Research Journal of Biological Sciences 9 (5): 193-196, 2014
ISSN: 1815-8846

Ethnobotanical Study of Traditional Knowledge on Plant Used in Traditional Bath (Mandiserom) among Malay Midwives in Perak and Negeri Sembilan

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Abstract: This study analyzed the traditional knowledge of plants used in traditional bath which known as mandiserom in Malay culture. Mandiserom is an important traditional way in postpartum practice among Malay communities in Perak and Negeri Sembilan. The study was carried out through face to face interviews with Malay midwives as the respondents and collection and identification of the plants in the area. A total of 25 species of plants were noted and collected during the botanical surveys. Most of them are predominated by zingibers and herbaceous plants. In mandiserom, the plants are used to get rid the body odour for spiritual cleansing, for hygienic purposes and to ward off mystical forces known as makhlukhalus in Malay culture. Traditional beliefs and practices surrounding postpartum practice were highly prevalent among young women in Malay culture. However this traditional knowledge is seldom recorded and only passed down through generations. Therefore these new ethnobotanical records are a rich source towards preservation of traditional knowledge of plants that can be further up for clinical studies in Malaysia.

Key words: Malay midwifery, scape ethnobotany, traditional bath, malay culture, my sticle forces

INTRODUCTION

Water is beliefs to be a vital and sacred origin of life. It is regarded as an essential element in traditional healing, both practically and symbolically (Rinne, 2001). Traditional bathing in Malay culture means a total body bath from head to toe. It is designated for specific purpose and occasion, mainly conducted by the midwives (bidankampung). Midwife (bidankampung) in Malay culture often an old respected skillful woman who holds the highest place in the community and seen as specialist doctor in attending childbirth, assisting woman and advising young lady. They normally get knowledge through matrineally transmission, along the female line from either mother to daughter or grandmother to granddaughter. This knowledge is regarded as sacred and esoteric (Karim, 1984). Midwifery practice was primarily among traditional peoples with limited access to biomedicine. However, today it is also practiced in Western societies as an alternative to biomedicine and continues to play an important role in providing health care to women and children (Arvigo and Balick, 1993; Barrett, 1994; Bhuyan, 1994; Bourdy and Walter, 1992; Browner, 1985; Coe, 2008; Coe and Anderson, 1996; Liulan *et al*., 2003; Luisier, 1985; Parra, 1993; Viisainen, 1992).

As in postpartum practice, Malay traditional bath (mandiserom) is the essential part in after birth recovery that involved selected plant species chose by the midwives together with the taboos (pantang-larang) that must be complied during the bathing ceremony (Ishak, 2012). Malay culture believes in the concept that illnesses are the consequence of physical as well as supernatural causes. Supernatural causes include a wide variety of malevolent spirits (hantu) witch craft and super natural aura that emanate from slain animals and men (badi) and reflect the Malay cultural concept of the "universe" (Chen, 1981; OSMAN, 1972).

During the postnatal treatment and care, the new born mothers are encouraged to perform mandiserom starting from the 2nd day after labour with lukewarm water two times daily, morning and evening. They need to practice this mandiserom continuously for 3 days until the end of postnatal confinement week. About 7-21 types of plants will be used throughout the mand iserompractice. The number of plants used must be odd, such as 7, 9, 11,

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Fig. 1: *Pandanus polycephalus* (pandan)

Fig. 2: *Curcuma domestica* (kunyit)

13, 15 or 21. All the plants involved in mandiserom will be gathered by the midwife who normally plants them around her house. She will clean the plants and put them into boil. The boiling water of herbal plants then will be poured into a large basin and water will be added and mix. Before performing mandiserom, midwife will recite some prayer over the water and the newborn's mother is ready to take her bath.

Mandiserom is one of the spiritual treatments as rejuvenation therapy for a newborn mother. Most of the new born mothers are always under-pressured, experience stress disorder, low self confidents and esteem, always nervous and other psychological effect. Therefore the practice of traditional bath (mandiserom) is important to refresh the newborn mother's mood, rejuvenate the body as well as calming their emotions and physical attributes. Mandiserom also belived to prevent postnatal blues (meroyan) high or low blood pressure, insomnia, moody, headache, loneliness and unconscious reflection (melatah).

Most midwifery plant species are wild but many important species are native to certain location or area. The documentation of traditional medicinal plants used by the midwives in Malaysia is very limited and traditional knowledge is disappearing due to reliance of modern medical care. Therefore Malay midwives are becoming rare and less respected. The purpose of this study is to assess and document the knowledge of traditional medicinal plant pertaining herbal traditional bath (mandiserom) in Malay culture which is a part of an initiative systematic study baseline data for future ethnopharmacology studies and reference in Malaysia. Moreover, ethnobotany can make a positive contribution towards alternative treatment in modern medicinal practices by identifying locally available plant resources, indigenous knowledge and traditional healers (Schultes and Reis, 1995) (Fig. 1 and 2).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sample and study area: This semi structure interview and observation were conducted at 2 different states in the west coast of Malaysia namely Perak and Negeri Sembilan. The 16 Malay midwives were selected. Ethnobotanical data were collected according to the methodology described by Ishak (2012). A semi-structured questionnaire was used to extract information on the ethno-botanical uses of plants. To facilitate cross-checking of plant species, the specimens were identified through various floristic records or secondary data such as sources from books, internet, University of Malaya herbarium and Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM) herbarium, Kepong and also from previous research studies and journals to ascertain the nomenclature as further detailed by Bandaranayake (1998).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 showed a total of 20 plant species composition in traditional bath (mandiserom) for both states, Perak and Negeri Sembilan. In Perak, mandiserom practice accumulated 14 species which predominated by zingibers, herbaceous and shrubs. While in Negeri Sembilan 13 species has been used frequently in this stages of treatment. Analysis of plant materials composition demonstrated that zingibers, herbaceous and shrubs are the most common group of plants being used by Malay midwives in these two localities. *Kaempferia galangal* (cekur), *Zingiberofficinale* (haliaputih), *Curcuma domestica* (kunyit), *Alpinia galangal* (lengkuas) and *Pandanus polycephalus* (pandan) were observed being used in both localities.

Table 1: List of plant materials used during mandiserom by 16 traditional Malay midwives at 2 different localities in the west coast of Malaysia (Perak and Negeri Sembilan)

				Locality	
Local name	Family	Scientific name	Types of plant	Perak	Negeri sembilan
Bonglai/baka	Zingiberaceae	*Zingibercassumunar*	Zingiber		*
Bungaraya	Malvaceae	*Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*	Shrub	*	
Cekur	Zingiberaceae	*Kaempferia galangal*	Zingiber	*	*
Halba	Fabaceae	*Trigonellafoenumgraecum*	Herbaceous	*	
Haliamerah	Zingiberaceae	*Zingiber minus*	Zingiber	*	
Haliaputih	Zingiberaceae	*Zingiberofficinale*	Zingiber	*	*
Inai	Lythraceae	*Lawsoniainermis*	Tree		*
Jerangau	Arecaceae	*Acoruscalamus*	Macrophyte		*
Kunyit	Zingiberaceae	*Curcuma domestica*	Zingiber	*	*
Kunyit mas	Zingiberaceae	*Curcuma zedoaria*	Zingiber	*	
Lempoyang	Zingiberaceae	*Zingiberzerumbit*	Zingiber		*
Lengkuas	Zingiberaceae	*Alpinia galangal*	Zingiber	*	*
Lime	Rutaceae	*Citrus aurantifolia*	Shrub	*	
Nilam	Labiatae/lamiacea	*Pogostemoncablinbenth.*	Herbaceous		*
Pandan	Pandanaceae	*Pandanus amaryllifolius*	Herbaceous	*	*
Pisang	Musaceae	*Musa* sp.	Zingiber	*	
PisangKelat air	Musaceae	*Musa paradisiaca*	Zingiber	*	*
Seraiwangi	Gramineae	*Cymbogonnardus*	Herbaceous	*	*
Seringan/Beringan	Fabaceae	*Flemingiastrobilifera*	Shrub	*	
Sireh	Piperaceae	*Piper betle*	Climber		*

Fig. 3: *Cymbogon nardus* (seraiwangi)

Fig. 4: *Alpinia galangal* (lengkuas)

Both states portray different plant composition which exhibit their own identity based on different environmental conditions. The results also suggest that the selection of plant species composition for different process in traditional Malay midwifery practices is mediated by the availability of plant materials at that particular environment versus the origin of the knowledge was transferred. In several instances, environment and culture of certain midwife will influence the selection of plant species composition for every stage and process as well as localities. Nevertheless, the origin of the midwife and traditional Malay midwifery practices knowledge appears to be a key factor and indicator for the plant species selection (Fig. 3 and 4).

CONCLUSION

The documentation of plant species used in Malay midwifery practices in Perak and Negeri Sembilan has proved to be an effective tool for investigating the environmental and culture factors of Malay traditional knowledge in midwifery practice.Medicinal plants are seldom recorded in a written form by the villagers but are still mainly based on oral history and cultural traditions passed down through the generations. Ethno-botany can make a positive contribution to alternative treatment in modern medical practices by identifying locally available plant resources, indigenous knowledge and traditional healers. Development activities which put indigenous

knowledge into the context of natural resource management are particularly important. Therefore, future studies are needed in order to establish a medicinal plant information database in order to educate young people especially and Malaysian about the importance of ethno-botany functions and uses. By understanding the environment and culture of the society that influenced traditional Malay midwifery practices, it should be possible to preserve the traditional knowledge from becoming history.

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