicines and external applications were the most frequently used treatment modalities.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study highlight the comprehensive therapeutic approach followed by traditional practitioners in Tirunelveli district. The integration of internal medicines, external applications, and manual therapies reflects the holistic philosophy of the Siddha system of medicine.

The predominance of herbal based internal medicines underscores the importance of natural resources and traditional pharmacological knowledge. External therapies and manual treatment modalities were particularly significant in managing musculoskeletal, dermatological, and neurological disorders. These findings are consistent with traditional concepts emphasizing physical manipulation and energy balance.

Despite their widespread use, these therapeutic practices lack systematic scientific evaluation. Documentation such as the present study serves as a foundation for future pharmacological, clinical, and safety studies aimed at validating traditional therapeutic practices.

CONCLUSION

The present study documents the therapeutic practices and treatment modalities followed by traditional practitioners in Tirunelveli district. The findings demonstrate a holistic treatment approach involving internal medicines, external therapies, and manual procedures. Systematic documentation and scientific evaluation of these practices are essential for ensuring safety, efficacy, and preservation of traditional medical knowledge. Further research is recommended to standardize and validate these therapeutic practices for broader integration into contemporary healthcare systems.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

The study protocol was approved by the Institutional Review Board of Government Siddha Medical College and Hospital, Palayamkottai. Informed verbal consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection.