



# Traditional Medicine and Side Effects: A Comparative Analysis of Patients and Doctors in Chennai

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## Abstract

Traditional medicine (TM) has continued playing a valuable role in healthcare systems based on the use of indigenous knowledge, locally procured materials, and cultural practices. Plant-based remedies are still in use in India especially in the urban setting in combination with modern medical practices. The study explores the nature and the intensity of the side effects of traditional medicine, and the perceived dissimilarity of patients and physicians in Chennai. Quantitative, cross-sectional research design was used to collect primary data by filling structured questionnaires during the period between May and November 2023. A total of 605 respondents fell under the scope of the study, which consisted of 502 patients, sampled by the use of the stratified random sampling method and 103 physicians, sampled by the purposive sampling method.

To research the correlation between the length of treatment and the occurrence of side effects, the analysis involved inferential statistics such as cross tabulation and chi square test in combination with descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages. Findings demonstrate that traditional medicine is considered to be safe, on the whole: more than 71 out of 100 doctors and almost 89 out of 100 patients did not report any severe adverse reactions. A smaller percentage of respondents (10–18%) reported minor adverse effects include gastrointestinal or skin discomfort distress most of which were transient and went away on their own without medical help. Longer treatment durations may marginally raise the risk of mild side effects according to the chi-square analysis which found a statistically significant correlation between the incidence of side effects and treatment duration.

The overall findings highlights that TM remains as one of the best choice for holistic, low-cost, and culturally adapted healthcare therapy. Also, pertaining to policy makers, the results recognize the complementary role of TM within urban health systems for the need of standardized treatment guidelines, safety monitoring mechanisms, and integrative healthcare frameworks. Besides, strengthening the regulation and practitioner awareness will eventually increase patients' safety at the same time preserving the indigenous knowledge and promoting the sustainable healthcare delivery.

**Keywords:** Traditional medicine, side effects, sustainability, healthcare innovation, holistic treatment, Chennai

## 1. Introduction

One of the oldest forms of healthcare is traditional medicine, rooted in indigenous knowledge systems that have evolved over thousands of years through several generations of keen observation, literature writings, practice and cultural teaching. India is a pioneer in conceptualising and formalising the traditional healing methods, including Ayurveda, Siddha, plant-based remedies, etc., which continue to prevail in the contemporary modern biomedical systems. These healing methods have not only been established due to their true historical roots, but also due to their availability, cost-effectiveness and holistic approach to serving mankind. Recently, there has been alarming concerns of side effects and health issues caused due to synthetic drugs use, which coincidentally make gradual increase in the users opting for natural therapy like TM, more so in urban sectors.

Perception of risk and trust is the common factor towards choosing the correct treatment methods. In general, user chooses the right TM based on their previous experience, allergies, and safety, whereas the physicians prescribe them on the basis of proven clinical trials and drugs' efficacy. For designing any inclusive healthcare policies, it is very crucial to have clear knowledge of different perspectives from user and physician viewpoint

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Quite often, TM is regarded as safer and gentler therapeutic method, but its scientific evidence on treatment duration and recovery outcomes remain scanty and unevenly documented. This gap is more pronounced in cities and township, where users have greater access to several medical systems and have more choice of preference of either traditional or modern therapies.

In this study, we selected Chennai as the study area because of its status as metropolitan city. Chennai has strong international medical facilities and various institutions dedicated to all forms of healing therapy, including advanced allopathic therapy and Siddha medicine. In Chennai, there are people surviving with various income groups and educational background, making it an excellent profile to assess the perception of TM. In addition, the use of herbal therapy has gained a greater attention after the COVID-19 pandemic, which will be good measure of users for assessing contemporary attitudes towards safety, effectiveness and risk.

The traditional medicine is significant in the concept of sustainability in a broader perspective of it. It facilitates the delivery of affordable healthcare provision, reduces dependence on imported drugs, and assists in the creation of employment, through the production and processing of medicinal plants. The paper examining these various aspects will endeavour to evaluate the side effects of using TM as well as compare the perception of patients and physicians in Chennai. Through this, the study contributes to the discussions on integrative healthcare with an empirical evidence and gives directions on the development of reasonable rules that uphold sustainable and culturally based health practices and ensure safety.

## 2. Review of Earlier Studies

Traditional medicine (TM) has long been acknowledged as a vital part of healthcare systems in several developing and emerging nations. Primary example is India where indigenous medical treatment has been practiced for many centuries. TM from multiple perspectives, including safety, effectiveness, user perception, economic affordability, and sustainability, has been examined in earlier studies. However, the findings documented so far is very limited, more specifically in terms of comparative assessments between patients' and physicians' perspectives on adverse reactions.

In several studies, the safety and side effects of herbal medicines have been highlighted. Ekor (2014) stated that "although herbal remedies are generally perceived as safer than synthetic drugs, adverse reactions can occur due to improper dosage, prolonged use or lack of standardization". Singh and Narsimhamurthy (2017) highlighted the "importance of quality control and pharmacovigilance in TM, noting that most reported side effects are mild and self-limiting". Similarly, Akinmoladun et al. (2007) established that "plant-based treatments rarely produce severe toxicity when used in traditional formulations, supporting their continued use under guided conditions".

Patient perceptions and risk awareness were also focussed on many literatures that dealt with traditional healing systems. Gupta et al. (2020) also observed that "Indian households continue to rely on herbal medicine not only because of affordability but also due to strong cultural trust and perceived safety". In majority, patients have advocated that they have experienced less or no side effects and had long-term health benefits. Kumar and Thomas (2022) reported "a growing preference for traditional therapies among urban populations, particularly for chronic and stress-related conditions, even when users are aware of potential minor adverse effects". In addition, these findings suggest that positive outcome has overshadowed the probable negative effects of therapeutic treatment.

However, from the physicians' perspective, studies indicate that there is a positive attitude, which is cautious towards TM. Patwardhan et al. (2005) argued that "integrative approaches combining modern and traditional systems can enhance treatment outcomes". Huang and Li (2021) further noted that "medical professionals increasingly acknowledge the complementary role of TM, especially in preventive and holistic care". However, to ensure patient safety, doctors also stress the need for scientific validation and regulated practice for natural treatment validation.

In previous studies, the economic and sustainability dimensions of TM have also demonstrated. Sofowora et al. (2013) emphasized that "medicinal plants contribute significantly to affordable healthcare, while

supporting rural livelihoods and biodiversity conservation". The World Health Organization (2019) highlighted "TM as a tool for achieving universal health coverage, particularly in resource-constrained settings".

WHO (2023) stated that "health-seeking behaviour had increased reliance on natural and immunity-boosting remedies after post-pandemic shift". This renewed interest has reinforced the relevance of TM in both urban and rural contexts.

Although there are many published studies on traditional medicine, yet there are only few studies that do comparative analysis of patients' experiences and physicians' observations in terms of side effects, particularly in urban Indian settings. This present study is dual-perspective analytical study targeting the city of Chennai, as a result, contributing greatly to empirical evidence for current debates on the safety, acceptability, and sustainability of TM.

### 3. Objectives

1. To analyse the extent and nature of side effects associated with TM.
2. To compare patients' and doctors' perceptions regarding side effects and recovery outcomes.
3. To assess the sustainability and holistic nature of TN practices in an urban Indian context.

### 4. Hypothesis

**H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no association between side effects and curability duration of medicinal plants.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is association between side effects and curability duration of medicinal plants.

### 5. Research Methodology

For data analysis, we collected the information from the users of Chennai in survey format, during the 8-month time period (May and November 2023). In order to have different perspectives, we included individuals from both clinical and patient backgrounds. A total of 103 doctors took part in this investigation, and they were chosen according to their experience of treating and recommending suitable therapies required for the patients. A total of 502 patients were chosen adopting stratified random sampling method. This method helped reflecting the differences in age, background and type of medical care received.

Information such as potential side effects, treatment efficiency, and outcomes were used for the analysis. The evaluation of different variables affecting the therapy and statistical compilation of them was based on the simplest tools to use such as counts, percentages and categories overlapping and the chi-square test.

We noted that there was high leap towards natural healing therapy after the COVID-19 pandemic and a stage that was relatively characterized by habits change in seeking care and increase in receptivity towards natural or plant based cures. Moreover, it became possible to trace the present trend of medical preferences and attitudes to risks associated with ancient medicine.

### 6. Primary Study: Results and Discussion

One of the largest metropolitan cities in India with attributed education, healthcare services as well as the heritage is Chennai, which happens to be the capital of Tamil Nadu. Although the city has a good allopathic infrastructure of hospitals, medical colleges, and even private health institutions, the city still maintains high practices of a traditional healing system; Siddha, Ayurveda and other treatment therapies based on plants. Indeed, it is proven that recently a great number of urban and rural residents have begun to adopt TMs, either as an addition to modern care, or use of alternative to conventional one. This confirmation is highly achieved due to the rise of awareness on natural remedies, worries over the side effects related to synthetic medicine, and the overall transition towards holistic, environmentally friendly, and preventative health remedies.

Empirical analysis based on the varied socio-economic and professional performance systems was developed on the basis of the primary data that were taken through the patient and physician practicing in

Chennai. The sample involved 502 respondents, including 72.1% married persons who were representative of all the age groups (specifically 20-60 years). The sample consisted of patients of diverse groups: students, homemakers, employees of the private and government sectors, daily wage workers, and business owners, which highlights the broad societal acceptance of TM. On the provider side, 103 physicians that attended the study were married (85.4%) and were of the age of 25–65 years and a part of the economically active population. The doctors were of scholarly qualification of Siddha (BSMS), Ayurveda (BASM), Homeopathy (BHMS) and modern medicine (MD) and the majority worked in public hospitals, private hospitals or standalone clinics.

Based on the statistical analysis, the income levels, professional experience, treatment/perceptions of side effects, recovery outcomes, and treatment duration were estimated. In total, the evidence offers valuable information on the ways, in which urban residents in the city of Chennai incorporate TM in modern healthcare decision-making in a pluralistic healthcare setting.

**Table 1. Income-wise Analysis on Usage of Traditional Medicine (Patients)**

Using traditional medicine	Income						Total
	Nil	Below 10,000	10,000 - 40,000	40,000 - 70,000	70,000 - 100,000	Above 100,000	
No	16 (3.20)	5 (1.00)	4 (0.80)	2 (0.40)	7 (1.39)	6 (1.20)	<b>40</b> <b>(7.97)</b>
Yes	94 (18.73)	81 (16.13)	94 (18.73)	120 (23.90)	31 (6.18)	42 (8.37)	<b>462</b> <b>(92.03)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>110</b> <b>(21.91)</b>	<b>86</b> <b>(17.13)</b>	<b>98</b> <b>(19.53)</b>	<b>122</b> <b>(24.30)</b>	<b>38</b> <b>(7.6)</b>	<b>48</b> <b>(9.56)</b>	<b>502</b> <b>(100.0)</b>

Source: Primary data.

Table 1 reveals that all the income levels use traditional practices implying that the value is not merely on the cost. The use of TM was also observed to be among the more affluent populations, which proves the motives of believing in the outcomes, cultural affiliation, or the general health-conscious consideration. The fact that they are popular in diverse economic statuses underscores the wide societal applicability of the healing practices. These findings are significant since it frame TM as a comprehensive and sustained process that ties local knowledge with larger objectives on practical innovation to sustainable healthcare in society.

**Table 2. Doctors Opinion regarding Side effects and permanent recovery.**

Doctors' opinion	Permanent recovery		Side effect of medicinal treatment	
	No. of doctors	Percent	No. of doctors	Percent
No	3	2.90	74	71.80
Yes	92	89.30	19	18.40
Depends	8	7.80	10	9.70
<b>Total</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Primary data.

Table 2 indicates that 90 percent of physicians believe in traditional remedies and full recovery and over 70 percent of them have reported few severe adverse reactions. The value of this finding lies in the fact that clinicians provide credible information on health outcomes, based on working experience. Their opinions hold the notion that these treatments can be of long-lasting benefits and risk-free. It is an important data regarding the level of evidence-based legitimacy and clinical usefulness in old age healing methods, which proved that the methods are beneficial as a practical and low-risk alternative to existing medical treatment.

**Table 3. Patient Respondents’ Views on Side Effects**

<b>Opinion of the respondents</b>	<b>No. of patient respondents</b>	<b>Percent</b>
No	448	89.20
Yes	54	10.80
<b>Total</b>	<b>502</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Primary data.

Table 3 shows that 89.2% felt no side effects after using TM and 10.8% had minor problems such as skin reactions or unpleasant stomach. Trust in TM is increasingly growing as there are no negative outcomes reported. Since this data captures actual user views and contentment, it highlights acceptance beyond cultural belief also emphasising medical feasibility. This table also shows on-going use stems from repeated favourable results, suggesting TM can serve as both realistic and lasting healthcare choice.

**Table 4. Duration of Side Effects Among Patients**

<b>Duration of side effects</b>	<b>No. of patient respondents</b>	<b>Percent</b>
No	458	91.2
21 days	30	6.0
30 days	14	2.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>502</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Primary data.

Table 4 shows the data on the duration of side effects present in the patients. Data shows that about 91.2% had no adverse reactions, while 6% had symptoms lasting for 21 days and 2.8% had symptoms lasting up to a month. These further confirms that any side effects will be reduced of their own without any external factors and does not hold any time duration. This data essentially satisfies that TM acts as gentle, mild with secured recovery and low stress. As a result, it proves that natural therapy adapts well against the modern medicinal treatment.

Smaller group, roughly one in four, uses helpful therapies if symptoms get worse. These results imply that problems caused by these medicines are usually minor and fade without strong treatment. The unusual note about these providers is the flexibility that they offer, they believe in natural recovery although they are available when the patients require additional attention. Their approach suits a larger concept: traditional healing is a whole-body system, it is safe, adapts, and concentrates on the condition of each individual.

**Table 5. Additional Drugs Used to Manage Adverse Reactions**

Doctors' opinion	No. of doctors	Percent
No	77	74.80
Yes	26	25.20
<b>Total</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Primary data.

As shown in Table 5, doctors are more likely to rely on the inherent curing of side effects of conventional treatment methods, with only about 25% showing the prescriptions of further drugs. The rest which is about 75 percent are more interventionist and use supportive treatments when the symptoms become serious. Such a distribution implies that the side effects are often mild and self-limiting and do not need many medical measures. The significant flexibility of providers, and their trust in natural remedy and willingness to advance the care is an indicator of a holistic approach to treatment. This practice is in line with the concepts of the traditional models of healing, which focus on the concept of safety, flexibility, and individual care depending on the unique circumstances of the patient.

### 7. Association Between Side Effects and Curability Duration (Chi-square)

**H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no association between side effects and curability duration in adults while consuming herbal medicines.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is association between side effects and curability duration in adults while consuming herbal medicines.

**Table 6: Details of side effects and curability duration in adults by consuming herbal medicines**

Doctor's opinion side effect \ Curability of adult	No	Yes	Depends	Total
	Depends	49	7	7
14 Days and below	13	3	2	18
15–20 days	2	1	1	4
21–30 days	1	2	1	4
1–3 months	1	2	1	4
3–6 months	1	2	1	4
More than 6 months	3	2	1	6
Total	70	19	14	103

Source: Primary data.

Table 6 shows that there is a subtle association between the side effects and recovery time in herbal medicine taken by adults. The majority of the doctors (n = 68) highlighted that the time needed to heal is not fixed and depends on personal characteristics, including the type of the body, the dosage of the herbs, and personal responses, which reveals the lack of certainty in the results prediction. In spite of such variability, 76%

of the patients in this group of doctors showed no adverse symptoms, which indicates that the treatment has a more positive safety profile. Moreover, in instances of the less than two-week treatment period, the incidence of those with none of the complications was approximately 75 percent, which supports the possibility of shorter treatment courses being comfortably used. Nonetheless, a minority (3 of 19) also showed some concerns regarding side effects although with faster recovery, which could be a good reason to conduct further studies on the risk factor or how patients perceive the effectiveness of treatment.

**Table 7. Chi-square Test Result**

Chi-Square Tests	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	37.154 <sup>a</sup>	12	.000
Likelihood ratio	34.970	12	.000
Linear-by-linear association	4.668	1	.031
No. of valid cases	103		

<sup>a</sup> 81 per cent of the cells, or 17 cells, had an anticipated count below 5. A count of at least 19 is anticipated.

**Sources:** Collected and computed by Researcher from collected data.

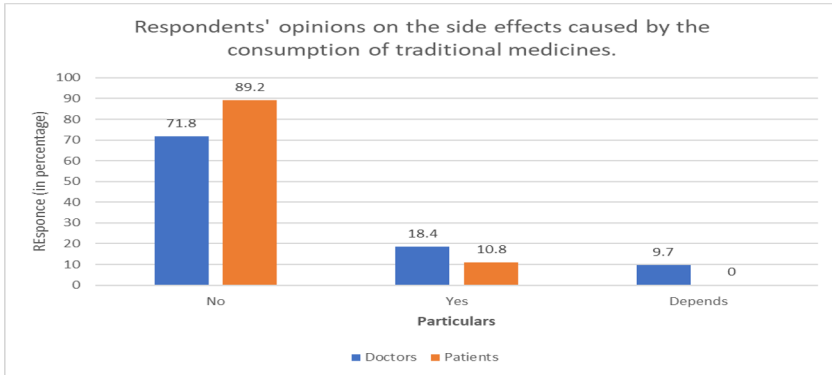
Comparatively, extended recovery times like "1–3 months" or longer tended to coincide more often with adverse reactions, although data points here remained limited. A chi-square analysis was used to explore links between symptom occurrence and time needed for treatment response (see Table 5.18). The assumption tested – that no connection exists between unwanted effects and healing timeframe among adult users of plant-based remedies – was evaluated. Results showed a Pearson statistic of 37.154 (df = 12), highly significant at  $p < 0.001$ ; therefore, this initial claim was dismissed. Moreover, the ordered relationship measure reached significance ( $p = 0.031$ ), suggesting some directional pattern across levels. A link between side effects and duration of treatment consuming herbal remedies was identified in this study. Further, doctors have claimed that various adverse reactions from traditional treatments occurred, such as stomach ulcers, gut inflammation, nausea, skin irritation or fluid retention, that could impact healing time.

**Table 8. Comparative Analysis of Doctors and Patients' Views**

Particulars	Doctors	Patients
No	71.8	89.2
Yes	18.4	10.8
Depends	9.7	nil

**Source:** Primary data.

The study reviews from physicians and users viewpoint, but does not consider vendors' input. Most members of these two groups assume that conventional remedies rarely lead to serious adverse reactions – 71.8% of clinicians and 89.2% of participants answered negatively when asked. By contrast, 18.4% of healthcare providers and 10.8% of respondents noted cases where negative outcomes occurred or were seen. Meanwhile, nearly one in 10 doctors – 9.7% – mentioned that risks depend upon personal behaviour like physical state, intake levels or bodily reaction. These findings indicate that although natural treatments are mostly viewed as harmless, however, these impacts differ among people, pointing towards tailored advice in usage.



**Fig 1.** Respondents' opinions on the side effects caused by the consumption of traditional medicines.

### 8. Policy Implications

Data analysis report of this study will provide a positive indicator to the decision makers to further develop the facilities and healthcare dedicated to the traditional healing methods. Also, considering the negative effects obtained from the doctors' and patients' perspective, there is always scope of improvement to incur traditional healing methods along with other contemporary healing methods. It is noted to be that this transformation will effectively lesser the focus on conventional clinics, especially in densely populated cities like Chennai. Alternately, this shift will offer more options for the users in order to navigate the best available choice for better healthcare.. Data also suggest that some users had side effect due to prolonged use of herbal treatment and inconsistent dosage prescription, and this also warrant further research.

In addition, doctors' trust in safety and recovery is fairly common, so all the initiatives that improve skills by shared training could gain more support. Such attempts will cause ordinary clinicians to acquire more concepts using natural TM, which will open broad directions to suggestions and referrals. Consequently, the process of coordination between various types of healthcare can get smoother.

Replenishing the right tracks may change once common solutions come in the scene, particularly since individuals of different economic groups already depend on them. Rather than ignoring these practices, the authorities should consider incorporating plant-based treatment as a health program sponsored by the state. To this, the assistance can come in the form of reduced prices, insured services or special assistance, especially in case of long-term or habit-related diseases.

When local communities choose the traditional healing systems, the key positive results will be observed such as strengthening of local economies, proper treatment of natural ecosystems and preservation of the traditional knowledge.

This finding of this evidence helps the researches to drive towards the direction of rules that are created with care into the category that would protect people without neglecting the degree to which herbal knowledge is shackled to culture, land use and local livelihoods. Such systems are not just of remedies, but also they are pervaded by way-of-living.

### 9. Conclusion

This research demonstrates that TM is still a viable, sustainable, and balanced and realistic healthcare choice in the urban sector as Chennai city. The result of analysis conducted on both patients and doctors has revealed that the natural indigenous medical practice is mostly consumed as safe and effective. The adverse reactions were also reported but most of them were mild to a point that they were not life threatening. This research also

confirms that favourable recovery results have continued to be emphasised by both patients and clinicians, which proves that TM is a reliable element of health care delivery.

The concept of safety and effectiveness created through treatment length, personal health and provider instructions was determined in this comparative study. The value of the monitored usage and proper treatment planning appreciates the statistically significant correlation between the period of curability and side effects. The general results back the idea that TM has holistic benefits as it is not only the physical symptoms that are addressed but rather the overall well-being that is based on the familiarity and long-term practice in terms of culture.

This paper brings to the fore the broader applicability of TM in advancing low-cost and inclusive healthcare beyond the clinical outcomes. It is highly accepted socially and economically by its use within the income and occupational groups. Also, TM benefits sustainable development that is based regarding the application of locally sourced medicinal herbs, the community livelihoods, and minimization of relying on the resource-intensive production of pharmaceuticals. In that regard, indigenous healing approaches are consistent with the modern aspirations of people-centred healthcare that is environmentally responsible.

Although the scope of this study was restricted to city (urban sector) and only self-derived data were used, the finding showed some good empirical evidence that TM has significantly developed in the post-pandemic period in regard to health-seeking behaviour. As our future research will also be extended to include the rural setting as the profile of research to determine the usage of herbal medicine. Overall, the general implications are reassuring to the fact that the age-old healing modalities are not yet obsolete in the technologically advanced world, thus offering culturally significant, risk-free, and sustainable life to well-being.

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