

Agriculture and Women's Health

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Abstract

Agriculture is the backbone of India and the most important sector among all. The role of Agriculture is significant in the overall Socio-economic development of India. It accounts for 18% of India's GDP and 50% of Indian population is depending on Agriculture for employment. Agriculture not only provides food and fabrics, it also helps in the development of major industries by providing raw materials and enhances the healthy life by contributing natural medicines. Health is a prime factor of a Country's development. Development of Health and development of Economics are interlinked. The Country's Economic performance is mainly depending on Health status of the people in the Country. Wealthier Countries have Healthier population. WHO (World Health Organization) has estimated that 80 percent of the people Worldwide are depending on medicines from plants. As per research data, it is found that three-quarters of the World population is relying on Agriculture for their well-being. Plants and plant extracts serve the nation by fulfilling human health care needs. Especially Women are mostly relying on herbal products for their day to day requirements. Moreover economically weak, Poor and marginalized people, who cannot access or afford to Modern medicines, depends on Traditional medicines for their Health care needs¹. This study elaborates some of the women's problems and remedies through medicinal plants.

Keywords Agriculture, Health economics, Natural/Traditional medicine, Women's Health, Medicinal plants, Dysmenorrhea.

Introduction

Health is a prime factor of a Country's development. The Country's Economic performance is mainly depending on Health status of the Country. Women play a vital role in preserving the health and well being of their societies. "Healthy Women leads to Healthy Children and it leads to Healthy Population which in turn creates Healthy World". Women are the caretakers of healthy family healthy society.

According to Geetha S. Iyengar, The wealth of a nation and the health of the future generation depend

upon women's physical and mental well-being.² Woman is soft, tender and flexible and this makes her move with ease and grace. Woman's muscles are soft and light. Woman does not have broad skeletal structure like man. In spite of that, by nature's characteristic gift, she has the power to withstand physical strains and mental pressures to a far greater extent.

Nature has, in addition, endowed her with the responsibility of perpetuating mankind. To fulfill her tasks, woman is being dependent on nature. Nature helps her in maintaining her physical body, her changing physiological functions and emotional states through Traditional plants³.

Generally speaking, the plants and plant products surrounding us will help us in solving our health issues. Himalayan sage scholars of Traditional Medicine have said

"Nanaushadhi Bhooram Jagat Kinchit" i.e. there is no plant in the world, which does not have medicinal properties.' We can get all which we desire from plant for our betterment, if we treat it to be in its own way without

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disturbing the law of nature. The Health maintenance is being done by the food we take daily. The crops that we cultivate bring harmony and ensure overall development of human body⁴. There is no need to search a plant with a medicinal quality. Every plant and plant products we use for food acts as a medicine, proving “Food is Medicine”. Generally the plants surrounding will definitely have the medicinal qualities to solve the health problems of the domicile as per the law of Nature⁵.

Research Objective: To analyze the role of Medicinal plants in solving the Women’s health disorders, in order to accelerate healthy Economy.

Stages in Women’s life: There are three important stages in woman’s life beginning with youth, passing through middle age, and ending in old age.

1. Menstruation
2. Pregnancy and delivery
3. Menopause.

These are the three periods and milestones of a woman’s life. In all the three stages Women face lot of problems physically as well as mentally.

In human females, the menstrual cycle occurs repeatedly between the ages of menarche-when cycling begins, until menopause-when it ends. In the menstrual cycle, changes occur in the female reproductive system as well as in other bodily systems. A woman’s first menstruation is termed menarche, and occurs typically around age 12-16. The end of a woman’s reproductive phase of life is called the menopause, and this commonly occurs somewhere between the ages of 45 and 55.

Menstrual cycle: The menstrual cycle is the cycle of natural changes that occurs in the uterus and ovaries as an essential part of making reproduction possible. The menstrual cycle is essential for the production of eggs, and for the preparation of the uterus for pregnancy. The average menstrual cycle takes about 28 days. It occurs in three phases: 1) Follicular phase (development of the egg), 2) Ovulatory phase (Release of the egg) and 3) Luteal phase (Implantation of fertilized egg).

If the egg is not fertilized, levels of hormones get decreased and the lining of uterus prepared for the pregnancy breaks down and sheds. Shedding of endometrium, the uterine lining is called menstruation or period. Women can experience lots of complaints during this period.

Three out of four experience menstrual discomforts. One of the problems during menstruation is extremely painful period or Dysmenorrhea.

Dysmenorrhea: Dysmenorrhea is the medical term for the painful cramps that may occur before or during the menstrual period. Menstrual cramps are caused by contractions in the uterus, which is a muscle. The uterus contracts throughout a woman’s menstrual cycle. If the uterus contracts too strongly, it can press against nearby blood vessels, cutting off the supply of oxygen to the muscle tissue of the uterus. Pain results when part of a muscle briefly loses its supply of oxygen.

Prostaglandin is hormone like substance that does contraction and relaxation of smooth muscle. Higher levels of prostaglandin are associated with more-severe menstrual cramps. Endorphins counteracts Prostaglandins. It interacts with the receptors in the brain which reduces the perception of pain and also it triggers a positive feeling in the body

Medicinal plants for Women’s health: During the menstrual cycle, hormone levels rise and fall in an effort to prepare the lining of the uterus to thicken for ovulation and then shed if pregnancy doesn’t occur. In this period women suffer with backpain, body pain, pain in the thighs, abdomen, hip, bloating, nausea, constipation, diarrhea, tiredness, headache, vomiting, giddiness, sweating, dizziness, fatigueness, depression, stress, irritability and mood changes etc. Deficiency of vitamin B12, vitamin B6, vitamin C and vitamin D can lead to nausea and dizziness during periods⁶.

The following Medicinal plants help to solve the discomforts of Dysmenorrhea⁷:

- Licorice root–Adhimadhuramver in Tamil–Can moderate spasms and alleviate pain. Contains glycyrrhizin & flavonoids which are antioxidants known to improve circulation and relieve tissues damage and also reduces inflammation.
- Foods with high Flavonoid–Onion, blueberries, black tea, green tea, bananas, all citrus fruits
- Ginger–Soothe menstrual trouble and fight the fatigue.
- Fennel–Perunjeeragam in Tamil–Contains anethole (a compound with anti-spasm effects)
- Chamomile tea–Samandhi in Tamil–Has pain relieving properties. Contains Hippurate–a natural

anti-inflammatory drug helps to decrease the prostaglandin production.

- Derris trifoliata–Angaravalli in Tamil–For painful periods
- Mentha arvensis–Mint or Pudhina in Tamil–For painful periods
- Melia azadirachta–Common name Neem–Vembu in Tamil–Acts as a Pain killer.
- Trigonella foenum-graecum–Common name Fenugreek–Vendhayam in Tamil–Acts as a pain killer.
- Black gram–Ullundhu in Tamil–For Uterine strength.
- Dolichos biflorus or Kollu in Tamil–For strengthening the Uterus and to reduce the menstrual pains.
- Vetiveria zizanioides–Vetiver in Tamil–Regulates Menstruation.
- Daucus carota–Common name Carrot–Roots regulate menstrual disorder.
- Desmodium triquetrum–Common name Sakuli–Sakkaraivalli in Tamil–Tender leaves regulate menstrual disorder.
- Ricinus communis–Common name Castor–Amanakku in Tamil–For sterility after Menstruation.
- Piper betel–Common name Betal–Vettilai in Tamil–Gives relief from perspiration and menstrual odor.
- Allium sativum–Common name Garlic–Poondu in Tamil–Fights against bacterial and fungal infections⁸.
- Vitamin B6–Can be obtained from Avacado, Sunflower seeds and Sesame seeds
- Vitamin B12–Can be obtained from Mushrooms, Broccoli, Soya beans and Asparagus.
- Vitamin C–Can be obtained from Kiwi, Guava, Orange, Papaya, Pineapple, Mango, Banana, Lemon, Grapes, Tomatoes, Strawberries, Broccoli, Cauliflower, Peas, Green bell pepper, Red pepper, Black currant, Parsley, Brussels sprouts, Honey dew.
- Vitamin D–Can be obtained from Orange juice, Soya milk and Cereals. Important in preventing menstrual cramps.

Conclusion

The traditional food and systematic lifestyle, adopting medicinal plants as food of our older generation kept their health in good condition. But present generation's food habits and negligence of the olden culture results in deterioration of self as well as future generation's health. Moreover medicinal plants do not have side effects and also it is economically cheaper. Especially at present women get Health awareness and utilize the traditional medicines for their well being.

Discussion

The general observation is that the agricultural sector feeds the population, animal population and also supplies raw materials to the development of agro-based industries. Infact, the agricultural sector also facilitate and promote women health through precious herbals. The herbal medicines are easily available especially in rural areas. When we properly cultivate herbal plants it will generate more income to the farmers as well as we can supply those precious supply of plants to prepare medicines and treat women's ill health. This effort will make people to avail herbal medicines at lesser price or at free of cost for all types of human ailments. The practice of herbal medicine will be more economical, natural and it will cut short the medical expenditure of the society. It is to say that this will lead to intergrated agricultural activities, natural way of life and healthy motherhood.

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