


Chapter 6

Herbal Remedies in Nigeria: Friend or Foe

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ABSTRACT

Herbal medicine involves the use of medicinal plants for treatment of diseases in developing and developed countries. Plants have been used for medical purposes in human history and it's still widely practiced today. Herbal remedies have active constituent/ingredient which is known to have curative effects on the body. They are used as treatment and relief for various diseases such as diabetes, low sperm count, anemia as well as cancer. Herbal remedies in Nigeria have become popular and are majorly classified into monoherbal and polyherbal remedies. The use of herbal remedies tends to affect humanity both positively and negatively. Some positive importance reported includes high level of effectiveness of the herb, cheap and readily available with numerous health benefits and vitality. The disadvantages however are the observed side effects, high percentage of alcohol content, and lack of dosage regulation of the herbs.

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INTRODUCTION

Herbal remedies represent the oldest form of medical care and have been used for centuries, particularly in developing countries. Historically, humans relied on nature not only for food and clothing but also for remedies to treat various ailments (Nontokoza & Mthokoza, 2018). Across time, medicinal plants and herbs have been widely employed worldwide for disease prevention and treatment. Extracted herbs and their isolated active compounds have played a significant role in the development of modern pharmacotherapy, with many of these natural compounds serving as templates for the synthesis of contemporary drugs (Djordjevic, 2017).

With the advancement of science, the popularity of herbal remedies has grown significantly, with over 80% of the world's population incorporating them into their healthcare (Alstad et al., 2018). In response to increasing demand and concerns over quality and potential toxicity, several countries, including Germany, France, and Austria, have implemented strict regulations and established comprehensive herbal remedy registration systems to ensure safety. However, in many countries, including Nigeria, herbal products are often used indiscriminately, which can lead to harmful effects and, in extreme cases, death (Yusuf et al., 2019). While herbal remedies offer numerous therapeutic benefits, improper use poses risks. Once considered “ancient” medicine by Western standards, modern research has validated many of their medicinal properties, and numerous pharmaceuticals have been developed based on phytochemicals derived from these plants (Ezekwesili & Okaka, 2019).

Herbal Remedies

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines herbal remedies as practices involving the use of plants, herbal materials, preparations, and finished herbal products that contain active ingredients derived from plant parts or other plant components for the prevention or treatment of diseases (Nontokoza & Mthokoza, 2018).

Herbal remedies typically contain active constituents from plant materials in either raw or processed forms, often combined with excipients such as solvents, diluents, or preservatives. These bioactive compounds help protect plants against pests and diseases and contribute to characteristic properties such as aroma, flavour, and colour. Scientifically, these active constituents—known as phytochemicals—are classified into major groups including flavonoids, glycosides, tannins, alkaloids, terpenoids, and others.

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