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Survey on the Usage of Forest Wood in Paediatric Ailments by Residents in Polikandy, Jaffna

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Abstract

Traditional health practices are strongly rooted in rural communities, where forest wood is widely used in paediatric care. In Polikandy, Jaffna, caregivers rely on fumigation, decoctions, and topical preparations, yet systematic documentation of prevalence and socio-cultural factors is limited. This study assessed patterns, determinants, and caregiver awareness, with secondary aims of identifying ailments treated. A community-based cross-sectional survey was conducted from March to August 2025 among caregivers of 98 children under 12 years using a pre-tested questionnaire. Overall, 95% of households reported forest wood use. Six species were identified: *Aquilaria agallocha*, *Cedrus deodara*, *Pterocarpus santalinus*, *Coscinium fenestratum*, *Santalum album*, and *Tinospora cordifolia*. All were perennial, comprising two large trees, two small trees, and two climbers. One-third belonged to Menispermaceae, while others were from Thymelaeaceae, Pinaceae, Leguminaceae, and Santalaceae. About half showed diuretic activity, while diaphoretic, stimulant, and alterative effects were also noted; essential oils and berberine were frequent constituents. Applications included fumigation for respiratory illness, decoctions for digestive, febrile, genitourinary, and ear conditions, and ash for skin infections. Usage was highest among low-income families, larger households, and those with limited access to modern healthcare. Caregivers cited accessibility, cultural beliefs, and affordability as primary reasons for use. Awareness of potential risks, including smoke inhalation and improper dosage, was limited (3% of respondents). This study concluded that there are six forest woods which are used in Siddha system for various Siddha formulations. Further scientific studies about forest woods should be performed in future.

Keywords: *Forest wood, Paediatric ailments, Traditional medicine, Siddha formulations, Pharmacological action*