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Self-therapy practices among university students in Palestine: Focus on herbal remedies

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Summary

Background: Herbal self-therapy is a common practice among Palestinians. However, no published data are available on herbal self-therapy in the Middle East in general, and in Palestine in particular.

Objective: This study was conducted to (1) determine the extent of herbal self-therapy among university students, (2) investigate the different types of herbal remedies used and (3) investigate the correlates and reasons associated with such practices.

Methodology: This cross-sectional, descriptive study was carried out using a structured questionnaire that contained five sections: (1) demographics; (2) medication knowledge and self-care orientation; (3) types of herbal remedies used; (4) clinical conditions treated; and finally, (5) the reasons reported by students for herbal self-therapy practice. Pearson χ^2 , multiple logistic regression and one-way ANOVA were performed using SPSS 13 program.

Results: 33.9% of the respondents reported using herbal remedies in self-therapy. Female gender, students at medical colleges and those with high self-care orientation were significant predictive model for herbal use. Sage (*Salvia fruticosa* L.), chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile* L.), anise (*Pimpinella anisum* L.), and thyme (*Thymus vulgaris* L.) were the most commonly utilized herbal remedies. The types of herbal remedies selected were significantly influenced by gender, but not by the level of medication knowledge or self-care orientation. Herbal remedies were used primarily for the treatment of headache, flu, menstrual pain and sore throat. The main motivating factor for using herbal remedies reported for using herbal remedies was simplicity of symptoms.

Conclusions: Herbal self-therapy was a common practice among university students. Health care providers need to be aware of the students' self-therapy practices and need to have sufficient knowledge regarding herbs not simply because of the widespread use, but also because of significant reported side effects. Academics need to consider offering courses about herbal remedies to students in both the medical and non-medical faculties to broaden their treatment capabilities during this time of increased unregulated medical interventions such as herbal therapy.

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