

An Ethnobotanical Survey of Medicinal Plants for the Treatment of Infantile Diarrhea in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa

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Abstract : The main objective of this paper is to develop an ethnobotanical survey that documents medicinal plants used to treat diarrhea among infants in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. In South Africa's pluralistic healthcare system, medicinal plants are an integral part of healing and treating an array of diseases. This is also the case in rural areas of South Africa, where healthcare facilities are hard to access. There is a lack of literature on the use of medicinal plants to cure ailments common to children, and this paper fills this gap. A total of 18 participants were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. A purposive approach was used to sample the study cohorts. A total of 28 medicinal plants representing 19 different families were recorded, with the family Asteraceae (11%) having the most medicinal plants. The remaining plants (82%) were distributed equally among the following families: Rubiaceae, Canellaceae, Aloaceae, Rutaceae, Thymeleaceae, Myrinaceae, Olinaceae, Iradeceae, Zingiberaceae, Capparaceae, Aizoaceae, Fabaceae, Geraniaceae, Cornaceae, Monimiaceae, Talinaceae, Chrysobalanaceae, and Icacinaceae. Oral administration was the most common mode of administration, with 82% of plants taken orally. Healing was proven to be holistic; it was more than just treating physical ailments as such; infants were protected from evil spirits that made them vulnerable to illnesses. There was also evidence of the assimilation of Dutch medicine and animal products into traditional healing methods. In order to mitigate the prevalence of disease and illness in South Africa, I recommend that diversity in healing practices should be acknowledged and appreciated.

Keywords : infants, traditional healers, primary care givers, traditional medicine

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