The role of herbal medicine in healthcare provision: a case of Kibera slums, Nairobi

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Abstract:
The study conducted was on 'role of herbal medicine in health care provision' and the study location was in Kibera's Laini Saba location. The key objectives of the study were: to examine the prevalence of use of herbal medicine in Kibera slums, to assess the factors that contribute to the preference of herbal medicine among the slums dwellers and analyze the challenges faced by the practitioners of herbal medicine. On the methodology, the paper gives the Site Selection and Description of the area under study. This study was a survey with the application of questionnaires and interviews. The research purpose was mainly exploratory whereby the findings were intended to offer more information and understanding of the research issue. The unit of analysis was the clients who seek herbal treatment in dealing with disease and illnesses and the units of observation included: 100 herbal medicine clients (users), 12 health care workers and 8 herbal medicine practitioners. The study relied on both secondary and primary data as the sources of data. Data for this study was collected through the use of both questionnaires (open and closed) and interview schedules. The targeted respondents were the herbal practitioners, health care workers and herbal medicine clients within the identified four villages in Kibera. Questionnaires and (key-informant) interview schedules were used as the major research instruments in the study. The questionnaires contained both structured and unstructured questions based on the study's research questions and objectives. Sampling Procedure was applied in the selection of clients, Herbal Practitioners and Health Care Workers. The findings established that herbal medicine plays a significant role in healthcare provision with respondents reporting that they had sought herbal medicine. It was further established that majority of the respondents had used herbal medicine for periods ranging one to ten years. This wide use indicated high prevalence and preference of herbal medicine treatment among the respondents. Factors contributing to this usage majorly included: affordability, accessibility, effectiveness, and Holistic Nature of herbal medicine. Although herbal practitioners have continued to provide services in the communities even before the introduction of western medicine. The findings established that herbal practitioners are still faced by operational and logistical challenges. The practice is also limited in terms of regulation, technology and appropriate machinery. Stigmatization is yet another challenge faced by the Practitioners who are perceived as quacks. Recommendations include developing national policies on the evaluation and regulation of herbal medicine. Creating a stronger evidence base on the safety, efficacy and quality of the medicine, creating awareness about safe and effective herbal therapies among the public and consumers. There is need for a comprehensive review and development of policy and legislation in the field incorporating standards of accreditation, training and research with formal collaboration between modern and traditional sectors.