

### Demand for government Ayurvedic medical care: a case study from the Rathnapura Provincial Ayurvedic hospital

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More than half of the world's population is still using traditional medicine for healthcare especially in developing regions. Traditional medicine as practiced in Sri Lanka for centuries consists of four main systems: Ayurveda and Sidda of Indian origin, Unani of Arabic-Islamic origin and Deshiya Chikithsa which is probably the oldest, and originated in Sri Lanka. Due to European imperialism, most of Sri Lanka's heritage was lost; among them the indigenous medical tradition. In the post colonial era, 70% of the total population utilized ayurvedic medicine especially in rural areas. Official reports of healthcare in 1927 record that 75% of cases were treated by Ayurvedic practitioners in Sri Lanka. According to the Department of Census and Statistics in 1971, the proportion of the population seeking traditional medical care was 50%. This percentage has now declined in all provinces according to the Consumer Finance Survey (CFS) of 2003/2004. On the other hand, there is evidence of resurgence of demand for ayurvedic care in the form of commercial herbal medicine and ayurvedic spas.

This research is an attempt to identify the nature and the determinants of the demand for Ayurvedic medical care in Sri Lanka. Ayurvedic treatment (adding both government and private together) is most popular in the Sabaragamuwa province. North Western and North Central provinces come second and third respectively. This study focuses on the Rathnapura district of the Sabaragamuwa province in identifying the determinants of demand for indigenous medical care. The study used provincial hospital of Rathnapura district for the purpose. The survey technique was applied. Data collection was carried out over five days to cover the different clinics. Diabetes, Gastritis, Vitiligo (*Sudu kabara*), Paralysis and Fistula diseases including piles are treated in special clinics on these days. Purposive systematic random sampling was used because the sampling framework is not clearly defined. The sample size is 215 out door patients.

The study concludes that the majority of the ayurvedic users are among the old age population and many of them are economically inactive. Majority of the patients are from the rural sector. In the cases of gastritis and *Sudu kabara* trend differs. There is a huge impact of media on the demand of ayurvedic care for *Sudu kabara* disease. Majority of the patients were highly satisfied with the treatment. Majority of patients came for Ayurveda for chronic diseases. A large proportion of people came for Ayurveda because of the failure of the allopathic treatment. Disease, quality, location, age and cost related factors affected for the selection of ayurvedic treatment for the disease.

**Key words:** Ayurveda, Health care, Out door patients, Traditional medicine, Sri Lanka.

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