

Disclosure of Traditional and Complementary Medicine Use and its Associated Factors to Medical Doctors Among the Longhouse Community in Julau, Sarawak

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ABSTRACT

Traditional and complementary medicine (TCM) practice is increasing worldwide and Malaysia is no exception. Despite the wide use of TCM by the population, there seems to be an issue of not disclosing TCM use to their medical doctor. The aim was to explore the related factors that influence the disclosure of TCM use to medical doctor among respondents in selected longhouses in Sarawak. A cross-sectional study was conducted on 90 respondents from selected Iban longhouses in Julau, Sarikei District. Data was collected via face-to-face interviews based on a questionnaire comprising sociodemographic characteristics, TCM use and disclosure, health profile, healthcare utilization and attitude towards TCM. To determine the factors related to disclosure of TCM use, independent t-test and Chi-square (χ^2) test was used to examine the relationship between various variables and disclosure of TCM use. The mean age of studied participants was 45.20 (± 14.92) years and 80% were married. The prevalence of usage of TCM treatment was 70% and the rate of disclosure of TCM use among respondents was 27%. Univariate analyses yielded three main factors that were significantly associated with the disclosure of TCM use among respondents, which were education level, presence of chronic diseases and type of chronic diseases. The rate of disclosure of TCM use in this study was very low, consistent with other local and foreign studies. Thus, other relevant factors that are not studied need to be further explored for better understanding in order to have better integration between TCM and current health system.

Keywords: TCM use, disclosure, longhouse community, Sarawak, attitudes

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INTRODUCTION

Traditional and Complementary Medicine (TCM) is defined as a group of diverse medical and health care systems, practices, and products that are not generally considered part of conventional medicine. It is a form of health-related practice across all ethnic groups, that includes homeopathy and complementary therapies but excludes registered medical practices (TCM Division, Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2011). It had gained popularity in both developed and developing countries as it is more accessible, affordable and acceptable to the local population (Zhang, 2015). Studies made in Malaysia reported that 69.4% of the population had used TCM in their lifetime, and about 55.6% of people used TCM within the last twelve months (Siti Zuraidah Mahmud et al., 2009).

Regardless of the wide usage of TCM by the population, there seems to be an issue of not disclosing TCM use to medical doctors by patients. Disclosure of TCM refers to an individual's willingness to share their usage of TCM openly. According to a study conducted by Johnny, Cheah & Razitasham Safii (2017), the percentage of disclosure of TCM use to medical doctors among primary care clinic attendees in Kuching Division, Sarawak was low at 9.6%. Besides, a meta-analysis done by Foley et al. (2019) revealed that there was only a 33% disclosure rate for biological-based complementary medicine.

Not disclosing TCM use to a medical doctor while seeking for allopathic treatment could pose harm to the health status of TCM users. While TCM itself could be beneficial and have fewer side effects, usage of both TCM and chemical drugs at the same time could bring about serious adverse effects or reduce the effect of chemical drugs (WHO, 2002). For example, a combination of warfarin and ginseng that has antiplatelet activity can cause over