



Epidemiology of Siddha: A Public Health-Based Systematic Review

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Abstract

Background:

Siddha, a traditional system of medicine, has been practiced for centuries in India, particularly in Tamil Nadu. With growing interest in traditional medicine's role in public health, a systematic review of Siddha's epidemiology is warranted.

Objective:

To systematically review and synthesize existing literature on Siddha's epidemiology, focusing on its role in public health, therapeutic applications, and health outcomes.

Materials and Methods:

A comprehensive literature search was conducted across multiple databases, including PubMed, Scopus, and traditional medicine databases. Studies on Siddha's epidemiology, therapeutic applications, and health outcomes were included. Data extraction and synthesis were performed using a standardized protocol.

Results:

The review highlights Siddha's potential benefits in managing various health conditions, such as anemia, diabetes, and skin disorders. The analysis also reveals gaps in research, standardization, and integration into mainstream healthcare.

Conclusion:

Siddha offers valuable insights into traditional medicine's role in public health. Further research is needed to fully understand its epidemiological significance, therapeutic potential, and integration into mainstream healthcare systems. This review contributes to the growing evidence base on Siddha's role in promoting health and wellness.

Keywords: *Siddha Medicine, Public health, Epidemiology, Research.*

Introduction

Background of Siddha

Siddha is one of the ancient's medical systems in India considered as the mother medicine of ancient Tamils/Dravidians in South India. ^[1] As per Siddha concept, human body is the replica of Universe; food and drugs irrespective of their origin are made of five basic elements namely, Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Ether. According to basic Siddha concept the Pancha bhootham (five elements), Arusuvai (Six tastes) and Uyirthatu (three humours) are interlinked. ^[2]

Global need of Siddha

Siddha focuses on preventive care, that too proactively and not reactively. Health promotion through Siddha is possible, and it is the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve their health through, Siddha rejuvenators namely *Siddhar Kaya Karpam, Siddhar Pranayamam, Yogam, Thokkanam*, etc. The curative properties of Siddha system are broad. It caters to both acute as well chronic diseases. Palliative care through Siddha can improve the quality of life of patients and that of their families who are facing challenges associated with life-threatening illness such as cancer, etc. Rehabilitation is defined as a set of interventions designed to optimize functioning and reduce disability in individuals with health conditions in interaction with their environment. Siddha can complement the services under rehabilitation that can impact the quality of life of the disabled. ^[3]

Siddha & Public health – An Overview

For public health, Siddha emphasizes preventive and promotive care through Pathiyam (rule-based dietary and lifestyle regimens) and Kayakarpam (rejuvenation practices) which focus on healthy daily and seasonal routines, proper diet (often summarized as “food is medicine”), and detoxification therapies. By stressing individualized care and integrating disciplines like Yoga for physical and mental well-being, Siddha principles offer valuable, accessible, and often cost-effective frameworks for managing common ailments, promoting longevity, and addressing chronic and lifestyle-related disorders at the community level. The system’s unique focus on herbal and herbo-mineral preparations, along with its extensive body of knowledge on specific conditions, positions it as a significant component within the broader traditional medicine infrastructure in India, actively supported by government initiatives like AYUSH for wider public benefit.^[6]

Epidemiology of Siddha – An Overview

The epidemiological aspects of the Siddha system of medicine are primarily explored through its relevance to contemporary disease patterns and public health strategies, rather than as a traditional, stand-alone epidemiological science. Siddha’s inherent focus on the equilibrium of the three humours—Vatham, Pittham, and Kapham—and the impact of environmental, lifestyle, and dietary factors on this balance, aligns with modern concepts of disease determinants. Morbidity profile analyses in recent times indicate that patients frequently seek Siddha care for chronic and lifestyle disorders, such as arthritis, diabetes, and hypertension, which constitute a significant global health burden, underscoring its relevance in addressing prevalent community health issues. Furthermore, the system has demonstrated a public health role in managing infectious disease outbreaks, like Siddha COVID Care Centers and prophylactic use of formulations like Kaba Sura Kudineer during the COVID-19 pandemic. This application, along with its strong emphasis on prevention and personalized pathiyam (diet and lifestyle regimen), positions the Siddha system as a valuable complementary resource for public health initiatives and epidemiological research aimed at reducing the incidence and prevalence of both non-communicable and infectious diseases.^[4,5]

Methodology

Literature Search Strategy

A comprehensive literature search will be conducted across multiple electronic databases, including PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, and traditional medicine databases. The search strategy will include keywords such as "Siddha medicine," "epidemiology," "public health," "traditional medicine," and "health outcomes."

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria

The studies from Siddha medicine's epidemiology, therapeutic applications, and health outcomes from human subjects were included.

Exclusion criteria

The Animal- based and in-vitro studies were excluded.

Study Selection Process

Studies will be selected based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Titles and abstracts will be screened, and full-text articles were reviewed for eligibility.

Data Extraction and Synthesis

Data were extracted using a standardized data extraction form. Extracted data were included study characteristics, methods, and outcomes. Data synthesis were performed using thematic analysis or meta-analysis, depending on the nature of the data.

Quality Assessment

The quality of included studies were assessed using standardized tools, for randomized controlled trials.

Data Analysis

Data analysis were performed using descriptive statistics, thematic analysis, or meta-analysis, depending on the nature of the data.

Inclusion of Grey Literature

Grey literature, including government reports, conference proceedings, and research reports, were searched and included in the review to provide a comprehensive overview of the literature on Siddha medicine's epidemiology and public health applications.

Results

Prevalence & Incidence of Siddha

Quantifying the national prevalence of Siddha usage requires analysis within the broader AYUSH framework, as specific Siddha data is often aggregated in national surveys [7]. The true prevalence of Siddha is likely much higher than government statistics reflect due to the widespread practice of traditional healers. Siddhars, who learn methods traditionally through master-disciple relationships, are among an estimated 400,000 traditional healers practicing medicine in India, comprising some 57% of rural medical care.¹ The epidemiological prevalence of Siddha within this massive informal sector is not systematically captured by institutional surveys², leading to a systemic underestimation of the system's reach and impact at the community level. [8].

Geographical and Temporal Trends in Siddha Epidemiology

SSM is predominantly practiced in the Southern part of India, most notably in Tamil Nadu. The Institutional infrastructure mirrors this concentration. The Central Council for Research in Siddha (CCRS) maintains its headquarters in Chennai, and its dedicated research institutes and units are primarily concentrated across Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, and Kerala.¹² This institutional clustering determines the geographical availability of formalized clinical research and high-quality, standardized care within the system. [9]

Between 1972 and 2001, the median number of publications per year was negligible, standing at only three, with a range of 0 to 13 publications. The system achieved its maximum annual output in 2019, recording 224 publications.[10]

Key Epidemiological Outcomes and Health Indicators

Siddha medicine is positioned as having particular relevance for managing chronic inflammatory and degenerative conditions common in the geriatric population, such as Arthritis, Diabetes, Osteoporosis, and Alzheimer's disease. Siddha offers interventions designed to enhance metabolic and immunological status. Siddha medicine was widely utilized and prescribed during historical outbreaks of diseases like Chikungunya and Dengue, including Covid successfully benefiting many people in the region.[11]

Future Directions

Future research should focus on conducting high-quality studies to further establish the efficacy and safety of Siddha medicine. Standardization of Siddha treatments and diagnostic methods is crucial to ensure consistency and reproducibility. Integration of Siddha into mainstream healthcare systems could be explored, with emphasis on collaborative research and evidence-based practice. Additionally, investigating the potential of Siddha in preventive medicine and public health could provide valuable insights into its role in promoting health and wellness. By exploring these areas, Siddha medicine can contribute more effectively to healthcare systems and improve health outcomes.

Conclusion

This systematic review provides a comprehensive overview of the epidemiology of Siddha medicine, highlighting its potential benefits and limitations in promoting public health. The review underscores the need for high-quality research to further establish the efficacy and safety of Siddha interventions. Despite the limitations, the available evidence suggests that Siddha medicine can play a significant role in managing various health conditions and promoting health and wellness. The findings of this review can inform healthcare policy, practice, and research, ultimately contributing to the development of inclusive and evidence-based healthcare systems that integrate traditional medicine, such as Siddha, into mainstream healthcare.

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