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Changes in attitudes toward and patterns in traditional Korean medicine among the general population in South Korea: A comparison between 2008 and 2011

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Background: Traditional Korean medicine (TKM) is acknowledged to be prevalent among the Korean public, but few follow-up studies are available to confirm this commonly held belief. Whereas most survey studies have focused on the demographic factors influencing the usage of TKM, only a few studies have conducted a pattern or trend analysis over time. The purpose of this paper is to observe and document recent trends in the usage of TKM in South Korea and to compare overall patterns of TKM use over a period of several years.

Methods: A cross-sectional survey was conducted in 2011 to assess TKM usage patterns and public perceptions regarding TKM. An online questionnaire was administered to consenting respondents that focused upon individual preferences between TKM and current Western medicine, respondents' reasons for using TKM, the frequency of respondents' visits to TKM clinics, the reasons respondents visited TKM clinics, and respondents' perceived satisfaction.

Results: The results revealed that 66.6% of the respondents showed a positive attitude toward TKM. In addition, 69.3% of the respondents had visited TKM clinics one to four times during the previous year. Patients used TKM with the intentions of receiving acupuncture (95.3%), moxibustion (40.1%), and cupping (36.0%) treatments or to take herbal medicines (35.7%). Most respondents who had visited TKM clinics were largely satisfied with the clinics' effectiveness (56.1%). The factors most commonly associated with TKM usage included sex (female), age (50s), and education (college or higher), but the within-factor differences were not significant. Compared with a previous survey of other groups, TKM usage was found to have increased from 45.8% in 2008 to 69.3% in 2011. With the exception of acupuncture and physical therapy, most usage doubled or more than doubled.

Conclusions: The attitudes toward and usage of TKM in South Korea have improved between 2008 and 2011. This result will be used to explain outcomes of certain social phenomena and to argue for national support in the promotion of TKM.

Biography

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