

D-027

A preliminary study to explore the different characteristics between those elderly who used Traditional Chinese Medicine and not in Taiwan

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The utilization of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) is common in Taiwan. While evidence showed that the elderly were more likely to use TCM, the aim of this study was to describe the different characteristics between TCM users and non-TCM users among elderly in Taiwan.

“National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) in Taiwan-For individuals aged 65 and above” database was used in this study. TCM users were defined as NHIS interviewees who reported with ever made TCM clinic visits, using Chinese medicine ordinarily, buying TCM products or other herbal medicine, and receiving acupuncture or cupping therapies. In addition to the descriptive analysis, the comparisons of health status and education levels between TCM users and non-TCM users were performed using *Chi* square tests. The SPSS 12.0 was utilized to perform statistical analysis and *p* value <0.05 was considered statistical significant.

Among 2727 elderly individuals, 22.1% were TCM users. While the average age was similar among TCM users and non-TCM users, there were more female among TCM users (57.24%). More proportions of TCM users ever suffered from the following diseases than non-TCM users: hyperlipidemia (21.8% vs. 20.70%), asthma (6.82% vs. 6.35%), kidney disease (10.82% vs. 8.42%), heart disease (20.30% vs. 18.34%), chronic respiratory disease (9.65% vs. 7.38%), Osteoporosis (33.78% vs. 23.28%), hepatitis (6.66% vs. 4.05%), cataract (32.28% vs. 25.82%), psychiatric disease (5.16% vs. 2.82%), and arthritis (22.63% vs. 15.95%). There were more low educated elderly in TCM users than in non-TCM users. More TCM users reported to have even worse health status, as comparing to one-year ago, than non-TCM users (42.60% vs. 37.25%), while there were no differences on recent health status and as comparing to the others. TCM users tended to purchase medications in pharmacies and use alternative therapies, in addition to use TCM therapies.

TCM users and non-TCM users among the elderly in Taiwan were different not only on the demographic characteristics, but also their disease status, and self reported comparison health status. Further more comprehensive analyses would be needed to explore the whole picture of TCM use and its associated factors.