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Documentation of Traditional Treatment Modalities for Vida Kadigal (Poisonous Bites) Practiced by Healers in Kadaladi Taluk, Ramanathapuram District

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ABSTRACT

Background: Traditional healers play a significant role in the treatment of dangerous poisonous bites particularly in rural communities, where access to modern health system is limited. *Nanju Maruthuvam* is a specialised branch in Siddha system of medicine, which deals with the toxicity and offers a range of therapeutic methods for treating envenomation. This study focused to record the traditional methods used by healers in Kadaladi taluk, Ramanathapuram district, Tamil Nadu to treat *vida kadigal.*

Methods: A descriptive cross-sectional ethnomedicinal study was conducted among traditional healers in Kadaladi Taluk. Structured surveys, in-person interviews, and conversations utilizing snowball sampling were used to gather data. Structured surveys, in-person interviews, and conversations utilizing snowball sampling were used to gather data. A total of 20 respondents were included, with key informants providing detailed insights into traditional practices.

Result: Twenty traditional healers were interviewed, with 85% of them being men. The most frequently treated conditions were scorpion stings (32%) and snakebite (60%). There were about thirty recorded medicinal plants from twenty-one families. The most commonly utilized elements were leaves (40%) and entire plants (28%). The most popular preparation (39%) was extract (chaaru), which was mostly used orally (61%). *Enicostema axillare, Indigofera tinctoria, Polygala chinensis*, and *Leucas aspera* were among the often-utilized plants. First-aid procedures, dietary restrictions, *manthiram* use, and internal and exterior therapies were all part of the treatment strategies. Additionally, traditional Siddha formulations and *seevam* - based treatments were used.

Conclusion: The study recognises the rich knowledge of traditional healers in managing poisonous bites. Documentation of these practices is essential for preserving indigenous knowledge and provides a foundation for future pharmacological validation and integrative healthcare approaches.

Keywords: *Vida Kadigal*, Siddha medicine, Nanju Maruthuvam, Ethnomedicine, Poisonous bites, Traditional healers

INTRODUCTION

Plants play a vital role in human life providing basic needs such as food, clothing and medicine.[(1)] Traditional healing practices comprising mainly plants continue to play a significant role in primary health care particularly in developing countries. These

practices are at higher prevalence among Indian people. It is estimated that about sixty five percent of the population in rural India still practices traditional medicine system for their primary healthcare needs. [2] Traditional healers employ herbal medicines for the management of various *vida kadigal* (poisonous bites). Poisonous bites is a serious issue in the world. Millions of people die every year because of poison. [3] Snake bites, scorpion stings and centipede bites are common among individuals in agricultural and rural occupations. In Siddha system of medicine, *Nanju maruthuvam* is a specialised branch which deals with the various aspects of poison like sources, signs and symptoms, treatment and management. Nanju Maruthuvam, describes several antidotes for plants, metals, minerals and animal poisons. It provides therapeutic knowledge on envenomation and toxic exposure. Information about the usage of those antidotes is a legacy which has been passed on from one generation to another. [2] However, the documentation of therapeutic technique is minimal. Snake bite is the most common poisonous case recorded. [3] In tropical countries like India, snake bite envenomation is recognised as a significant public health issue, which accounts for morbidity and mortality. [4] In rural places, where seeking modern healthcare facilities are difficult, traditional healers treat and manage the poisonous case immediately as the first point of care. [5] They use both internal and external medication in various forms for treating the cases. Plants used in the treatment of poisonous bites are rich in various bioactive compounds like flavonoids, tannins, alkaloids, etc. They tend to possess an anti – inflammatory, anti - toxic property, which may help to neutralise the venomous effect in the body and further reduces the complications. Documentation of this knowledge is important for integrating the therapeutic effect. The world health organization has emphasized the need to integrate the traditional medicine and document the indigenous practices. It also provides a scientific basis for evaluating its safety and efficacy. They contribute to the discovery of lead molecules that can be developed into modern pharmacology. This study aims to document the treatment modalities for various *vida kadigal* (poisonous bites) practiced by healers in Kadaladi Taluk of Ramanathapuram, Tamil Nadu. Furthermore, in Kadaladi taluk traditional healers continued to play a significant role in the management of poisonous cases. Manuscription of the therapeutic intervention provide an insight into locally available and cost-effective treatment.

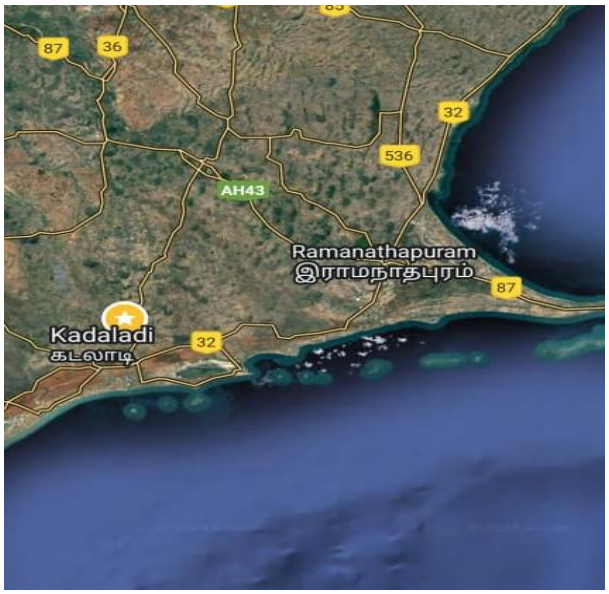
MATERIALS AND METHODS:

STUDY TYPE:

Descriptive study

STUDY AREA:

The study area comprised Kadaladi Taluk in Ramanathapuram District, Tamil Nadu, India, a predominantly rural region where agriculture and related occupational activities are common. Owing to frequent exposure to natural habitats and farmlands, the incidence of poisonous bites such as snake bites and scorpion stings is relatively common in this area. The region was selected for the study due to the presence of traditional healers and local communities possessing valuable ethnomedicinal knowledge related to the management of poisonous bites.



STUDY DESIGN:
Cross sectional Study
METHOD OF APPROACH:
Data were collected through in-depth interviews conducted in a face-to-face manner.
DATA MANAGEMENT:
The collected data were systematically documented and organized using Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel.

DATA COLLECTION:
The data were collected using questionnaires, interviews, and discussions with the local tribal population. A total of 20 respondents from Kadaladi Taluk, Ramanathapuram District were selected through snowball sampling, of whom 85% were male and 15% were female. Elderly participants were considered key informants, as they were able to provide valuable information on how the knowledge and practices related to medicinal plant collection and usage have changed over time. Traditional practitioners play a significant role in the healthcare system of the community and possess specialized indigenous knowledge of traditional medicine.

RESULT

A total of 20 traditional healers were interviewed. Among them, 85% (17) were male and 15% (3) were female as shown in *figure.4.1.*

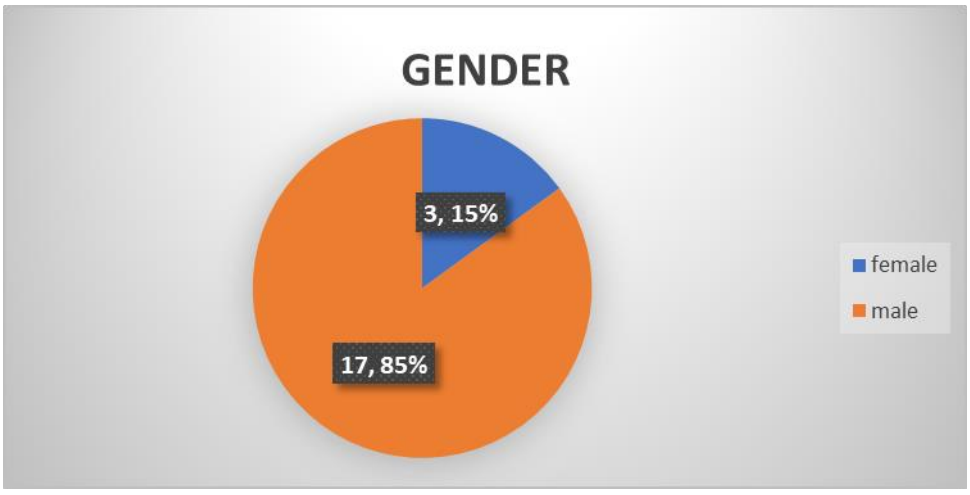


figure 4. 1

The Traditional healers were interviewed from different villages of kadaladi taluk. They were from Appanur 25% (2), Pothikulam 25% (2), Thevarkurichi 25% (2), Punavasal 13% (1), Samiyadikottagai 12% (1) as given in figure 4.2.

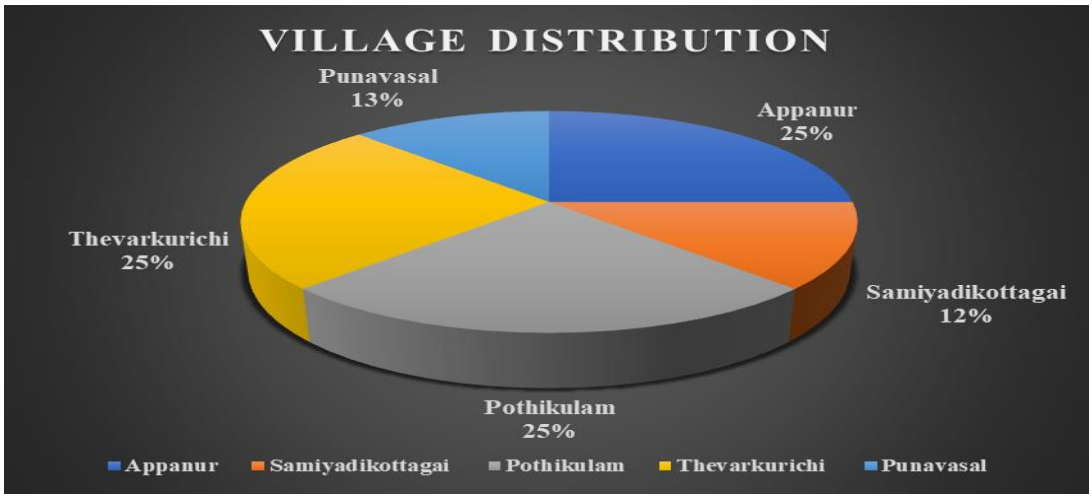


figure 4. 2

RECORDED RESPONSES TO STRUCTURED INTERVIEW:

Q1. How long have you been treating *vida kadigal* (poisonous bites)?

figure 4. 3

Q2. Is this VIDA KADI (poisonous bites) practice passed through generations?

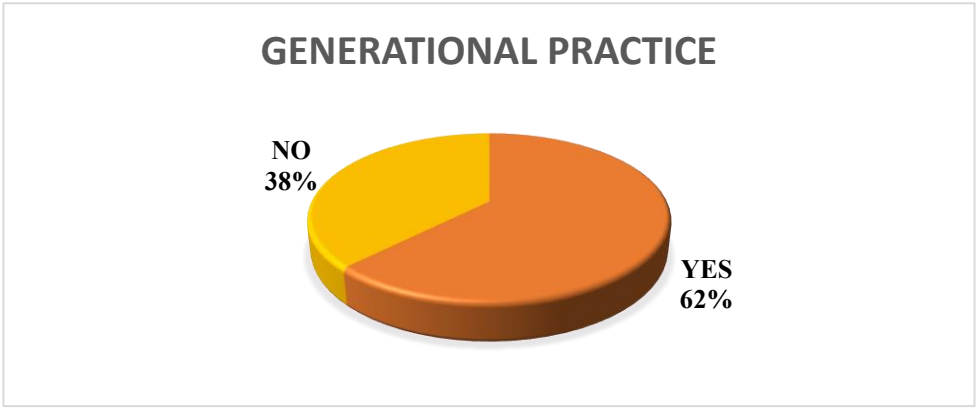


figure 4. 4

Q3. In your area, what are the most common type of *vida kadigal* (poisonous bites) found?

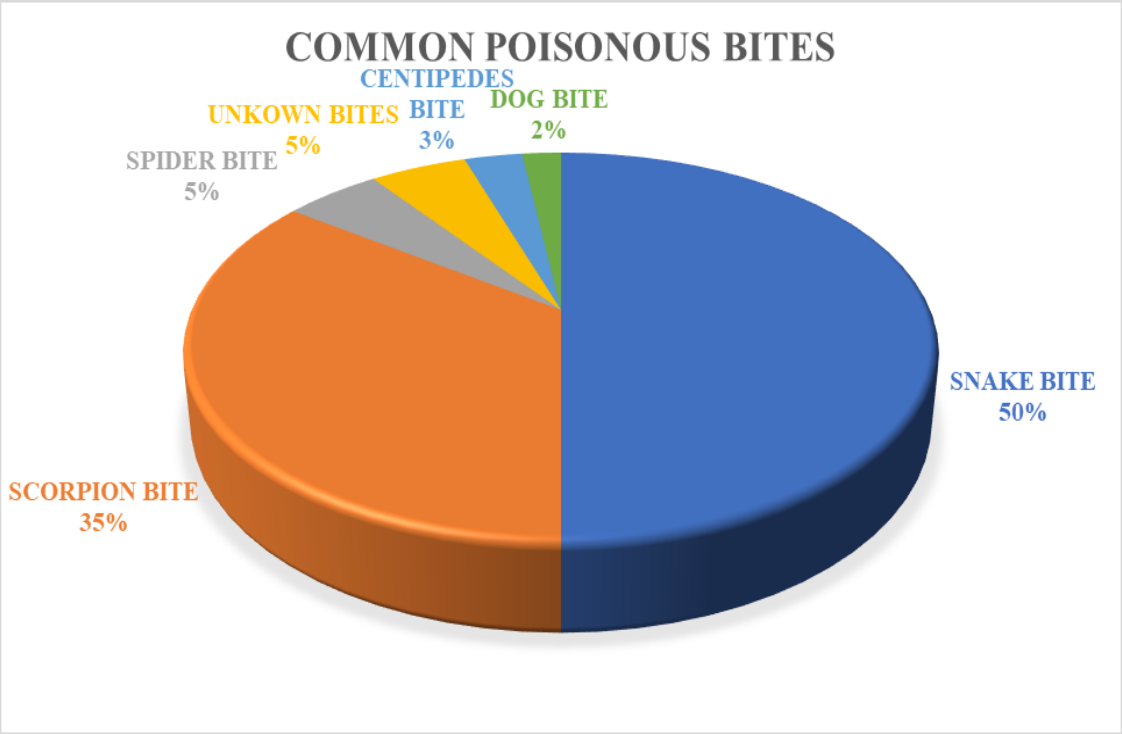


figure 4.5

Q4. Do you use any texts/manuscripts for the practice of treatment against *vida kadi*gal (Poisonous bites)?

None of the healers responded to the question.

Q5. How do you diagnose the type of poisonous bite?

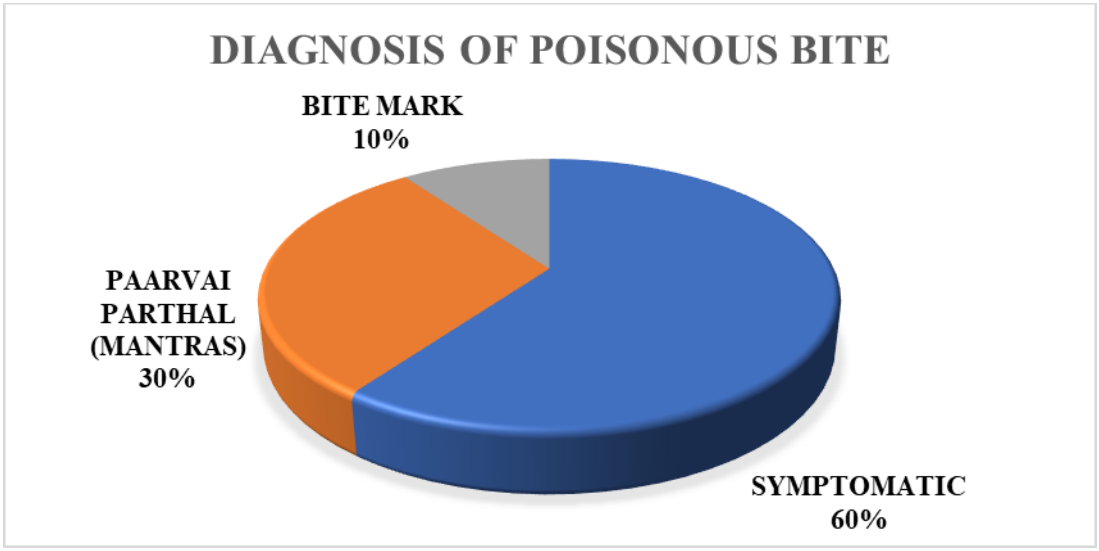


figure 4.6

Q6. How do you differentiate the type of snake bite in patients?

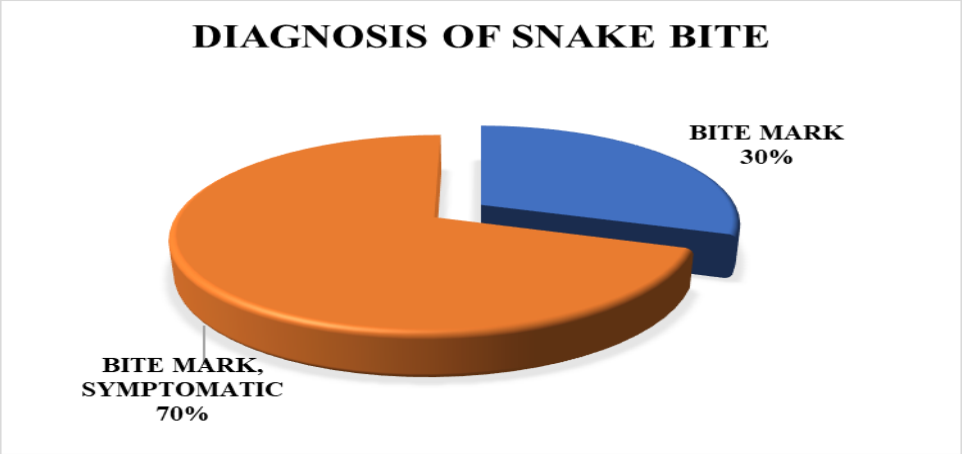


figure 4.7

Q7. What are the first aid given to patients with poisonous bites?

The healers treat poisonous bites immediately with first aid methods such as Kalingam (oothal), Thakkali poochu, Sarva sarpa marundhu, pain relief medicine, vomiting methods and providing leaf juice or decoction internally.

Q8. List out the plants that you use for poisonous bites.

The list of herbal plants commonly used for poisonous bites were collected. Around 30 plants from a total of 21 families were recorded.

Table No: 1

COMMONLY USED PLANTS FOR THE TREATMENT OF POISONOUS BITES BY TRADITIONAL HEALERS				
S.NO.	**TAMIL NAME**	**BOTANICAL NAME**	**FAMILY**	**USED PART**
1	Vellaragu	*Enicostema axillare*	Gentianaceae	WHOLE PLANT
2	Vaagai	*Albizia lebbeck*	Fabaceae	LEAF
3	Vembu	*Azadirachta indica*	Meliaceae	LEAF
4	Kuppaimeni	*Acalypha indica*	Euphorbiaceae	WHOLE PLANT
5	Seenthil	*Tinospora cordifolia*	Menispermaceae	LEAF, STEM
6	Avuri	*Indigofera tinctoria*	Fabaceae	ROOT
7	Aadutheendapalai	*Aristolochia bracteolata*	Aristolochiaceae	WHOLE PLANT
8	Echchuramooli	*Aristolochia indica*	Aristolochiaceae	LEAF
9	Siriyanangai	*Polygala chinensis*	Polygalaceae	WHOLE PLANT
10	Nilavembu	*Andrographis paniculata*	Acanthaceae	WHOLE PLANT
11	Nayuruvi	*Achyranthus aspera*	Amaranthaceae	ROOT
12	Oomathai	*Datura metel*	Solanaceae	LEAF
13	Thumbai	*Leucas aspera*	Lamiaceae	WHOLE PLANT
14	Vetrilai	*Piper betle*	Piperaceae	LEAF
15	Mookkirattai	*Boerhavia diffusa*	Nyctaginaceae	WHOLE PLANT
16	Vilvam	*Aegle marmelos*	Rutaceae	LEAF
17	Agathi	*Sesbania grandiflora*	Fabaceae	LEAF
18	Erukku	*Calotropis gigantea*	Asclepiadaceae	LEAF, LATEX
19	Varikummatti	*Citrullus colocynthis*	Cucurbitaceae	SEED
20	Murungai	*Moringa oleifera*	Moringaceae	LEAF
21	Peipeerkku	*Luffa amarus*	Cucurbitaceae	LEAF
22	Chukku	*Zingiber officianale*	Zingiberaceae	RHIZOME
23	Milagu	*Piper nigrum*	Piperaceae	FRUIT
24	Sirukanpeelai	*Aerva lanata*	Amanthaeceae	WHOLE PLANT
25	Vengayam	*Allium cepa*	Liliaceae	BULB
26	Mulli keerai	*Amaranthus spinosus*	Amarantheceae	LEAF
27	Aagasagarudan	*Corallocarpus epigaeus*	Cucurbitaceae	ROOT
28	Manjal	*Curcuma longa*	Zingiberaceae	RHIZOME

29	Koraikilangu	*Cyperus rotundus*	Cyperaeceae	ROOT
30	Keela nelli	*Phyllanthus amarus*	Euphorbiaceae	WHOLE PLANT

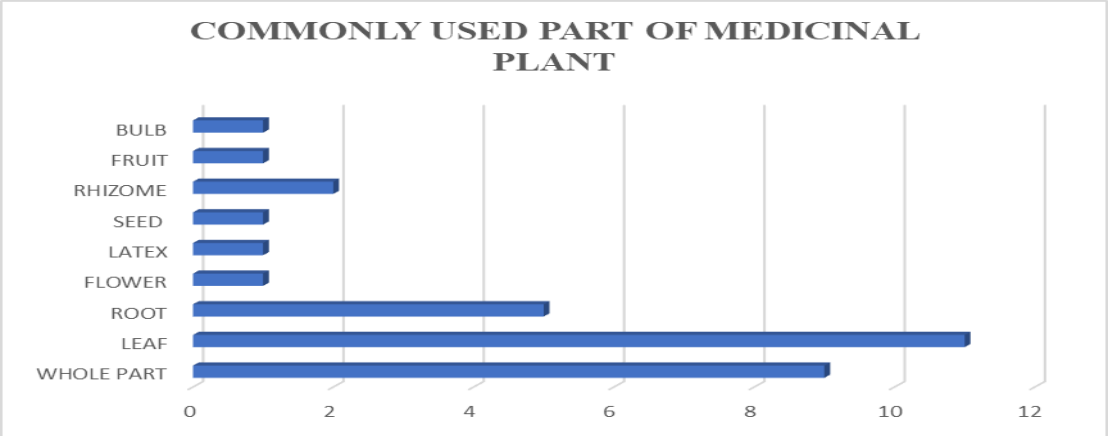


figure 4.8

The most commonly used parts of medicinal plants were leaves (40%) and Whole plant (28%) as given in the *figure 4.8.*

Q9. In what form of medicine, the plants are given to the patients?

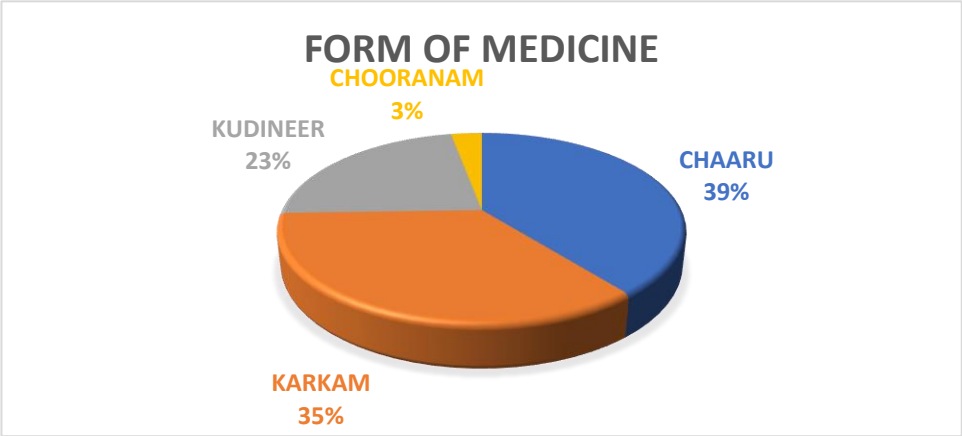


figure 4.9

Q10. Do you practice any kind of external therapy for poisonous bites?

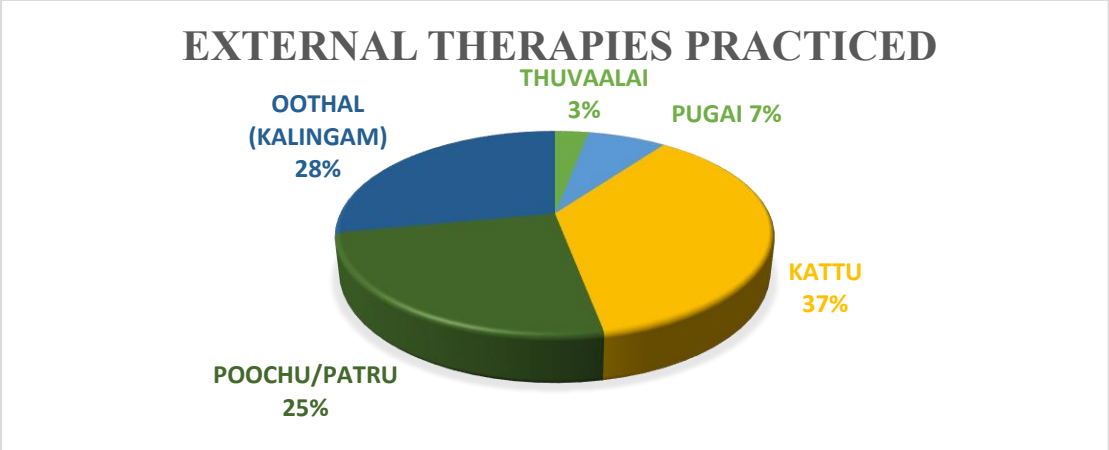


figure 4.10

Q11. How do you handle unknown poisonous bites?
All the healers reported that unknown poisons were managed based on symptoms.

Q12. What is the duration of medication for poisonous bites?

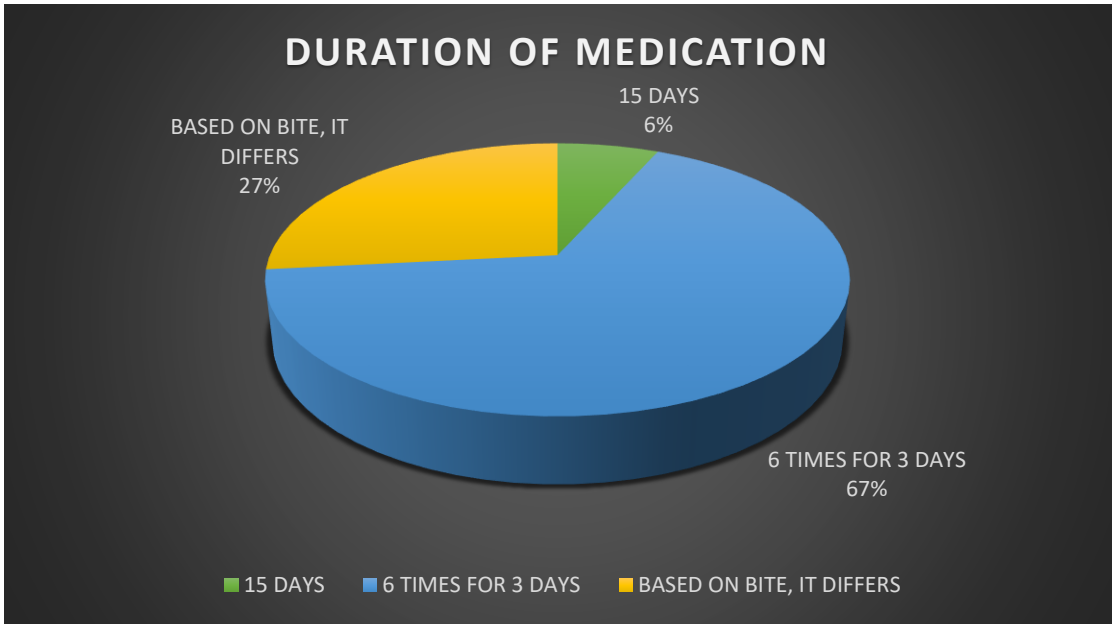


figure 4. 11

Q13. What are the dietary restrictions instructed to patients affected by poisonous bites?
87% of the healers instruct the patients with dietary restrictions while 13% do not give any restrictions. Avoiding Sesame oil, Hot drinks such as tea, coffee, cut off salt, sour, spice, non-vegetarian foods are the common instructions.

Q14. Do you use manthiram/chanting slogans for treating poisonous bites?
67% of the healers have used manthiram /chanting slogans for treating severe poisonous bites. Most commonly for some specific snake bites such as spectacled cobra, Common kraits, Indian king cobra slogans were chanted in practice as tradition. The slogans and method of chanting differ for different bites.

Q15. Do you prepare the medicine that you give for treatment? Can you answer in detail about the various preparations used for treating vida kadigal?

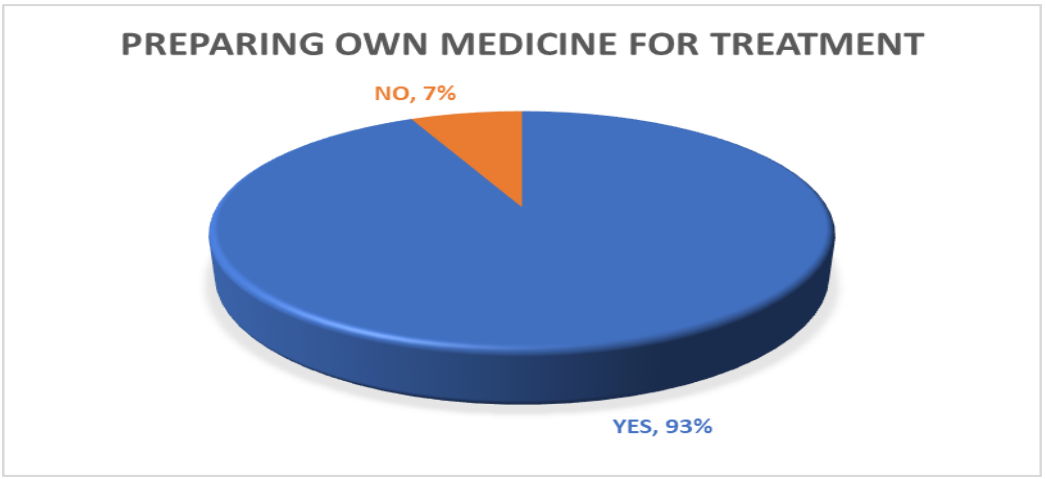


figure 4.12

Table No:2 **List of plant-based remedies used in the treatment of poisonous bites.**

SL.NO	LOCAL NAME	BINOMIAL NAME	FAMILY	PARTS USED	FORM OF MEDICINE	PREPARATION	INDICATION
1	Vellaragu	Enicostema axillare	Gentianaceae	Whole plant	Extract - internal	Whole plant extract given for 12 days	All types of snake bite
2	Vaagai	Albizia lebbeck	Fabaceae	Leaf	Extract – internal & external	Leaves are grinded and extract is taken given for 7 days	All types of snake bite
3	Vembu	Azadirachta indica	Meliaceae	Leaves	Extract & paste – internal & external	Extract and paste are given orally and externally	Insect bite, Centipede bite & unknown bite
4	Kuppaimeni	Acalypha indica	Euphorbiaceae	Whole plant	Paste (External)	Whole plant grinded and applied over the bite	Scorpion bite & Centipede bite
5	Seenthil	Tinospora cordifolia	Menispermaceae	Leaves, Stem & Root	Internal – Decotion	Decotion prepared and given orally for 21 days.	Snake bite & Scorpion bite
6	Avuri	Indigofera tinctoria	Fabaceae	Root	Internal – Decotion	Decotion prepared and given (3 times a day) for 24 days.	All types of poisonous bite.
7	Aadutheendapalai	Aristolochia bracteolata	Aristolochiaceae	Whole plant	Internal – Paste	Leaves are grinded and made into paste	Snake bite
8	Echchuramooli	Aristolochia indica	Aristolochiaceae	Leaves	Internal – Paste & Extract	Extract & paste prepared and given internally for 10 days	Snake bite (Common Krait)
9	Siriyanangai	Polygala chinensis	Polygalaceae	Whole plant	Extract – internal	Whole plant extract given for 12 days	Snake bite (Cobra)
10	Nilavembu	Andrographis paniculata	Acanthaceae	Whole plant	Extract – internal	Whole plant extract given for 12 days	Snake bite, Scorpion bite, Centipede bite
11	Nayuruvi	Achyranthus aspera	Amaranthaceae	Root	Internal – Decotion	Decotion prepared and given orally for 40 days	Snake bite & Dog bite
12	Oomathai	Datura metel	Solanaceae	Leaves	Internal & External	Extract of root are taken with garlic	Snake bite & Dog bite
13	Thumbai	Leucas aspera	Lamiaceae	Flower & Whole plant	Internal & External - Karkkam	Karkkam is prepared and given for 3 days	Snake bite & Scorpion bite
14	Vetrilai	Piper betle	Piperaceae	Leaves	Internal - Decotion	Vetrilai, Arugambul leaf, Kuppaimeni leaf and milagu are taken and boiled in water and made into decotion	Unknown bite
15	Mookkirattai	Boerhavia diffusa	Nyctaginaceae	Whole plant	Internal - Karkkam	Karkkam is prepared and given for 7 days	Snake bite (Russel viper)

16	Vilvam	Aegle marmelos	Rutaceae	Leaves	Internal - Karkkam	Karkkam is prepared and given for 3 days	Snake bite
17	Agathi	Sesbania grandiflora	Fabaceae	Leaves	Internal & External	Leaf is made into paste and taken orally for 3 days	Scorpion bite
18	Erukku	Calotropis gigantea	Asclepiadaceae	Leaves & latex	External	Latex is applied over the bite	Centipede bite, Spider bite
19	Varikummatti	Citrullus colocynthis	Cucurbitaceae	External - Paste	External - Paste	Seed is made into paste and applied over the bite	Snake bite (Viper)
20	Murungai	Moringa oleifera	Moringaceae	Leaves	Internal – Extract & Karkkam	Extract & Karkkam is given in internally for 3 days	Scorpion bite
21	Peipeerkku	Luffa amarus	Cucurbitaceae	Leaves	Internal - Extract	Extract is given for 5 days	Snake bite (King cobra)
22	Chukku	Zingiber officianale	Zingiberaceae	Rhizome	External - Oothal	In first – aid	All types of poisonous bite
23	Milagu	Piper nigrum	Piperaceae	Fruit	Internal & External - Chooranam	Chooranam is prepared and given orally for 12 days	All types of poisonous bite

Table No:3 **Seevam-based preparations that are used to treat venomous bites.**

SL.NO	SEEVA PORUTKAL	MODE OF ADMINISTRATION	PREPARATION	ADJUVANT	INDICATION
1	Katterumbu (Indian black ant), Puttru man (Termite hill), Naththai sathai (Fresh water snail)	External	These 2 raw drugs are grinded with Naththai sathai (Fresh water snail) dried and made into chooranam.	Hot water	All types of poisonous bites.
2	Valai rasam (Mercury), Indhuppu (Rock salt), Garudakkal (Magnesite)	External	These raw drugs are taken and grinded with Keeri bile, then dried & made into chooranam.	Venkaya juice (Allium sativum)	Snake bite (King cobra)
3	Thaai eesal (Winged termites)	External	The raw drug is grinded with cow's ghee. Made into Mai and applied on the eyes.	Cow's ghee	All types of poisonous bites.
4	Puttranchoru (Termite hill)	Internal	The raw drug is fried in sesame oil and given orally.	Milagu podi	Snake bite (Especially Raktha Viriyan)
5	Pambu sattai (Snake slough)	External	Snake slough is burned in veppam kattai and the pugai is inhaled.	-	Snake bite
6	Karunkozhi (Black hen), Minminipoochi (Fire fly) and Inthirakopapoochi (Mutila occidentalis)	External & Internal	The raw drugs are grinded and made into chooranam.	Honey	Snake bite (Viper), Scorpion sting

7	Maankombu (deer horn)	Internal	The raw drug grinded with kuppai meni (Acalypha indica) and brought to pudam process & converted to parpam.	Honey and ghee	Poisonous complications
8	Ganthagam (sulphur)	Internal and external	Made it parpam by grinding with Ginger (zingiber officinale)	Milk and ghee	Snake Bite (Karunagam)
9	Kilinjal (Ostrea edults)	Internal and external	Made it parpam by grinding with sunnambu thelineer	Amukkura choornam	Scorpion bite
10	Palagarai (cypraea moneta)	Internal and external	Made it parpam with lemon juice	Lemon juice	All poisonous bite (externally- wound healing)

In addition to plant and seevam-based preparations, there are also numerous medications available for treating poisonous bites. Following are the key medicines traditionally used to treat poisonous bites, include:

- Paranjothi mai
- Sanjeevi mathirai
- Visha thailam
- Mannar podi
- Mahalinga mathirai
- Viraalivaagai podi
- Yanthira mai
- Sivakarandhai uyirppu podi
- Keeri thailam
- Thelsunaambu pasai
- Thirukanda kuligai
- Palagarai chenduram
- Kaalanamirtham
- Sivanaadha thailam
- Sarva sarpa marundhu

In addition to poisonous bites, traditional healers treat a range of ailments such as jaundice, haemorrhoids, cancer and joint pain. Some of the remedies used for these conditions include:

- Vettai vaivu chenduram
- Rajabedhi thailam
- Kottamchukkadi podi
- Rasa parpam
- Poorachandamarutham
- Vajirakandi parpam
- Karisalai vazhalai podi
- Sirattai kuzhi thailam
- Thazhuthalai kuzhi thailam
- Rajarajeshwari kuligai
- Kuppaimeni parpam
- Ayaveerapavala chunam
- Sadaachara kumari chenduram
- Andakkal chunam
- Nandhisar chandamarutha mezhugu

Q16. What is the time duration you suggest for recheck-up?

- **46%** of healers recommend a follow-up visit after **3 days** of medication.
- **20%** advise a revisit after **5 days**.
- **7%** suggest a follow-up after **7 days**.
- **7%** recommend returning after **15 days**.
- **7%** base the revisit time on the type and severity of the bite.

Q17. What is the most common type of poisonous bites you have treated?

Most frequent type of poisons treated were Snake bite (60%), scorpion bite (32%), unknown bite (5%), and Centipedes bite (3%).

Q18. What is the most common type of poisonous bites that you have treated and experienced good prognosis?

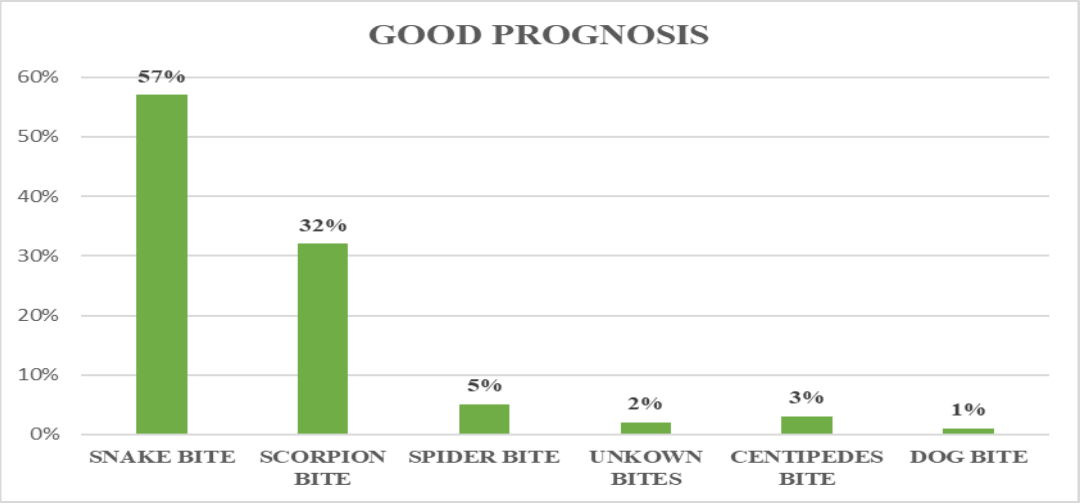


Figure 4.13

Q19. Do you treat pregnant women and paediatric age group with poisonous bites?

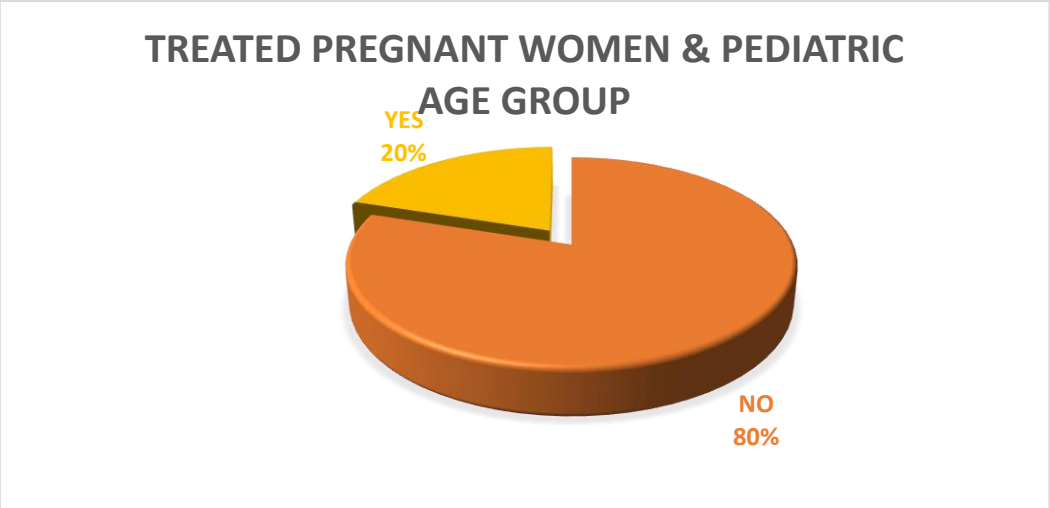


figure 4.14

Q20. Which types of poisonous bites do you suggest for referral?

68% of healers have not referred their cases to other healthcare providers. However, **32%** refer cases involving dog bites and certain poisonous bites with severe symptoms.

Q21. Do you face any difficulties in this field?

All 20 healers reported facing no difficulties in treating poisonous bites. Their perspective is rooted in viewing this healing practice as a service to their community, carried out in honor of their teachers and ancestors, which likely explains why they did not identify any challenges in their work.

Q22. Do you treat for any other medical ailments other than poisonous bites?

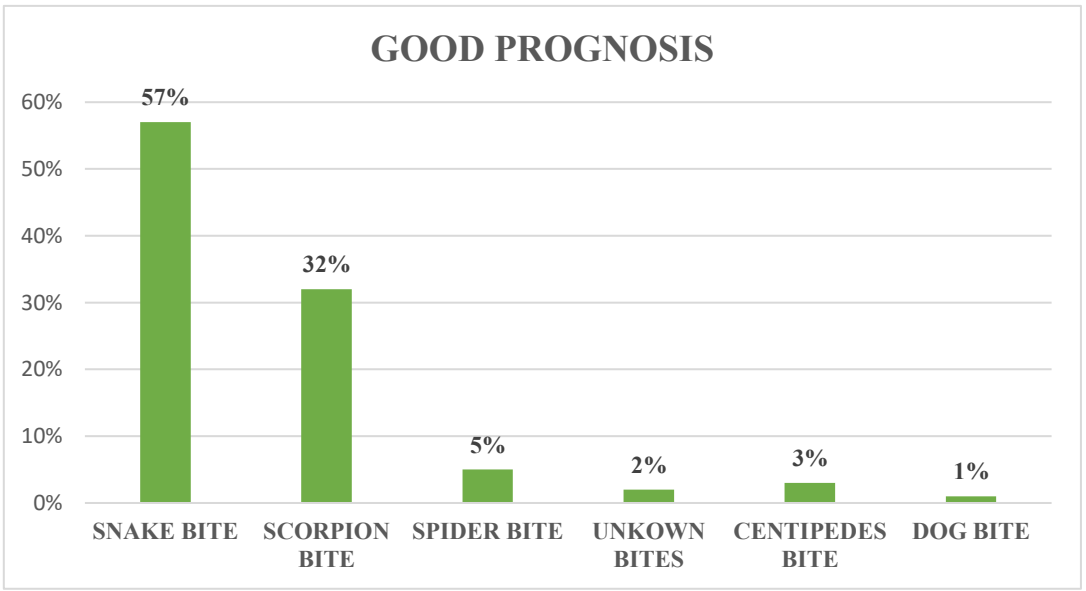


figure 4. 15

Q23. What are the commonly used medicine preparations for treatment of diseases other than poisonous bites?

In addition to poisonous bites, traditional healers treat a range of ailments such as jaundice, haemorrhoids, cancer and joint pain. Some of the remedies used for these conditions include:

- Vettai vaivu chenduram

- Rajabedhi thailam
- Kottamchukkadi podi
- Rasa parpam
- Poorachandamarutham
- Vajirakandi parpam
- Karisalai vazhalai podi
- Sirattai kuzhi thailam
- Thazhuthalai kuzhi thailam
- Rajarajeshwari kuligai
- Kuppaimeni parpam
- Ayaveerapavala chunam
- Sadaachara kumari chenduram
- Andakkal chunnam
- Nandhisar chandamarutha mezhugu

DISCUSSION

The present study covers the traditional methods practiced by healers in Kadaladi taluk, Ramanathapuram district in treating *vida kadigal* (poisonous bites). The outcomes demonstrate the persistence, reliance of rural communities over traditional medicine, especially in cases of critical need, like snake bite, scorpion sting, where access to modern medical care, may be limited. Similar results on traditional healer, serving as the first line of care in rural and indigenous settings have been reported in various ethnomedical research conducted throughout India. It is evidenced by the fact that eighty seven percent of traditional healers were men. The traditional medicinal knowledge is often preserved and passed down within families or communities. The knowledge was inherited across generation through oral transmission and it lacks the written documentation. This highlights the importance of documenting the valuable indigenous practices. The prevalence of snake bite in rural India was found to be the most frequently treated condition, followed by scorpion string increased human exposure to natural ecosystem is thought to be the cause of these instances in agricultural communities. These findings reinforce the recognition of snakebite as the neglected healthcare issue requiring management strategies. The study concluded over 30 therapeutic plants from 21 families that are used to treat deathly bites. The commonly used plant parts were leaves (40%) and whole plants (28%). This choice may be due to the ease of availability, sustainable harvesting methods and greater concentration of bioactive chemicals. The anti - toxic property of plants, *Acalypha indica, Tinospora cardifolia*, *Azadiracta indica*, *Andrographis paniculata* may contribute to their therapeutic effectiveness. Extracts, decoctions, pastes, chooranam and external applications were different forms of medicine. A comprehensive approach to treatment was suggested by combination of both internal administration and external therapies. These methods may try to reduce symptoms and inhibit the spread of venom, but further research is needed to confirm their therapeutic effectiveness. *Manthiram* as the method of treatment was an interesting fact used by healers. This reveals how the traditional system combines cultural and spiritual way of treating them. Belief system and psychological peace are proven as essential elements of healing. The healers also use many *seevam* based preparations. Various forms of medicines like *parpam, chooranam, chendhuram* and *thailam* are being used. More research is required to establish the scientific evidences by proving its pharmacological actions. *Pathiyam* is an important concept for both disease and medication consumed by patient. 87% of the healer recommend the dietary regimen which typically involves avoiding salt, sour foods, non-vegetarian diet and alcohol. Sometimes sleeping is also restricted as it spreads the venom fastly. 68% of the healers did not refer the patient do modern facilities. However, 32% of them referred complicated cases. Overall, this study documents the rich knowledge of traditional healers in treating *vida kadigal* in Kadaladi Taluk, Ramanathapuram. It urges the need of preserving and documenting it for further scientific evaluation. It proves strong foundation for future integrative health care approaches.

Limitations

This documentation has certain limitations. As this was conducted within the traditional healers, gaining in – depth insights into specified therapeutic indexes and diagnostic approaches were challenging. The knowledge is often kept quite confidential and transmitted within limited range. The time frame was limited, restricting detailed documentation of drug preparation, dosage and outcomes. The sample size is too small to generalize the wide aspect of knowledge and practices. Future studies should involve a large sample size, vast field work and detailed interview and questionnaire are recommended.

CONCLUSION

The ethnomedicinal study documents the traditional treatment modalities performed by traditional healers in Kadaladi taluk, Ramanathapuram District. Snakebite and scorpion sting were identified as the most common types of poisonous bites in the study area. A total of 30 medicinal plants from 21 families were recorded, with leaves being the most commonly used plant part and extract (*chaaru*) being the predominant mode of preparation. Commonly reported plant species included *Enicostema axillare*, *Indigofera tinctoria*, *Polygala chinensis*, and *Leucas aspera*. The study reveals the holistic treatment modalities integrating internal medications, external applications, dietary regimen, chanting methods (*Manthiram*). Despite of its limitations, this documentation emphasizes the need for preservation. This paper serves as a foundation for future research in siddha toxicology and ethnomedicine which leads to the scientific validation and standardization.

Ethical Consideration:

Ethical considerations were followed during data collection, and informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Declaration by Authors

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