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ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Fear of COVID-19 and the Media Influence on Herbal Medication Use in Uganda: A Cross-Sectional Study

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Phillip Musoke[1]
Brandy Nantaayi[1]
Rodney Kato Ndawula[1]
Babrah Wannyana[2]
Nelson Ssewante[1]
Godfrey Wekha[1]
Ronald Olum[1]
Lourita Nakyagaba[1]
Dianah Rhoda Nassozi[3]
Germinah Nabukeera[4]
Andrew Marvin Kanyike[5]
Daniel Ojilong[5]
Gabriel Madut Akech[5]
Jonathan Kajjimu[6]
Joshua Kiwumulo[7]
Drake Agira[7]
Jerom Okot[7]
Felix Bongomin[1,8]

[1]School of Medicine, College of Health Sciences, Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda; [2]School of Clinical Medicine and Dentistry, Kampala International University Western Campus, Bushenyi, Uganda; [3]School of Health Sciences, College of Health Sciences, Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda; [4]School of Medicine, Kabale University, Kabale, Uganda; [5]Faculty of Health Sciences, Busitema University, Mbale, Uganda; [6]Faculty of Medicine, Mbarara University of Science and Technology, Mbarara, Uganda; [7]Faculty of Medicine, Gulu University, Gulu, Uganda; [8]Department of Medical Microbiology and Immunology, Faculty of Medicine, Gulu University, Gulu, Uganda

Correspondence: Felix Bongomin
Department of Medical Microbiology and Immunology, Faculty of Medicine, Gulu University, P. O. Box, 166, Gulu, Uganda
Email drbongomin@gmail.com

Background: The coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has created fear in people around the world. This has led to the widespread use of various herbal remedies in its prevention and treatment regardless of the paucity of scientific evidence about their safety and efficacy. This study assessed the fear of COVID-19 and the influence of media on the use of herbal medicine to prevent or treat COVID-19 in Uganda.

Methods: In the first 2 weeks of July 2021, a descriptive online cross-sectional study was carried out anonymously in the general population in Uganda. A validated questionnaire was used to collect data on herbal medicine use and the influence of media. Fear of COVID-19 was rated using the Fear of COVID-19 Scale (FCV-19S).

Results: We recruited 488 participants, 273 (55.9%) were female, with a median age of 25 (range: 18–73) years. Sixty-seven (57.8%) participants had a confirmed COVID-19 diagnosis. The mean FCV-19S score was 21.7 SD 5.9 with 53.3% reporting high levels of COVID-19 fear. About 57.4% of participants reported using herbal remedies either to prevent or treat COVID-19-like symptoms. Media was the main source of information, with more than 80% of the participants reporting seeing or accessing information about herbal medication use. Women (adjusted odds ratio (aOR): 1.74, 95% CI: 1.2–2.5, p=0.003) and people with a previously confirmed COVID-19 diagnosis (aOR: 3.1, 95% CI: 1.35–7.14, p=0.008) had a statistically significantly higher FCV-19S score. Being unemployed (aOR: 1.0, 95% CI: 1.1–2.3, p=0.008) and a female (aOR: 1.0, 95% CI: 1.1–2.3, p=0.012) were statistically significantly associated with herbal medicine use. Participants who used herbal remedies had a higher median FCV-19S score compared to non-users (23 versus 21, p<0.001).

Conclusion: The use of herbal medicines to treat or prevent COVID-19 is a widespread practice among the general population in Uganda amidst the high levels of fear of COVID-19.

Keywords: COVID-19, fear, media, herbal medicine, health awareness, Uganda

Introduction

The coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has affected over 190 million people with over 4.2 million deaths worldwide at the time of writing.[1] Uganda has so far suffered two waves of COVID-19 with the most recent associated with a highly infectious strain leading to over 93,000 cases and 2690 deaths as of 1st August 2021.[1]

Globally, about 80% of the population is estimated to rely on herbal medicines for disease prevention and as alternative/complementary medicine.[2] Some of these have been approved and/or recommended for use by health professionals in the

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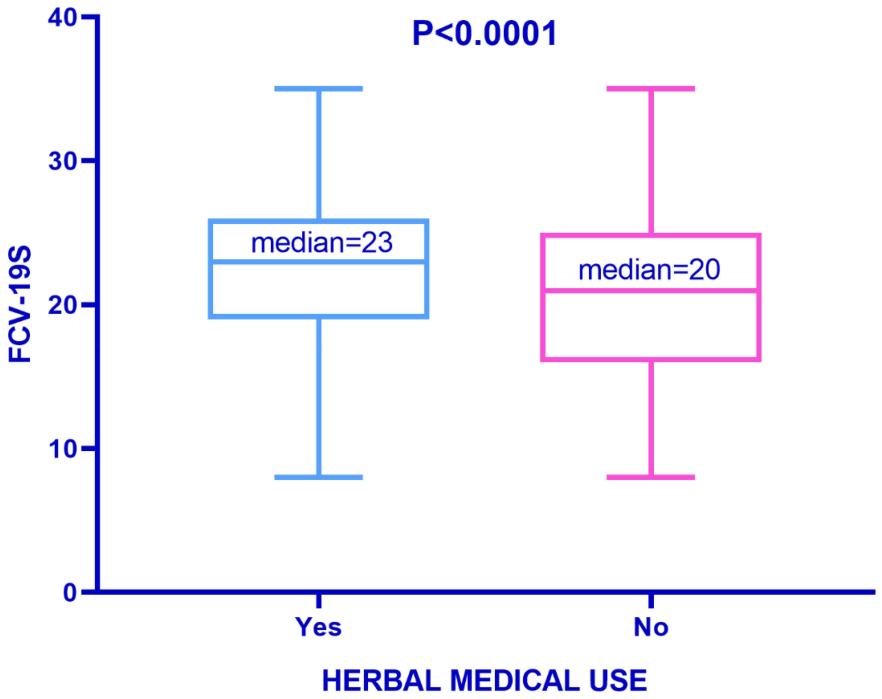

Figure 2 Fear of COVID-19 score stratified by herbal medicine use.

Data Sharing Statement

The data used to support the results of the research are available from the corresponding author upon request.

Author Contributions

All authors made substantial contributions to conception and design, acquisition of data, or analysis and interpretation of data, took part in drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content, agreed to submit to the current journal, gave final approval to the version to be published, and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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Disclosure

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest in this work.

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