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Herbal medicines: Prevalence and predictors of use among Malaysian adults

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KEYWORDS

Herbal medicines;
Prevalence;
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Summary

Objective: The aim of this study was to examine the prevalence and identify factors, which predict the use of herbal medicines among Malaysian adults.

Methods: Using a cross-sectional design, data were collected via face-to-face interview using structured questionnaire from convenience sample of adults from four towns in Malaysia. Multivariate logistic regression analysis was used to identify the significant predictors of herbal medicines use.

Results: From a total of 1601 respondents, 542 (33.9%) reported use of herbal medicines in the previous 12 months. Multivariate logistic regression analysis revealed the following variables to be predictive of herbal medicines use: female gender [odds ratio (OR) 1.80, confidence interval (CI) 1.40–2.31], being married [OR 1.97, CI 1.44–2.71], having health problems [OR 2.31, CI 1.74–3.07] and having high-income levels [OR 4.21, CI 1.72–10.30]. The odds of someone using herbal medicines also increases though slightly if someone has favorable opinions about herbal medicines on the aspects examined. On the other hand, being Chinese [OR 0.74, CI 0.57–0.96] and Indians [OR 0.17, CI 0.11–0.27] were associated with decreased odds of using herbal medicines compared to Malays.

Conclusion: The prevalence of herbal medicines use is high. Respondents' personal attributes and opinions influence their likelihood of using herbal medicines. These findings are important because knowledge of the predictors of herbal medicines use may help health care providers to identify patients at increased risk who would be candidates for receiving guidance on safe use of herbal medicines.

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Introduction

Traditional Medicines, which includes herbal medicines, has been increasingly used worldwide including Malaysia.

From 2000 to 2005, annual sales for traditional medicines increased from US\$ 385 million (RM 1 billion) to US\$ 1.29 billion (RM 4.5 billion).¹ The prevalence and factors associated with its use is largely unknown, although the use is believed to be widespread.

Patients and the public have been known to self-prescribed herbal medicines for health maintenance^{2,3} for the treatment or prevention of minor ailments,^{2,4} and also for chronic illnesses.^{5–7} The increasing use of herbal

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