

## REVIEW ARTICLE

# Determining Perception and Predilection for Ayurveda versus Allopathy amongst Educated Individuals Studying and Practising Allopathy at Different Levels

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Ayurveda is an alternative medicine system with historical roots in the Indian subcontinent. Ayurvedic preparations are typically based on complex herbal compounds, minerals, and metal substances. Up to 80% people in India use Ayurveda exclusively or combined with conventional Western medicine. The COVID-19 pandemic, also known as the coronavirus pandemic, is a recent global pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). On 5<sup>th</sup> May 2023, WHO declared end of COVID-19 as PHEIC. As of 24<sup>th</sup> May 2023, the pandemic had caused more than 766 million confirmed cases and over 6.9 million deaths globally, making it one of the deadliest in history. It is necessary that the scientific community must draw on pluralistic knowledge systems available globally to strengthen the immune system and reduce dependence on any one system of medicine. It is time for us to strengthen our trust and belief in our age-old tradition and knowledge of Ayurveda. This study was planned to determine use of Ayurvedic medicines and associated beliefs of educated individuals studying and practicing allopathy at different levels.

**Materials and Methods:** Descriptive cross-sectional study amongst students pursuing a Bachelor of Pharmacy and Medical and Paramedical staff using an online questionnaire created using Google Forms. A total 229 respondent data were included in the study. The obtained information was summarised using Microsoft Excel and presented as percentages. The parameters that were studied were gender and age distribution of study subjects; preferred system of medicine for major ailments; reason for preferring allopathic medicine over ayurvedic medicine, rationale for rising credence of Ayurveda in COVID and post-COVID era; common perceptions regarding Ayurvedic medicines.

**Results:** Most of our subjects were 18 to 35 years of age (176, 76.9%). One-third of the study subjects (77, 33.6%) preferred Ayurveda as the science for medical treatment. Ayurvedic treatment was preferred for gastro-intestinal and liver diseases. The rationale sought by study subjects for rising credence of Ayurveda during the COVID and post-COVID era were fewer side effects, ease of availability, and cost-effectiveness.

**Conclusion:** COVID-19 has rekindled the belief and knowledge of people in Ayurveda. Predilection is to use ayurvedic and allopathic medicines together rather than Ayurveda alone and still people resort to allopathy to tide over acute conditions and immediate crisis.

**Keywords:** Ayurveda, Allopathy, COVID-19, Predilection towards Ayurveda.

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## INTRODUCTION

The word "Ayurveda" is composed of āyus, "life", and veda, "knowledge," meaning knowledge of life and longevity.<sup>1</sup> Ayurveda is an alternative medicine system with historical roots in the Indian subcontinent.<sup>2</sup> Therapies include herbal medicines, special diets, meditation, yoga, massage, laxatives, enemas, and medical oils.<sup>3,4</sup> Ayurvedic preparations are typically based on complex herbal compounds, minerals, and metal substances (perhaps under the influence of early Indian alchemy or rasashastra). Ancient Ayurveda texts also taught surgical techniques, including rhinoplasty, kidney stone extractions, sutures, and the extraction of foreign objects.<sup>5</sup>

According to sources, up to 80% of people in India use Ayurveda exclusively or combined with conventional Western medicine.<sup>6,7</sup> About 75 to 80% of the population of Nepal use Ayurveda,<sup>8,9</sup> and it is the most practiced form of medicine in the country.<sup>10</sup> Ayurveda spas are common in Sri Lanka, and some function as home-based income-generating activities. The Sri Lankan tradition of Ayurveda is similar to the Indian tradition. Practitioners

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of Ayurveda in Sri Lanka refer to Sanskrit texts, which are common to both countries.<sup>11</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic, also known as the coronavirus pandemic, is a recent global pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). The novel virus was first identified from an outbreak in the Chinese city of Wuhan in December 2019, and attempts to contain it there failed, allowing it to spread across the globe. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2020 and a pandemic on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2020.<sup>12-14</sup> On 5<sup>th</sup> May 2023, WHO declared end of COVID-19 as PHEIC.<sup>15</sup> As of 24<sup>th</sup> May 2023, the pandemic had caused more than 766 million confirmed cases and over 6.9 million deaths globally, making it one of the deadliest in history.<sup>16</sup>

It is necessary that the scientific community must draw on pluralistic knowledge systems available globally to strengthen the immune system and reduce dependence on any one system of medicine. It is time for us to strengthen our trust and belief in our age-old tradition and knowledge of Ayurveda. With this background, this study was planned to determine use of Ayurvedic medicines and associated beliefs of educated individuals studying and practicing allopathy at different levels – pharmacy students, medical and paramedical staff and their friends and families. Allopathy treats disease but not the root cause of illness. Allopathic medicines involve a lot of chemical-based drugs that have the potential to treat diseases and cause serious side effects in the process. Undoubtedly, in comparison to allopathic treatment, Ayurvedic treatment is more effective in most of chronic diseases.

## Material and Methods

This descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted in the month of May 2022 amongst students pursuing Bachelor of Pharmacy at Shri Ram Murti Smarak College of Engineering and Technology (SRMS CET) and medical and paramedical staff of Shri Ram Murti Smarak Institute of Medical Sciences (SRMS IMS) along with their friends connected on social media.

For data collection, an online questionnaire was created using Google forms and a link to fill the form was circulated with the help of the WhatsApp mobile application. All the forms filled in one week from date of circulation were included in the study. A total of 308 forms were filled. Out of these, forms with respondents aged below 18, incomplete forms and forms with irrelevant data were excluded from the study. After filtration, 229 respondent data were included in the study. Information regarding demographics and use of allopathic *versus* the

ayurvedic system of medicine was collected using the form. The obtained information was summarised using Microsoft Excel and presented as percentages.

## RESULTS

The majority of our subjects were in 18 to 35 years of age (176 and 76.9%), followed by 36 to 50 years of age (38 and 16.6%) and the remaining were above 50 years old (15 and 6.5%). A major proportion of the participants were males (137 and 59.8%) (Table 1).

It was observed that two-thirds of the study subjects (152 and 66.4%) preferred allopathy as the science for medical treatment and the remaining (77 and 33.6%) preferred Ayurveda as the science for medical treatment (Table 2).

The main diseases for which the allopathic medicines were preferred included heart problems, cancers and brain disorders, whereas ayurvedic treatment was preferred for gastro-intestinal and liver diseases (Table 3).

The main reasons for preferring allopathic products cited were prescription by general practitioners (58 and 25.3%), ease of availability (27 and 11.8%), suggestions by near ones (3 and 1.3%) and combinations of all the mentioned reasons (141 and 61.6%).

The rationale sought by study subjects for rising credence of Ayurveda during COVID and in a post-COVID era were fewer side effects, ease of availability, cost-effectiveness and all of these (Table 4).

Nearly two-thirds of the participants (153 and 66.8%) believed that Ayurvedic products are good for enhancing the body's immune response.

More than half of the people surveyed (133 and 58.1%) opined that immunity-boosting ayurvedic products played a role in preventing COVID-19 infection, whereas less than half (96 and 41.96%) believed that ayurvedic medicines were more effective in treating COVID-19 infection (Table 5).

A little over a third of the participants (87 and 38.0%) preferred taking Ayurvedic medicines by doctor's prescription and a similar proportion (91 and 39.7%) indulged in self-medication.

**Table 1:** Gender and age distribution of study subjects

|           |       | Gender     |           |
|-----------|-------|------------|-----------|
|           |       | Male       | Female    |
|           |       | N (%)      | N (%)     |
| Age group | 18–35 | 107 (78.1) | 69 (75)   |
|           | 36–50 | 22 (16.1)  | 16 (17.4) |
|           | > 50  | 8 (5.8)    | 7 (7.6)   |
| Total     |       | 137 (100)  | 92 (100)  |

**Table 2:** Preferred system of medicine for major ailments

| Ailments  | Allopathy | Ayurveda  |
|---|-----------|-----------|
|   | N (%)     | N (%)     |
| Brain disorder  | 32 (14)   | 5 (2.2)   |
| Cancer  | 34 (14.8) | 5 (2.2)   |
| Gastro-intestinal disease   | 16 (7)    | 57 (24.9) |
| Heart disease   | 40 (17.5) | 10 (4.4)  |
| Liver disease   | 14 (6.1)  | 45 (19.7) |
| Obesity   | 4 (1.7)   | 13 (5.7)  |
| Others  | 89 (38.9) | 94 (41.0) |
| Total   | 229 (100) | 229 (100) |
| Others included fevers, pregnancy related problems, cataract, joint pains, fractures, fungal infections, etc. |           |           |
| Overall preference  | 152       | 77        |

**Table 3:** Reason for preferring allopathic medicine over ayurvedic medicine

| Reasons               | N (%)      |
|-----------------------|------------|
| Prescribed by doctor  | 58 (25.3)  |
| Easy availability     | 27 (11.8)  |
| Suggested by nearones | 3 (1.3)    |
| All of these          | 141 (61.6) |
| Total                 | 229 (100)  |

**Table 4:** Rationale for rising credence of Ayurveda in COVID and post-COVID era

| Rationale for rising credence of Ayurveda | N (%)      | Percent (%) |
|---|------------|-------------|
| Less side effect                          | 88 (38.4)  | 38.4        |
| Easy availability                         | 15 (6.6)   | 6.6         |
| Cost effective                            | 6 (2.6)    | 2.6         |
| All of these                              | 120 (52.4) | 52.4        |
| Total                                     | 229 (100)  | 100.0       |

Half of the people surveyed (115 and 50.2%) believed that Ayurveda was to gain popularity and had good scope in future.

Most of the study subjects (186 and 81.2%) believed that Allopathic medicines provide immediate relief in symptoms compared to Ayurvedic medicines.

A little over half of the participants (118 and 51.5%) thought Allopathic and Ayurvedic systems should be integrated for better outcomes.

Less than half of the study subjects (109 and 47.6%) admitted to having used Ayurvedic and Allopathic medicines together at some point in life.

A little less than half of the participants (103 and 45.0%) believed that Ayurvedic medicines did not result in treatment failures, whereas a similar proportion (104 and 45.4%) were not sure if Ayurvedic medicines would result in treatment failures.

## DISCUSSION

This descriptive cross-sectional study entitled "Determining perception and predilection for Ayurveda versus allopathy amongst educated individuals studying and practicing allopathy at different levels" was conducted in the month of May 2022 amongst students pursuing Bachelor of Pharmacy at Shri Ram Murti Smarak College of Engineering and Technology (SRMS CET) and Medical and paramedical staff of Shri Ram Murti Smarak Institute of Medical Sciences (SRMS IMS) along with their friends connected on social media. A total of 308 online forms were filled. After filtration, 229 respondent data were included in the study. Most of our subjects were 18 to 35 years of age (176 and 76.9%), and were males (137, 59.8%). It was observed that two-thirds of the study subjects (152 and 66.4%) preferred Allopathy as the science for medical treatment and major ailments for which the Allopathic medicines were preferred included heart problems, cancers and brain disorders, whereas ayurvedic treatment was preferred for gastro-intestinal and liver diseases. The main reasons for preferring Allopathic products cited were prescriptions by general practitioners, ease of availability, and suggestions by nearby ones.

The rationale sought by study subjects for the rising credence of Ayurveda during the COVID and post-COVID era were fewer side effects, ease of availability, cost-effectiveness and all of these. The majority believed that Ayurvedic products are good for enhancing the immune response of the body, play a role in preventing COVID-19 infection, and are also effective in treating it. Participants preferred taking Ayurvedic medicines by doctor's prescription and also self-medication. More than half of the participants thought Allopathic and Ayurvedic system should be integrated for better outcomes.

These systems viz. Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha, Homeopathy and Naturopathy have rightfully existed side-by-side with Allopathy and are not in 'the domain of obscurity, as stated by Venkat Subramanian. Millions of Indians use herbal drugs regularly as spices, home remedies, health foods as well as over-the-counter (OTC) drugs as self-medication or also as drugs prescribed in the non-allopathic systems.<sup>17</sup>

Information on herbal drugs is most frequently obtained from TV, newspapers, books, and family friends. The most prevalent justification for choosing herbal medications is the steadfast conviction that they don't have any negative effects. These medications are typically purchased *via* grocery stores, kitchens, kitchen gardens, and occasionally public parks and gardens. Pharmacists can play a key role in boosting their use by educating the public about the advantages of these treatments.

**Table 5:** Common perceptions regarding Ayurvedic medicines

|   | Yes |      | No  |      | May be |      |
|---|-----|------|-----|------|--------|------|
|   | n   | %    | n   | %    | n      | %    |
| Ayurvedic products enhance immunity                     | 153 | 66.8 | 16  | 7.0  | 60     | 26.2 |
| Immunity enhancer helpful to prevent from covid-19      | 133 | 58.1 | 23  | 10.0 | 73     | 31.9 |
| Ayurvedic medicine more effective in COVID-19 treatment | 96  | 41.9 | 115 | 50.2 | 18     | 7.9  |
| Ayurvedic medicine taken by doctor's prescription only  | 87  | 38.0 | 91  | 39.7 | 51     | 22.3 |
| Ayurvedic medicines have good scope in future           | 115 | 50.2 | 42  | 18.3 | 72     | 31.4 |
| Use allopathic skin care products more than ayurvedic   | 96  | 41.9 | 86  | 37.6 | 47     | 20.5 |
| Allopathic medicine gives immediate relief              | 186 | 81.2 | 9   | 3.9  | 34     | 14.8 |
| Allopathic and ayurvedic medicine should be integrated  | 118 | 51.5 | 41  | 17.9 | 70     | 30.6 |
| Ever used ayurvedic and allopathic medicine together    | 109 | 47.6 | 79  | 34.5 | 41     | 17.9 |
| Ayurvedic medicine results in treatment failure         | 22  | 9.6  | 103 | 45.0 | 104    | 45.4 |

Government regulations should strictly regulate the standards and quality of these drugs as well as encourage their use. These can be made duty-free so that the general public can readily purchase them. A circumstance like this will make it possible to gain from every system without having to deal with the annoying side effects of medications.<sup>18</sup>

India has a very long, safe and continuous usage of many herbal drugs in the officially recognized alternative systems of health viz. Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha, Homeopathy and Naturopathy. More than 500,000 non-allopathic practitioners are trained in the medical colleges (> 400) of their respective systems of health and are registered with the official councils that monitor professionalism. Hence, these systems are not folklore or traditional herbal practices. These systems' basic axioms lead to a logical and systematic structure of pathogenesis and diagnosis, which also serves as a determinant for therapy.<sup>19</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Predilection is to use Ayurvedic and Allopathic medicines together rather than Ayurveda alone and still, people resort to Allopathy to tide over acute conditions and immediate crisis. COVID-19 has rekindled the belief and knowledge of people in Ayurveda. It was observed that the majority of study subjects preferred allopathy and diseases for which the Allopathic inclination was seen included heart problems, cancers and brain disorders, whereas ayurvedic treatment was preferred for gastro-intestinal and liver diseases.

The rationale sought by study subjects for the rising credence of Ayurveda during COVID and in the post-COVID era was less side effects, ease of availability and cost-effectiveness. Preponderance was observed for

Ayurvedic products for enhancing immune response. The common belief is to integrate Allopathic and Ayurvedic systems for better outcomes.

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