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Local health wisdom of rural women of Jaisalmer district, Rajasthan

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The health traditions in which the practices are local and community specific, are known as 'Local Health Traditions (LHTs). For fracture, the traditional practices included giving of Mushroom flour and butter; Maida lakdi and milk; tying Bamboo bark. Whereas, for Abdominal pain, traditional treatment comprised of use of Phitkari; mixture of Harad and Salt; use of Ajwain, Salt and water; chewing of Nosadar. Snake bite was treated by orally giving Deshi ghee in extreme amount and Tumba and Onion. Apart, the traditional management for Minor cuts and Burns were application of Coconut oil; Turmeric and Ghee; Urine. While, for Muscular pain, massaging the affected portion with Mustard oil/ Turpentine oil/ Castor oil; Tying of Aak leaves; Arandi leaves; Balu reth was considered. For Headache, the indigenous treatments used were taking Ukaali made of Black pepper, Javitri, Sonth and Meshri; application of mixture of Heena and Multani mitti; Sonth and Coriander paste was applied. For Nausea and Vomiting, Elaychi and Mishri; Pudina Tikki; Grounded seeds of Kamal doda with water; Phanki of Jeera and salt; Cloves rubbed with water etc were used to treat the ailment. As far as the handling of Eye pain was considered, Popped Phitkari with Elaychi; use of Cotton swab dipped in Sheep/goat milk Honey was accepted. For Rheumatism, massaging affected part with Mustard or Turpentine oil and tying of Castor or Aak leaves was good. Whereas, Sunstroke was treated by, taking Mint and Onion juice; Butter milk; Saunf in Tea or Lemon water; excess intake of Onion; Massage on palm and feet of Imalee pulp and dried Ber pulp

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Introduction

The traditional life styles in India, are well acquainted with the secrets of herbal medicines. These pearls of wisdom have remained in the realm of societies, been accepted, practiced, passed on from generation to generation and are part and parcel of people who follow them as their inherited gift.

The health traditions in which the practices are local and community specific, are known as

'Local Health Traditions (LHTs). The origin of traditional knowledge is deep-rooted in local people's age old experimentation. It is local knowledge, unique to a given society, the importance of which cannot be neglected. People have acquired such knowledge through keen observation, trial and error, evaluation etc. which seems that people were self-reliant to take care of their own health, which is basic for citizen to lead a healthier life. One of the significant features of

Local Health practices is that they use locally available and readily accessible resources. These traditions are alive as household practices.

Health has been recognized as fundamental to the well-being of individuals. Good health is a means to an end not the goal itself. Therefore it aims to promote the happiest and best life possible. Therefore health maintenance is vital for a healthy society either through Local Health Traditions or by Medicinal science.

Traditional knowledge has its vast spectrum of practices, which embodies various aspects of life. Traditional practices are manifold, dispersed and based on the experiences of people, which should not be discarded just because they are being practiced from old age. But in today's era of modernization there is a veering drag towards a monoculture. Modern medicines are super dominating the traditional practices, despite of its limitation of spiraling cost coupled with the side effects of the chemical drugs. Due to this mushroom growth of modern medicinal field across the world the Local Health Traditions which have evolved over centuries and which have stood the test of time, are facing threat of erosion. Unless we make urgent and quicker efforts to track this valuable knowledge it will get lost soon and not to be regained in future at any cost. The loss of the traditions will be a monumental loss to the country and particularly to the rural communities. It will also be a civilization loss to the world because with the erosion of Local Health Tradition, one is losing time-tested, medical knowledge. It is necessary to act urgently in order to save our "Local Health Practices" which form an extremely important facet of Indian Medical Heritage. Therefore a critical analysis of existing traditional wisdom and integrating the same with scientific wisdom for its sustainability is the demand of era, so that this can further be tested and scientifically proved for their worthiness.

So, an effort is made to investigate the prosperity of Local Health Traditions in district Jaisalmer so that appropriate practices in various facet of health, among rural women could be recognized and encouraged for scientific validation.

Methodology

The study was conducted in rural area of two panchayat samities of Jaisalmer district, Jaisalmer and Sam. In order to get a representative sample of the selected panachayat samities, it was divided into 4 zones, North, South, East and West. One village from each zone was selected randomly. To select the sample, rural women above 40 years of age were taken, as older women can be assumed to have more knowledge and experience as compared to younger ones. Out of the eight selected villages, 20 rural women from each village were selected purposively, making a total sample of 160 rural women. For this, the interview schedule developed was taken with slight modifications ^[1]. It was prepared on the basis of identical traditional practices from the respondents with their logic for following the practices. These practices were then analyzed by the experts as scientific, unscientific, not known and need further research. Efforts were also made to get the properties of identified indigenous practices analyzed by 20 experts. Interview method was used to collect data from the respondents. Along with this Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) with focus group discussion technique was also used to get the desired information from respondents by gathering a group of 6-10 people. Probing was done to get clear and complete information. To collect information about scientific validation, questionnaire was given to all the experts (20) and their responses were collected. On the basis responses obtained from the respondents, the variable were classified into the different categories. The obtained data was classified, tabulated and quantified by calculating frequency and percentages.

Results and Discussion

Findings of the study shows that rural families were using traditional practices for curing various ailments. An effort thus was made to study the scientific validity of these practices so that, the scientific practices can be further promoted to achieve health for all.

Fracture

The findings portrays that no preventive measure was taken by respondents for fracture.

On the other hand, on its occurrence the practice of giving Mushroom flour and butter was considered as scientific by 40% experts. The logic given by the respondent was that it helped in joining the bone immediately. The traditional practice of using Maida lakdi and milk by the respondents was considered as scientific by all the experts (100%). Along with this the practice of tying Bamboo bark with the logic that bamboo gives support to bones and avoid pain was also considered scientific by all (100%) the experts. As far as the practice of Massage with sheep milk was concerned, with the logic of relief from pain was considered as scientific by 35% experts only while 25% experts considered it uncertain and remaining 40% considered it as unscientific. The practice of applying Asalia seed on the affected part with the logic of soaking the pain by the respondents was considered as unscientific by 65% experts and the practice of application of Haldi, Deshi ghee and Gur was considered as scientific by 55% of the experts.

Abdominal Pain

The results of the study for the problem of abdominal pain practices reveals that all the preventive measures adopted by the respondents were scientific (100%) along with their logics like use of Phitkari to clean water which in turn helps to keep the digestion proper. The treatments by the respondents like mixture of Harad and Salt with the logic helps in easy digestion of food was considered as scientific by all the experts (100%). The use of Ajwain, Salt and water with the logic helping in digestion of food and avoids gas formation was also opined as scientific by all (100%) the experts but only 30% of the experts considered the practice of using Paneer (traditional herb) with water as scientific. The logic of immediate relief in pain by using Tumba, Ajwain and Salt was considered by 80% experts as scientific while the remaining were uncertain regarding this practice. To avoid gas formation by chewing of Nosadar was also considered as scientific by all (100%) the experts.

Snake bite

The study revealed that no preventive measures were taken by the respondents (100%) to avoid snake bite but the matter was attended soon after the occurrence of problem.

Most of the practices followed by respondents for treating it were either judged as unscientific or uncertain by the experts. However, there were two practices i.e. orally giving Deshi ghee in extreme amount and Tumba and Onion in excess amount were judged as scientific by 75-80% experts. The experts too felt that giving of these things in excessive amount helps in vomiting and avoids spreading poison in the body. The practices of applying Cotyledon of Peelu, Pesticide, Nail polish, Chuna, Ash of Mohr phank, Goats urine, Buffalo dung, paste of Tamarind cotyledon and orally giving of Nosadar and Amal ki tikki were reported as unscientific (60-100%). Apart from these one practice i.e. tying of Aak leaves on affected part was ranked as uncertain by 75% experts.

Minor cuts and Burns

The judges had mixed opinion about the ways of managing cuts and burns. As precautionary measure, the safety observed by respondents in performing different activities were judged as scientific. Scientists (100%) too said that safety is must while doing any work.

The traditional treatments which were judged as scientific included Applying of Mehandi (60%), Coconut oil (100%), Turmeric and Ghee (100%) and Curd / Buttermilk (70%) and Urine (100%) on affected part. The logic of the respondents was that these things give the effect of coolness and helps in fast healing which was similar to the opinion of experts. the application of Bidi wrapper was considered as unscientific by 90% of the judges. Experts opined that bidi has hazardous chemicals, hence should not be applied on the wounds. For the practice of application of Ink on the affected part mixed opinion of scientific (35%) and uncertainty (65%) were obtained. Application of Bhui powder on skin for formation of skin during minor burns was considered unscientific practice by 35% of the

experts and remaining 65% were uncertain about the treatment.

Muscular Pain

It was encouraging to note that the respondents followed a number of their own treatment to overcome the problem of muscular pain and majority of these were ranked as scientific by the experts (70-100%). Some of these included doing physical work (100%), massaging the affected portion with Mustard oil/ Turpentine oil / Castor oil (100%). Tying of Aak leaves on muscles was considered 100% scientific along with this Arandi leaves were equally effective in sucking the muscular pain which was also considered as 100% scientific by all the experts. The logic of Balu reth provides warmth and relieved pain was also considered scientific by all (100%) the specialists. Apart, the practice of massaging the affected portion with Milk of Aak leaves and Haldi was found scientific by only 70% experts while 30% denied it. All the experts (100%) were uncertain to the practice of application of decoction of Cham grass.

Headache

As a preventive measure respondents took adequate sleep and covered the head when go out in sun to get rid of headache. These were considered as scientific by all the experts (100%). The indigenous treatments viz; taking Ukaali made of Black pepper, Javitri, Sonth and Meshri to get relief from pain was considered as scientific by all the experts (100%), the application of Mixture of Heena and Multani mitti to attain coolness and relief was judged as scientific by 70% experts while all (100%) experts considered Sonth and Coriander paste application scientific.

Measles

The findings for this ailment prevention was totally unscientific as the respondents took the blessings of Devi devata for its prevention. Treatment taken by the respondents like use of Decoction of Bajra root; Kesar; Fumes of goat dung; Peelu fruits were considered scientific by 70%, 65%, 80%, 35% experts simultaneously.

Some of the experts (30-40%) also regarded the practice of not giving bath for 8 days, Giving kesar, Ground Date Palm and Decoction of Bajra root as uncertain and recommended for further research. Mohr phank kept in house was considered unscientific by all (100%) experts.

Nausea and Vomiting

For this ailment, as a preventive measure, respondents avoided over eating to get rid of this problem which had been reported as scientific by all the experts (100%).

Regarding traditional treatments, all the practices were ranked as scientific by all experts (100%) viz; Elaychi and Mishri as it prevent the feeling of nausea; Pudina Tikki (provided relief in nausea); Grounded seeds of Kamal doda with water; Phanki of Jeera and salt leaped curing nausea and prevented vomiting. Cloves rubbed with water was also judged as scientific by all the experts (100%).

Only one practice of drinking boiled and cooked water of Wasp house was judged as unscientific by all (100%) the experts.

Eye Disease (Eye Pain)

The preventive measures adopted by respondents to get relief from eye disorders i.e. washing of eyes with water twice or thrice a day was regarded as scientific by all the experts (100%) while applying Kajal in eyes to prevent eye pain was considered as unscientific by 60% experts.

Various traditional treatments adopted by the respondents viz: Applying Phitkari rubbed in cow's milk was judged as scientific by all the experts (100%). While the application of Babool leaf juice was considered unscientific by 40% experts.

It was exciting to know that treatment Popped Phitkari with Elaychi was considered as scientific by all the experts (100%). The traditional treatment of use of Cotton swab dipped in Sheep/goat milk to give coolness to eyes and relieve pain was judged as unscientific by 70% experts. To prevent infection the use of Honey was accepted to be as 100% scientific by all the experts.

Rheumatism

The study revealed that no preventive measures were taken by the respondents for rheumatism.

For treatment, various practices were used by the respondents, they were considered as scientific by 100% experts like Massaging affected part with Mustard or Turpentine oil and tying of Castor or Aak leaves. The practice of massaging with oil which is extracted from the Oil glands of Sanda was regarded as unscientific by experts (60%).

The practices which were ranked as uncertain were using Decoction of herbs like Gathia grass and Sewan grass and recommended for further research.

Sunstroke

It was interesting to note that the preventive measures followed by respondents to protect themselves from sunstroke were ranked as scientific by all the experts (100%) viz: eating onion, drinking at least 8-10 glasses of water, tying cloth on head before moving out in sun and taking buttermilk/curd. The logics given were that these measures will maintain water balance and avoids sunstroke. Only a single practice of keeping onion in pocket was considered as unscientific by 60% experts.

As far as the findings of treatment was concerned it was found that all the experts (100%) judged the treatments scientific viz: Taking Mint and Onion juice; Butter milk; Saunf in Tea or Lemon water; excess intake of Onion; Massage on palm and feet of Imalee pulp and dried Ber pulp. Only the intake of Gur and Imalee was considered scientific by 70% experts.

Conclusion

It could be thus inferred that there are many traditional rural practices related to ailment of various diseases which have been proved scientifically valid and are recommended to be useful by experts. There are certain practices which needs more research. Thus, there is a need to scientifically validate these practices for their wider use.

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