

## Traditional Medicine Vs Modern Medicine in Rural Area of Kedah State, Malaysia.

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**Abstract:** In this modern era, there is a preference of the population in choosing between the use of modern medicine and traditional medicine treatment. The terms complementary / alternative /non-conventional medicine are used interchangeably with traditional medicine in some countries. The global prevalence of usage of traditional medicine use is increasing up to 80%, the proportion which varies among countries due to different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. This study was carried out based on the findings from community survey in rural area of Kedah State, Malaysia. This study aimed to assess the knowledge of the participants on modern medicine treatment and traditional medicine treatment and their preferences on type of treatment in different situations. Two focus group discussions were done as qualitative approach and participants involved were mainly house wives of above 18 years of age. The participants generally had a good understanding on modern medicine and traditional medicine. Most of the participants or their family preferred modern medicine. They also aware about the advantages and disadvantages of modern medicine and traditional medicine. However, they preferred to use traditional medicine mainly supported by Islamic knowledge and understanding. The importance of both traditional as well as modern medicine should be emphasized to the public.

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### I. Introduction

In this modern era, there is a preference of the population in choosing between the use of modern medicine and traditional medicine treatment. Traditional medicine has a long history. It has been defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as 'the sum total of the knowledge, skills and practices based on the theories, beliefs and experiences indigenous to different cultures, whether explicable or not, used in the maintenance of health, as well as in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement or treatment of physical and mental illnesses'. (1)

The terms complementary/alternative/non-conventional medicine are used interchangeably with traditional medicine in some countries. According to the Laws of Malaysia, the practice of traditional and complementary medicine (T&CM) is defined as a form of health-related practice designed to prevent, treat, or manage ailments or illnesses or to preserve the mental and physical well-being of an individual.(2)

The global prevalence of usage of traditional medicine use is increasing up to 80%, the proportion which varies among countries due to different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. (3)The study performed by Siti et al also reported that the prevalence of TM usage is within WHO estimation (50 - 80%) particularly in the use of herb-based therapies and is lower than that in the study conducted in Japan and Singapore.(4)

A cross-sectional study on awareness of the efficacy and safety of T&CM compared to the conventional Western treatments conducted in 2014 in the population residing in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia revealed that in spite high prevalence of usage, there was lack of awareness on the side effects and understanding and knowledge of T&CM.(5)

An analysis study of Patient satisfaction on the utilization of traditional and complementary medicine services at public hospitals in Malaysia revealed that a high level of satisfaction among patients who had received T&CM treatment validates the integrative management approach adopted in patient care within the public hospitals in Malaysia. (6)

This study was carried out based on the findings from community survey in rural area of Kedah State, Malaysia. In fact, rural areas have high tendency to seeking traditional practitioners. Traditional medicine is

proven to soothe and treat many common ailments relieve pain. However, this has also become an obstacle or delay in access for the poor people with severe disease to get mainstream medicine and proper treatment.

To get a better understanding on the choice of treatment, the study aimed on the following:

1. To access the knowledge of the participants on modern medicine treatment and traditional medicine treatment.
2. To access the choice of treatment between modern medicine and traditional medicine.
3. Preferences on type of treatment in different situations.
4. To investigate the reasons of choosing the types of treatment.

## **II. Methodology**

Two focus group discussions were done as qualitative approach to achieve our aims and objectives. Purposive sampling method was used, and participants involved were mainly housewives of above 18 years of age. Individuals agreed to participate in the research on their free will. Verbal consent was taken. All the personal information of the participants was kept confidential. Discussions were transcribed and analyzed accordingly. Discussion were focused on the seven themes:

1. What is your choice of treatment when you get sick? Is it traditional medicine or modern medicine?
2. Why do you choose that particular treatment?
3. Are the benefits that you gain better than the other choice of treatment?
4. In your opinion, what are the disadvantages of the other option of treatment?
5. In your past experience, do you wish that there are anything that modern medicine should offer you?
6. What do you think about the cost of medical services/treatment offered to you?
7. So based on question 4, does it influence your decision on the treatment?

## **III. Result**

After transcribing and analyzing the information, results were focused on seven aspects.

### **1) Understanding on modern medicine and traditional medicine**

All respondent can differentiate modern medicine from traditional medicine. According to them, traditional medicine uses natural substances from plants or herbs to treat disease or illness. The knowledge of the content in traditional medicine is past down from one generation to the next. According to 25% of the participants, modern medicine involves a much more sophisticated method of confirming diagnosis as per compared to traditional medicine. All agree that modern medicine practitioners have a better understanding on disease than traditional practitioners.

### **2) Choice of treatment**

All of them having modern medicine as their first choice when compared to traditional medicine. They also got an opinion that modern medicine is playing a big role in their life during sick their sick.

### **3) Reason for choosing and benefits of modern medicine**

25% of the participants told that doctors are sure about the diagnosis or the problem they are facing. Their diagnosis are less vague compared to traditional practitioners. 50% of them thought that modern medicine treats with much more precision and the other 25% told that there is evidence for the diagnosis of the disease. These are the reasons why they choose modern medicine.

### **4) Preferred improvement in modern medicine**

75% of them think that they should reduce the waiting period for patients in the hospitals and clinics especially in emergency department. 25% of them complained that the hospital staffs do not entertain the patient unless the patient looks very ill. Only then immediate actions are taken. So, they concluded that modern medicine should have improve their waiting timing.

### **5) Reason why traditional medicine that failed to full-fill the expectation.**

25% of them told that diagnosis is vague in traditional medicine and the other 75% thinks that traditional medicine have no evidence on the diagnosis made. They compared traditional medicine with modern medicine and told that modern medicine gives a very clear evidence like x-rays on broken bones, but traditional medicine is not.

### **6) Participants opinion on cost of medical services or treatment offered**

All of them told that paying rm1 at hospital is not a burden and that is more than reasonably affordable. They add in that medicine fee is also included in that RM1, and they have no need to spend much on it.

### **7) Preferred medicine for mental issues**

All participants told that for superstitious cases, they only prefer traditional medicine which is supported by Islamic knowledge & understanding. Based on experience of some participants (25%), modern medicine practitioners are not equipped to treat this kind of cases.

## **IV. Discussion**

Traditional medicine is an ancient form of medical system that plays a vital role in maintaining health and combating against different life threatening physical and mental diseases.(1) Traditional medicine is also known as complementary, alternative or ethnic medicine that includes broad range of practices.(7) Traditional and modern systems of medicine have distinctive doctrines with distinctive civilizing backgrounds. The view of health, diseases and causes of diseases are in their own contrasting ways which leads to a difference in their approaches towards health and disease.(8)

In the present study, modern medicine is preferred as the first choice of treatment by the participants when compared to traditional medicine because of the quick and efficient cure. The other reason may be the therapeutic effects of traditional medicine is not clear which lack research-based evidence and need to be further enlightened which can be made possible by conducting basic research.(9)Hence international health and research organizations support research, practice and training on traditional therapies to emerge which will bridge this knowledge gap in traditional medicine across the world. (10,11)

This study explored that 25% of the participants reported that modern medicine has more advanced method of confirming diagnosis when compared with traditional medicine and also doctors are sure about the diagnosis and the problems that they are facing. WHO reports that traditional medicine practitioners have constructed their own unique mode of diagnosis and treatment that are peculiar to their particular civilization. But modern medical diagnosis may be appropriate for screening purposes in certain cases. Hence traditional and modern medicine can be bound together for an excellent outcome.(1) Steven Novella says that a practitioner who shows utmost care with a good bond to the patients makes the patients to adopt healthier lifestyles, which in turn leads to better health. Therefore, it also depends on the practitioners to comfort them with hard-to-diagnose complaints rather mentioning that there's no diagnosis or any effective treatment.(12) Certain research reports indicate that traditional medicine is frequently utilized in the management of chronic diseases.(1)

This study reported that cost of medical services or treatment offered was not a burden and is more than reasonably affordable. Herman in 2012 reported that traditional therapies are cheaper, cost-effective and thus the impoverished people with very low income seek help from traditional practitioners.(13) whereas modern medicines are very expensive; has potentially dangerous adverse side-effects and also the physicians are not easily available. On the other hand, people around the world use out of pocket money on traditional remedies, most of which are not covered by insurance companies unlike modern therapies. This immense financial venture by patients in traditional therapies who are unhappy with modern medicine reinforced public and governments' interest to frame protocols that support research funding's and the use of traditional remedies around the world.(14)

Results of this study reveals that all participants prefer only traditional medicine for the treatment of mental issues as it is supported by Islamism. 25% of the participants told that modern medicine practitioners are not well versed in treating this kind of cases. A study conducted in South Africa reported that alternative practitioners, including traditional healers and religious advisors, play an tremendous role in the delivery of mental health care.(15) A study in Nigeria reported that 26% of patients with mental illness consulted a traditional healer prior to a mental health services.(16)Another similar study conducted in Ghana found that only 6% of patients consulted a traditional healer prior to presenting themselves to mental health care services.(17)

## **V. Conclusion**

The participants from rural area of Kedah State generally had a good understanding on modern medicine and traditional medicine. Most of the participants or their family preferred modern medicine. They also aware about the advantages and disadvantages of modern medicine and traditional medicine. During discussion, participants preferred traditional medicine only for superstitious case. The importance of both traditional as well as modern medicine should be emphasized and brought into light for promoting health, wellbeing and also for preventing disease so that various health intervention strategies can be planned accordingly.

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