



Knowledge, Attitude, and Practices (KAP) in Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) Among Selected Asian Countries: A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT: This literature review examines the landscape of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) in selected Asian countries, focusing on knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP) among healthcare professionals and the general population. Drawing insights from studies conducted in Bangladesh, Iran, Malaysia, Thailand, Nepal, Oman, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the Philippines, the review highlights the increasing interest in CAM as a holistic approach to health and well-being. While positive attitudes towards CAM are prevalent, challenges such as knowledge gaps, concerns about evidence, and limited integration into clinical care persist. The review underscores the importance of education, research, and policy interventions to promote the safe and effective use of CAM, enhance healthcare quality, and meet the diverse healthcare needs of populations in the region. Recommendations include investing in educational programs, supporting research initiatives, and raising public awareness to advance healthcare systems' capacity in integrating CAM practices effectively.

KEYWORDS: Asia, knowledge, Attitudes, Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM), Practices

INTRODUCTION

The utilization of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) has experienced a significant surge in popularity across selected Asian countries, where traditional healing practices have historically been deeply entrenched within cultural and religious frameworks. Despite the widespread use of CAM, there remains a notable deficiency in comprehensive understanding regarding the Knowledge, Attitude, and Practices (KAP) surrounding CAM among both the populace and healthcare professionals in these regions. This deficiency poses a substantial challenge in effectively integrating CAM into mainstream healthcare systems, as well as in ensuring the safety and informed decision-making of individuals seeking CAM therapies.

Studies conducted in Bangladesh (Ahammed et al., 2018; Reza et al., 2021), Iran (Jadidi et al., 2023), Malaysia (Jamshed et al., 2016), Thailand (Wahab et al., 2016), Nepal (Aryal & Adhikari, 2021), Oman (Haridass et al., 2018), and the Philippines (Abano & Maraviles, 2019) shed light on this multifaceted landscape of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM). However, there is a gap on the overall understanding of the complementary and alternative medicine in the Asian Healthcare Systems. Despite numerous individual studies shedding light regarding the Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) in countries such as Bangladesh, Iran, Malaysia, Thailand, Nepal, Oman, and the Philippines, a comprehensive synthesis to understand the overall state of CAM within the Asian healthcare systems is lacking.

Within this context, there is a need to address the existing gap by thoroughly examining the body of research on KAP in CAM among selected Asian countries. While individual studies may offer insights into specific aspects of CAM utilization, there is a notable absence of a holistic understanding that encompasses knowledge, attitudes, and practices across diverse populations and cultural contexts. By consolidating and analyzing the existing body of research, this review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of KAP in CAM among selected Asian countries.

The primary objectives of this literature review are to identify key themes and trends related to KAP in CAM and assess the level of knowledge, attitudes, and practices among different demographic groups within selected Asian countries. This study will contribute to valuable insights that can inform future research directions, healthcare policies, and clinical practice guidelines aimed at promoting safe and effective CAM utilization, fostering informed decision-making among the public, and facilitating the integration of CAM into broader healthcare systems in Asian countries.



METHOD

In this study, the researcher utilized a literature review technique. The researcher examined a wide range of literature sources including books, articles, conference proceedings, government policy documents, and other relevant materials to gather information related to the research topic. The primary aim of the study was to gain insights that could help address existing challenges. Drawing from Creswell's (2012) perspective, the literature review involved compiling both historical and contemporary knowledge from articles, books, and various documents. The process included organizing the literature based on thematic elements and presenting it in accordance with the specific needs of the research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Complementary and Alternative Medicine

In recent decades, the utilization of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) has seen a significant increase across contemporary nations, particularly within the healthcare sector (Alsharif et al., 2021). Alternative medicine, as defined, encompasses medical approaches divergent from conventional biomedicine, extending beyond mainstream therapeutic practices (Ezechukwu et al., 2023). This broad category, termed CAM, encompasses a diverse range of interventions, including natural remedies, dietary supplements, mind-body practices like meditation and yoga, as well as somatic interventions such as acupuncture and chiropractic care (Patel et al., 2024).

The surge in the adoption of alternative medicine reflects a growing interest in holistic approaches to health and well-being, resonating with individual philosophies on existence rather than mere dissatisfaction with conventional medical methods (Barikani et al., 2015). Notably, modalities like homeopathy, energy healing, and herbal remedies have witnessed a notable upswing in popularity (Gao et al., 2019).

In response to this trend, there has emerged an informational connection facilitating knowledge exchange among medical professionals, traditional healers, pharmacists, and patients regarding the therapeutic efficacy, safety protocols, and potential risks associated with alternative medicine (Mortada Eman et al., 2024). Furthermore, there is a growing imperative to advance research efforts in alternative medicine, addressing publication bias, safeguarding intellectual property rights, and engaging with policymakers to ensure the accessibility of cost-effective treatments (Rao et al., 2021).

2. Knowledge on Complementary and Alternative Medicine

Studies across various Asian countries indicate varying levels of knowledge regarding complementary and alternative medicine among healthcare professionals. For instance, a study conducted in the United Arab Emirates found that community pharmacists exhibited good knowledge of complementary and alternative medicine functions, with some gaps identified in understanding side effects and drug interactions (Naja et al., 2024). Conversely, a survey among healthcare professionals in Pakistan revealed poor knowledge scores regarding CAM, despite overall positive attitudes toward its potential benefits [Tahir et al., 2023]. Similarly, a study in Saudi Arabia highlighted the need for improved knowledge and training on CAM among healthcare providers (Al-Batanony et al., 2021).

In Bangladesh, Ahammed et al. (2018) conducted a study among selected adult populations, revealing that 50% of respondents had average knowledge, while 25% had good knowledge of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). Similarly, in Iran, Jadidi et al. (2023) found that medical science students had moderate knowledge regarding CAM, with herbal therapy being the most common CAM modality. In Malaysia, a study by Jamshed et al. (2016) showed that pharmacy students exhibited inadequate knowledge about CAM, particularly regarding traditional Chinese medicines. Conversely, Wahab et al. (2016) found that pharmacy students generally expressed favorable attitudes towards CAM and acknowledged its potential benefits in Thailand.

3. Attitude toward Complementary and Alternative Medicine

Attitudes toward complementary and alternative medicine among healthcare professionals in Asia tend to be generally positive, with some variations. Research in the United Arab Emirates showed that community pharmacists exhibited positive attitudes toward complementary and alternative medicine, with most participants agreeing on its potential benefits (Naja et al., 2024). Similarly, a study in Pakistan revealed a favorable perception of CAM among healthcare professionals, with many considering it a beneficial adjunct to conventional medicine (Tahir et al., 2023). However, despite these positive attitudes, healthcare



providers in Saudi Arabia expressed concerns about the lack of evidence supporting CAM and highlighted the need for further research (Al-Batanony et al., 2023).

In Bangladesh, Ahammed et al. (2018) reported a positive attitude towards CAM among respondents, with the majority agreeing that CAM is beneficial and easy to access. Similarly, Aryal & Adhikari (2021) found a favorable attitude towards CAM among middle-aged adults in Nepal, with most participants holding a positive perception of CAM. In Iran, Jadidi et al. (2023) found that despite moderate knowledge, students displayed a positive attitude towards CAM, with a significant proportion willing to use CAM methods. Conversely, Haridass et al. (2018) observed a positive attitude towards CAM among pharmacy and nursing students in Oman, highlighting the importance of CAM knowledge in their profession.

4. Practices in Complementary and Alternative Medicine

Practices related to complementary and alternative medicine among healthcare professionals in Asia vary widely, reflecting diverse cultural contexts and healthcare systems. In the United Arab Emirates, community pharmacists reported engaging in counseling patients on complementary and alternative medicine use, although gaps were identified in providing information on toxic effects (Naja et al., 2024). Conversely, studies in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia indicated relatively low levels of CAM practice among healthcare professionals, with limited integration into clinical care (Tahir et al., 2023; Al-Batanony et al., 2023). These findings underscore the need for targeted interventions to promote the safe and effective use of alternative medicine across Asia.

In Bangladesh, Ahammed et al. (2018) found that 97% of respondents practiced CAM for curing and preventing various diseases, with traditional healing methods being commonly utilized. Moreover, Reza et al. (2021) reported that students in the southeastern region showed a positive perception of CAM use, with herbal medicine and nutritional supplements being the most commonly known and used modalities. In Iran, Jadidi et al. (2023) found that herbal therapy was the most common CAM practiced among medical science students, particularly for gastrointestinal problems. Similarly, Abano (2019) observed widespread usage of CAM, such as leaf extracts and traditional massage, among residents in the Philippines, primarily influenced by friends or family members. These studies collectively demonstrate varying levels of knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding CAM among selected countries in Asia, highlighting the need for further research and education in this area.

SYNTHESIS OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) across selected Asian countries reveals a multifaceted landscape shaped by diverse factors such as knowledge, attitudes, and practices among healthcare professionals and the general population. Studies conducted in Bangladesh, Iran, Malaysia, Thailand, Nepal, Oman, and the Philippines indicate varying levels of knowledge regarding CAM among healthcare professionals and students. While some studies report moderate knowledge levels, others highlight gaps in understanding, particularly regarding specific CAM modalities. Overall, there is a need for improved education and training on CAM to enhance knowledge among healthcare professionals and students.

Attitudes toward CAM tend to be generally positive across the selected countries, with healthcare professionals acknowledging its potential benefits as a complementary approach to conventional medicine. However, concerns about the lack of evidence supporting CAM and the need for further research are also evident. Overall, there is a recognition of the importance of CAM knowledge in healthcare practice, albeit with variations in attitudes among different populations.

Practices related to CAM vary widely, with traditional healing methods, herbal therapy, and nutritional supplements being commonly utilized. While some healthcare professionals engage in counseling patients on CAM, integration into clinical care remains limited in certain contexts. There is a need for targeted interventions to promote the safe and effective use of CAM, address barriers to integration, and improve access to CAM modalities.

This literature review underscores the importance of further research, education, and policy interventions to promote the safe and effective use of CAM across Asia. Addressing knowledge gaps, fostering positive attitudes, and integrating CAM into healthcare systems are essential steps to enhance the quality of care and meet the diverse healthcare needs of populations in the region. Collaboration between healthcare professionals, policymakers, and researchers is crucial to advancing the understanding and utilization of CAM in clinical practice and public health initiatives.



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

In conclusion, the literature review highlights the complex landscape of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) across selected Asian countries, characterized by varying levels of knowledge, attitudes, and practices among healthcare professionals and the general population. While there is a prevalent positive attitude towards CAM as a complementary approach to conventional medicine, gaps in knowledge and challenges in integrating CAM into clinical care persist. The findings underscore the need for comprehensive education and training initiatives, evidence-based practices, and policy interventions to promote the safe and effective use of CAM, address barriers to integration, and improve access to CAM modalities across Asia.

It is recommended that healthcare systems invest in educational programs and training initiatives to enhance CAM knowledge among healthcare professionals and students. This includes integrating CAM into existing curricula, providing continuing education opportunities, and fostering interdisciplinary collaboration between conventional and CAM practitioners. Additionally, policymakers should prioritize research funding and support initiatives aimed at evaluating the safety, efficacy, and cost-effectiveness of CAM modalities. Furthermore, efforts to raise public awareness, promote informed decision-making, and ensure regulatory oversight of CAM practices are essential to safeguarding public health and advancing healthcare systems' capacity to meet the diverse needs of populations in the region.

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