ORIGINAL ARTICLE

DETERMINANTS OF 'PREFERENCE OF HOMEOPATHIC TO ALLOPATHIC TREATMENT'

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ABSTRACT
Homeopathy is considered as the most widely practiced and safe alternative form of medical treatment such as allopathic medicine. It was introduced by a German doctor who believed that minimum dose of a drug can alleviate the symptoms similar to other conventional forms of treatment. The objective of the present study was to determine the factors that influence individual's attitude towards homeopathic treatment. A cross-sectional descriptive study was conducted in different homeopathic clinics of Bhawalpur from January 1 to February 1, 2017. A total of 72 patients (both genders) were included in the study by using convenient sampling technique. A pretested questionnaire containing personal information and subject related questions was used to collect the data. The questions were interviewed from the patients in the local language and were transferred to the questionnaire in English. The study concluded that 87% of the respondents preferred homeopathic treatment while around 13% favored the use of allopathic medicines. The reasons for high utilization of homeopathic medicines can be attributed to the high efficacy, low cost, better taste, minimum side effects and forefathers trend.

Keywords: Allopathy, cross-sectional study, efficacy, homeopathy, side effects.

1. INTRODUCTION

The present era not only offers a conventional form of western medical treatment, commonly known as allopathic medicine, but many other alternative forms are also available. Among them, homeopathy is one of the most widely accepted and safe way of alternative medical treatment practiced worldwide[1,2].

Homeopathy was introduced by a German doctor Samuel Hahnemann about 200 years ago. It is based on "Laws of Similar" described by him as "Homeopathy". According to his philosophy, a minimum dose of the drug can also relieve symptoms of a disease similar to those created by strong and potent doses of drug[3,4]. Furthermore, due to different laws, every individual is treated as a peculiar case in homeopathy[5]. Complimentary alternative medicine (CAM) are medical interventions and techniques that are neither included in residency training nor usually taught in medical institutes and are not even practiced at hospitals of 21st century[6]. At present, around 70% of the developing world's population still depends and use CAM therapies on regular basis[7].

In Pakistan, people look for alternative treatment options of almost all kinds of diseases and disorders. The ratio of CAM users varies depending upon the area[8], condition of the disease and awareness about the illness[9]. Most prevailing illnesses for which Pakistani population seek for alternative treatment includes many chronic diseases like cardiac disorders, cancers, diabetes, epilepsy, leucorrhea, infertility, asthma, erectile dysfunction, alopecia, constipation, piles, liver and kidney diseases, etc. A number of infectious diseases like syphilis, breast abscess, gonorrhea, hepatitis, tuberculosis, dengue fever, eczema, leprosy, viral warts and unfortunately different types of complex bone fractures are also treated with CAM strategies[10-13]. The key factors due to which people seek for alternative medicine and treatments include high hopes of patients to get better, low cost of treatment[14], media advertisement with scientific claims, religious beliefs and influence and

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recommendations of hospitals staff[15] and family members, etc. Besides these influential reasons, there are some other factors of healthcare system and administration malpractices due to which patients adopt alternative treatment as a preference. The reasons may include the failure of empirical therapy, long duration of treatment leading towards patient frustration, patient's internal fear of surgery due to lack of proper counseling by the physicians and lack of availability of female practitioners to facilitate female patients with any gynecological diseases[16-18].

Though in some cases CAM therapies have shown benefits in curing acute as well as chronic disorders, it is strappingly assumed that these therapies show their effects of healing through their prime influence on the immune system of human body[19]. However, in Pakistan, there is a lack of substantial evidence regarding the beliefs and concepts of homeopathic treatment among general populations[20]. This study explores the characteristics of patients and their gender influence on the use of homeopathic medicine by visiting both homeopathic and allopathic clinics.

2. METHOD

The current study was conducted in different homeopathic clinics of Bhawalpur. The study continued from January 1 to February 1, 2017. A total of 72 patients (both genders) visiting homeopathic clinics were selected by convenient sampling technique. This technique is also known as availability sampling in which subjects are selected on the basis of convenient accessibility. The inclusion criterion was very simple. Only those patients (either male or female) were included in the study who gave their consent for sharing the required information while all those patients were excluded from the study who were not willing to share the information.

The study was cross-sectional and descriptive in nature and was performed using a preformed and pretested questionnaire having two parts A and B. Part A consisted of bio-data including education and income details whereas part B consisted of questions related to the subject (Table 1). After taking an informed consent, the interviewer translated each question in the local language (Urdu, Punjabi or Saraiki) to the patients. The answers were then retranslated to English and entered in the questionnaire by the interviewer. Data was analyzed by using SPSS (version 2015).

Table 1. Part B of the questionnaire

1.	Which is more accessible? Homeopathy or allopathy?
2.	Do you prefer homeopathy or allopathy?
3.	First-time homeopathic user?
4.	Did homeopathy help you cure the disease?
5.	Does your entire family use homeopathic treatment?
6.	Would you recommend homeopathy to others?
7.	Are you aware what homeopathic medicines are made up of?
8.	Are you using any allopathic medicine simultaneously?
9.	Has there ever been an emergency in the family?
10.	Have you taken the vaccine for any disease?
11.	Was the vaccine homeopathic or allopathic?
12.	Do you think there are any setbacks to homeopathic medicine?
13.	Have you encountered any side effects of homeopathic medicine?
14.	Have you encountered any side effects of allopathic medicine?
15.	Why do you prefer homeopathy?
16.	Why did you started using homeopathic medicine?

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine the factors that influence the preferences of homeopathic treatment over allopathic medicine. The results from this population-based study have been obtained from a representative sample of the population of adults in the midsize city, Bahawalpur, Pakistan. Since the present study is based on the evaluation of factors that influence the preference of homeopathic treatment to allopathy, the patients were interviewed about their opinion on the above-stated fact. Among all the selected 72 participants, 35 (48.61%) were male and 37 (51.39%) were female. Majority of the selected respondents were intermediates (36.11), followed by graduates (33.33%), middle or secondary pass (9.72%), and primary pass (4.17%) whereas 16.7% of the participants were uneducated (Fig. 1).

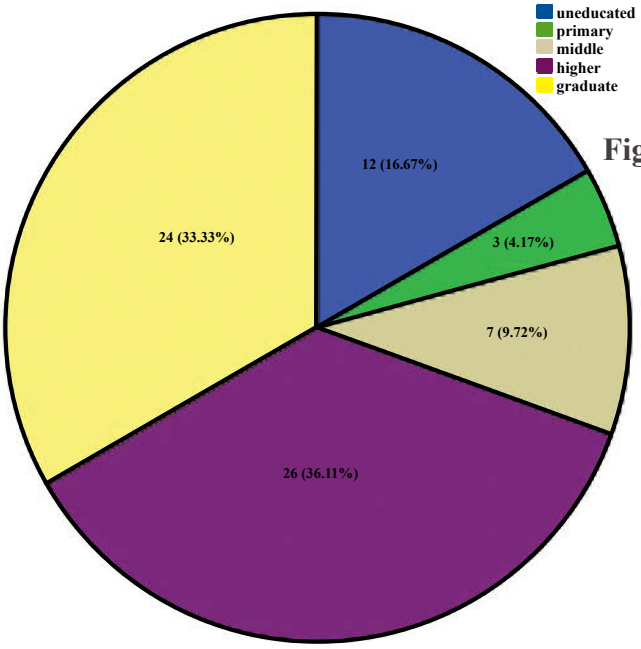

Fig. 1. The educational status of the participants.

The level of education is better than another similar study conducted in Lahore[21], where 61% subjects belonged to an education level of less than primary or no education at all.

Majority of the respondents included in the study belonged to the middle class (~51%) having an income of more than Rs 10,000/- per month (Fig. 2). While the remaining participants belonged to the lower income class having an income of less than Rs. 10,000/- per month (Fig. 2).

Most of the people think that both types of treatment are easily accessible. However, homeopathic treatment is comparatively considered more easily accessible than allopathic treatment (Fig. 3).

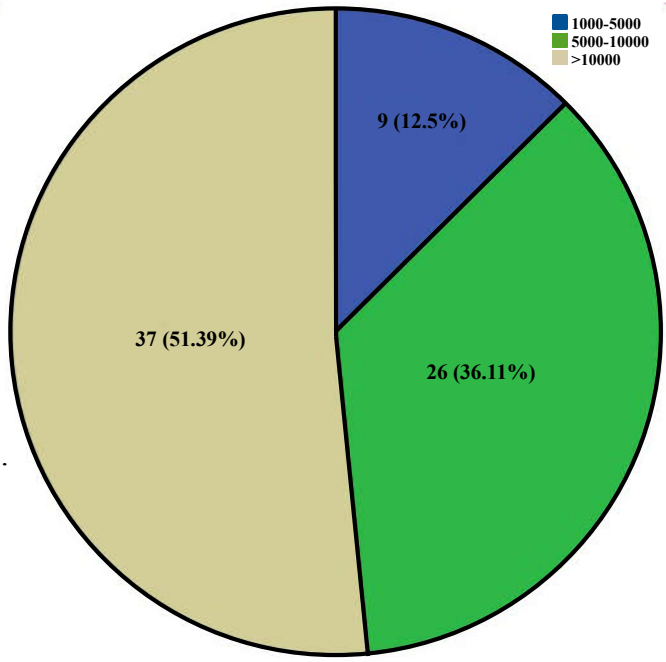

Fig. 2. The income status of the participants.

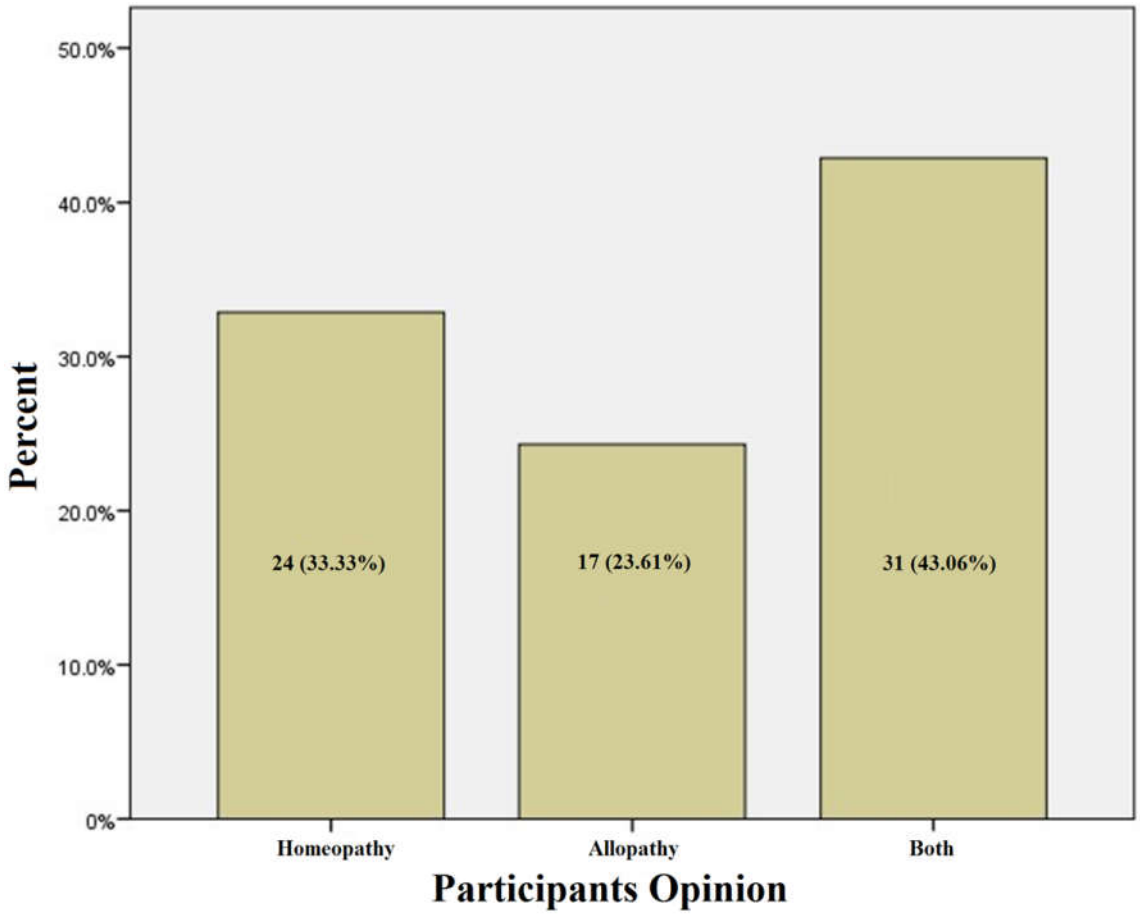

Fig. 3. Opinion of the participants regarding the accessibility to homeopathic treatment.

Among the selected participants, a vast majority of people (87.50%) preferred homeopathy over allopathic treatment while only 9 patients (12.50%) preferred an allopathic mode of treatment (Table 2). This preference is much higher than those of the residents of Karachi (67%), who preferred homeopathic treatment over allopathy[20]. A total of 23 patients (31.94%) among the selected participants visited the homeopathic clinic for the first time (Table 2). About 82% respondents were satisfied as homeopathy helped to cure the symptoms of their disease whereas in around 18% respondents homeopathy did not produce any effect against the disease (Table 2). Due to this satisfaction, it has been observed that homeopathic system of treatment is preferred in majority of the families (~57%) of the participants as well as they have recommended to others (Table 2). This is also evident from the fact that about 54% of the patients visited the homeopathic clinic on the advice or recommendation of others while the rest visited when they saw someone getting better after the treatment (26%) or when they become hopeless from the allopathic treatment (Fig. 4). This percentage is much higher than a previous study conducted in Karachi, where 72% people consulted a homeopathic practitioner on the recommendation of others[21]. On the contrary, a Brazilin study has reported that most people go for homeopathy due to dissatisfaction from allopathic treatment[22]. The lack of effectiveness of allopathic medicine actually put forward the demand for alternative therapies. It is interesting to note that in spite of high preference towards homeopathic medicines the knowledge of the great majority of the participants was very poor. They were totally unaware what homeopathic medicines are made up of (Table 2).

Table 2. Responses of the participants to different questions

Question	Response, N (%)	
	Yes	No
Do you prefer homeopathy or allopathy?	63 (87.50)	9 (12.50)
First-time homeopathic user?	23 (31.94)	49 (68.06)
Did homeopathy help you cure the disease?	59 (81.94)	13 (18.06)
Does your entire family use homeopathic treatment?	41 (56.94)	31 (43.06)
Would you recommend homeopathy to others?	62 (86.11)	10 (13.89)
Are you aware what homeopathic medicines are made up of?	49 (68.06)	23 (31.94)
Are you using any allopathic medicine simultaneously?	29 (40.28)	43 (59.72)
Has there ever been an emergency in the family?	46 (63.89)	26 (36.11)
Have you taken the vaccine for any disease?	61 (84.72)	11 (15.28)

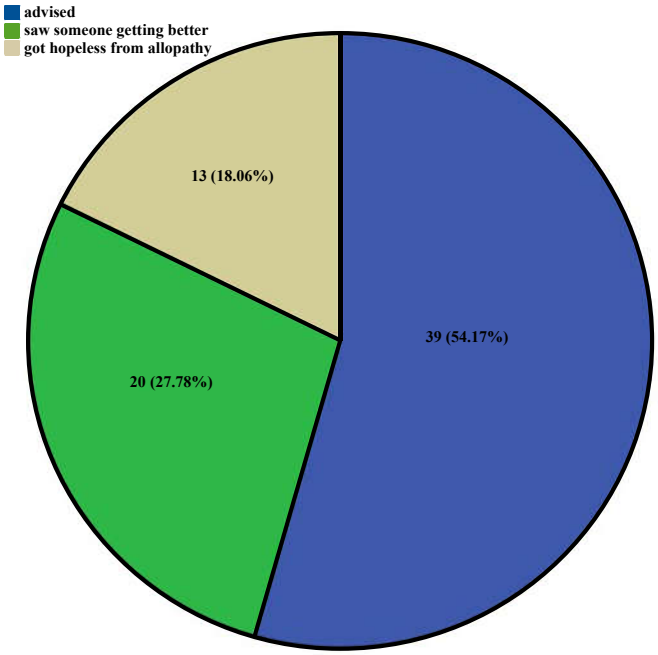

Fig. 4. Reasons for visiting homeopathic clinic.

According to the present study, it has been observed that majority of the patients (~60%) do not use both allopathic and homeopathic treatments simultaneously. However, in order to get quick recovery from the disease or due to less confidence on the physician and/or on a single treatment, some of the patients (~40%) were found using both types of medicines at a time (Table 2). An emergency condition has been faced in about 64% of the participants during the treatment while no such event has been encountered in the families of the remaining participants (Table 2). During the treatment, 61 patients (84.72%) took the vaccine for different disease conditions (Table 2). Among those 61 patients, homeopathic vaccines were given to around 92% while the allopathic vaccines were administered in only about 7% patients (Fig. 5). Only one patient was unaware whether he was given any vaccine or not.

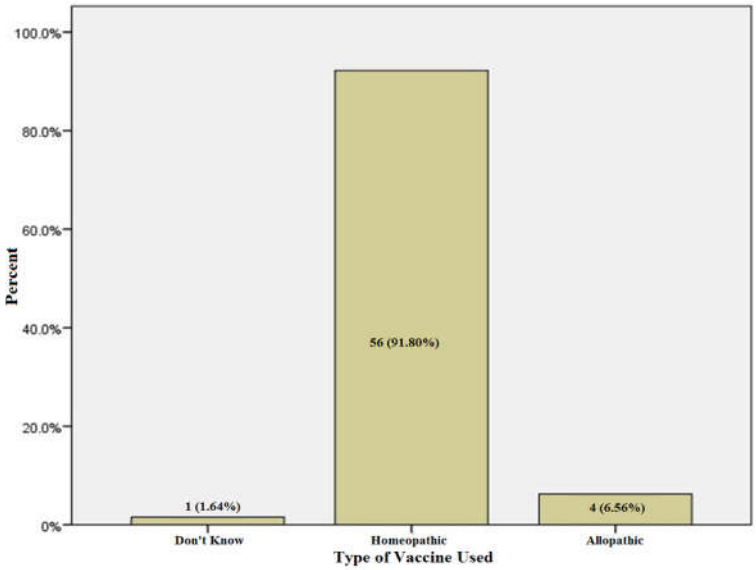

Fig. 5. Type of vaccines used among the study participants.

The study also found that majority of the patients on homeopathic treatment believes that there are no side effects of using such drugs (76.39%) while the rest were either unaware or believes that homeopathic medicines pose some unwanted risks or side effects with their use (Fig. 6). However, the comparison of unwanted effects associated with both treatments revealed that the majority of the patients taking homeopathic medicines remained safe from any undesirable side effect (95.83%). These findings are similar to the study conducted in Lahore[21], where majority of the patients (84%) also did not encounter any side effects from homeopathic medicines. Only a small proportion of 4.17% did suffer from some unwanted effects (Table 3). Similarly in case of allopathic treatment, 70.83% of respondents did not encounter any side effects while 29.17% did suffer from some side effects (Table 3).

The major determinants of preference of homeopathic treatment are found to be no or lesser side effects (40.28%), effectiveness (31.94%), economical (9.72%), good taste (2.78%) or all of them (15.28%) (Fig. 7).

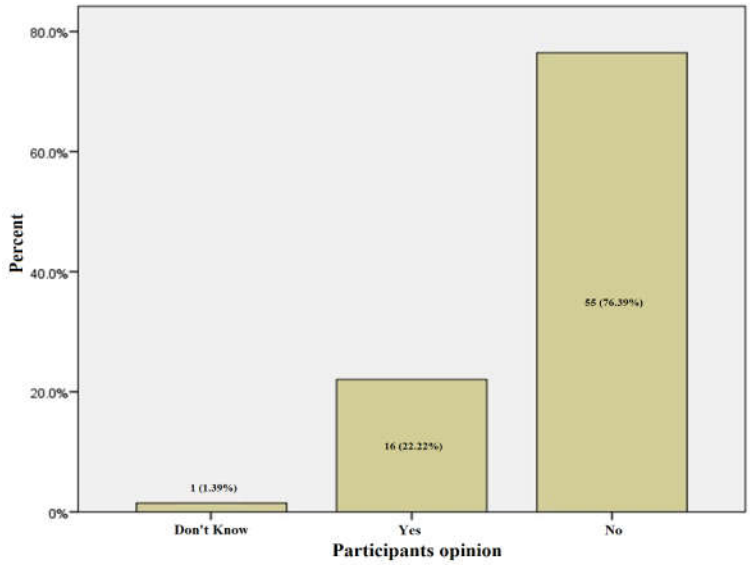

Fig. 6. Opinion of the participants regarding the side effects of homeopathic medicine.

Table 3. Comparison of appearance of side effects with respect to the use of homeopathic and allopathic medicines

Side Effects	Homeopathy		Allopathy	
	N	%	N	%
Did not appear	69	95.83	51	70.83
Appeared	3	4.17	21	29.17

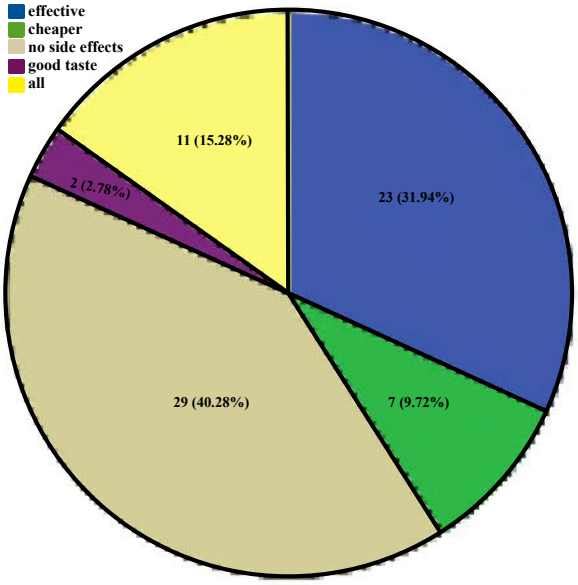

Fig. 7. Major determinants for preferring homeopathic treatment.

4. CONCLUSION

Both, allopathic and homeopathic, systems of treatment are in practice since ages. However, due to high cost of medicines, heavy consultation fees, unwanted effects, etc. a large proportion of our community now prefers homeopathic treatment. A more detailed survey including a larger population would definitely give a better idea of the preferences of the common man.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

A prior consent was taken in writing from the patients and the in charges of the clinics.

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