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Review Article

Mothers' and Healthcare Providers' Attitudes Towards the Use of Cabbage Leaves and Fenugreek in During Lactation: A Scope Review

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Abstract

Background: The World Health Organization advocates for proper integration and regulation of evidence-based Traditional, Complementary, and Integrative Medicine (TCIM) into healthcare systems nationally in response to the rapid growth of using TCIM worldwide (WHO, 2017). Fenugreek seeds are one of the most popular galactagogues for lactating mothers (El Sakka *et al.,* 2014). Additionally, cabbage leaf compresses have shown several benefits in reducing breast engorgement (Thomas *et al.,* 2017). Understanding the attitudes of both mothers and healthcare providers towards the use of TCIM during lactation is essential to promote informed decision-making regarding practices(Sim *et al.,* 2014). ***Objective:*** This review aimed to explore the attitudes of lactating mothers and healthcare providers towards cabbage leaves and fenugreek, to investigate healthcare providers' perspectives on these remedies, and to identify potential benefits and risks associated with the use of cabbage leaves and fenugreek during lactation. ***Method:*** The literature review employed a systematic approach to gather relevant articles. Electronic databases such as PubMed, Cochrane, MEDLINE, and Google Scholar were systematically searched using specific keywords related to the topic of interest. ***Result:*** Fifteen studies met the inclusion criteria. The review of literature provides significant insights into the traditional use of cabbage leaves and fenugreek in lactation management, elucidating their perceived benefits and effectiveness in alleviating breast engorgement among lactating mothers. ***Conclusion:*** The synthesis of literature underscores the significance of integrating traditional practices and natural remedies, such as cabbage leaves and fenugreek, into lactation management. While these interventions have shown promising results in relieving breast engorgement and enhancing milk production, further research is warranted to elucidate their mechanisms of action, optimal dosages, and potential side effects. Collaborative endeavors among healthcare providers, researchers, and lactating mothers are crucial to facilitating informed decision-making and fostering the comprehensive overall health of lactating mothers and their infants.

Keywords: Traditional, Complementary, and Integrative Medicine (TCIM), postpartum, Lactation, Breastfeeding, Breast engorgement, Cabbage leaves, fenugreek, healthcare providers.

INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization advocates for proper integration and regulation of evidence-based Traditional, Complementary, and Integrative Medicine (TCIM) into healthcare systems nationally in response to the rapid growth of using TCIM worldwide (WHO, 2017).

The published literature on using fenugreek during lactation has shown promising outcomes. Several studies agree that fenugreek has exhibited a galactagogue effect, increasing milk synthesis and secretion in lactating individuals (Sevrin *et al.,* 2020). Conversely, fenugreek supplementation has been associated with increased milk production, neonatal weight gain, and maternal prolactin hormone levels (Sevrin *et al.,* 2020).

Additionally, Breast engorgement is a common challenge facing breastfeeding mothers, particularly during the early stages of lactation. Multiple factors contribute to breast engorgement, including excessive milk production, ineffective breastfeeding techniques, blocked milk ducts, and breast infections (Bhuiyan *et al,* 2017). To alleviate discomfort and swelling, TCIM is increasingly favored. Among these, cold cabbage leaf compresses have emerged as an effective remedy, as they

contain sulfur compounds known for their anti-inflammatory properties (Choi *et al,* 2020).

Cabbage leaf compresses have been demonstrated to effectively reduce breast engorgement and pain in postpartum women (Rahmah *et al.,* 2022; Napisah *et al.,* 2021; Ozkaya, & Korukcu 2023). Specifically, the application of cabbage leaf gel shown more effective result than standard care in relive breast engorgement, Moreover, the combination of cabbage leaf compresses and lactation education were successful made postpartum breast engorgement a rare occasion for breasts to be seen as exposed and not be a part of the liberated breast movement that breast feeding (in all its forms) is (Napisah *et al.,* 2021; Rahmah *et al.,* 2022).

Due to mothers' willingness to use TCIM, the attitude of healthcare providers toward these methods is very important in order to answer mothers' inquiries and advise them about the effects and adverse effects (Shorofi & Arbon, 2017). Understanding the attitudes of both lactating mothers and healthcare providers towards the use of TCIM during lactation is essential to promote informed decision-making regarding practices (Sim *et al.,* 2014).

The present literature review aims to assess the attitudes of lactating mothers and healthcare providers toward the use of cabbage leaves and fenugreek as traditional, complementary, integrative medicine (TCIM) for breast engorgement relief and increase milk supply during lactation. By examining existing research and perspectives, this review seeks to shed light on the efficacy, safety, and acceptance of these TCIMs in promoting breastfeeding success and maternal well-being.

Objectives of the Review

1) To explore the attitudes of lactating mothers and healthcare providers towards cabbage leaves and fenugreek.
2) To investigate healthcare providers' perspectives on these remedies
3) To identify potential benefits and risks associated with the use of cabbage leaves and fenugreek during lactation.

Limitations and Gaps

The literature has several limitations. For instance, there was limited literature on the subject especially in Saudi Arabia. Limited studies have been designed to evaluate the current attitude toward TCIM among healthcare providers and healthcare consumers in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, future projects will advance their agenda and explore more on this topic. Currently, the attitudes of lactating mothers, physicians, and nurses on the use of cabbage leave and fenugreek are not clear in our population. Therefore, this study will address this gap in knowledge to create a healthcare system that is culturally aware.

METHODOLOGY

Search Method:

The literature review employed a systematic approach to gather relevant articles. Electronic databases such as PubMed, Cochrane, MEDLINE, and Google Scholar were systematically searched using specific keywords related to the topic of interest.

However, some of the terms databases used Saurus terms, and therefore some of the databases used the terms 'after giving birth' which is the same as postpartum. Using Boolean operators 'and' and 'or', including ('complementary medicine' OR 'integrative medicine' OR 'traditional medicine' OR 'traditional, complementary, integrative medicine') the researcher was able to combine various search terms and subject headings to generate articles relevant to the discourse.

The other search terms that were included in the search process were attitude of mothers and attitude of healthcare providers of the TCIM. All the duplicates were removed, and a thorough screening of the abstracts and titles was done. The first analysis was followed by a second analysis to ensure that all the articles included met the required threshold.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:

Articles were included based on being written in English, published in a peer-reviewed journal, with a good reputation, published on/ between 2018 and 2024, and focused on the use of cabbage leaves and fenugreek in lactation management, postpartum care, or breastfeeding-related issues, and the attitude of mothers and healthcare providers. Studies employing various methodologies, including experimental, quasi-experimental, systematic reviews, meta-analyses, and qualitative research, were considered. However, articles not directly related to the topic or those lacking relevance to the research objectives were excluded. Articles that had only abstracts and full texts that were not available were automatically excluded from the study.

Finding:

Initially, 59 articles were collected through the database search, after screening based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria, and relevance to the research objectives. A total of 15 articles were selected for inclusion in the literature review. These articles provided valuable insights into the perceived benefits, effectiveness, recommendations, and guidelines regarding the use of cabbage leaves and fenugreek among lactating mothers.

Synthesis of Evidence:

Identifying common themes was an important step in comprehensively analyzing and summarizing the results of each study. The use of an evaluation matrix was essential to categorize the results into themes. Each included study was reviewed individually and identification of themes across studies. This process

helped distill key findings into consistent and easily understandable thematic categories.

Studies Findings

Theme 1: Traditional Use of Cabbage Leaves and Fenugreek

A total of 4 studies were found in the nursing literature from 2020 to 2024 to determine the use of cabbage leaves and fenugreek. In this context, first, the study conducted by Khalid and Mohamed's (2020) in Malaysia. Aimed to review the observation of midwives' practices according to healing processes and herbal remedies after over a 30-year gap. Data collection was utilized by the researcher based on in-depth interviews and observation. The main findings revealed a sustained integration of traditional practices, including herbal intake for diet, baths, and massage, within modern healthcare systems. This integration reflects a cultural capital that views the healing process as integral, with traditional methods adapting to fit into contemporary medical practices, thereby reinventing as a new commercial form to support women's health post-childbirth.

In their study conducted in Iran, Razmjouei *et al,* (2020) and her colleagues aimed to explore the effect of non-pharmacological medicines on reducing breast engorgement in lactating mothers, considering the potential side effects of chemical drugs during lactation. They identified several non-pharmacological interventions, such as cabbage leaves. The findings show that cabbage leaves have a highly effective treatment for breast engorgement in breastfeeding mothers, with significant reductions observed in engorgement severity and pain compared to control groups.

Moreover, in a study conducted in Indonesia, Natalia (2024) aimed to assess the effect of cold cabbage leaf compresses in reducing breast engorgement among lactating mothers in Purwakarta Regency. The researcher utilized a quasi-experimental design with a pre-post testing strategy. The study included a sample of 60 lactating mothers, who were divided into intervention and control groups. The first group received cold cabbage leaf compresses, while the control group did not receive. The pain of Breast engorgement was measured by using a visual analog scale during the first day and the seventh day after receiving the intervention. The findings revealed a significant variation between the intervention group and the control group. The intervention group experienced a greater reduction in breast swelling. By day seven, the VAS value in the intervention group was significantly lower than that in the control group. This study suggests that cold cabbage leaf compresses are an effective natural remedy for reducing breast engorgement in lactating mothers.

In their interventional comparative study conducted in Egypt, Hassan and his colleagues (2020) aimed to study the nursing intervention impact in reducing the engorgement among lactation mothers in puerperal area and compare the effectiveness of cold cabbage leaves compresses versus Fenugreek seed poultice in relieving breast engorgement. By utilizing a quasi-experimental design, the study was conducted in the outpatient clinics and post-natal units. The purposive sample comprised 100 puerperal mothers, with 50 assigned to the Fenugreek group and 50 to the cold cabbage group. Data collection tools included a structured interview schedule and various breast engorgement assessment scales. The results indicated a significant improvement in breast condition after intervention for both groups, with the Fenugreek group experiencing better and quicker improvement compared to the cabbage group ($p < .05$). The study concluded that cold cabbage leaves compressed and Fenugreek seed poultice were both effective in managing and reducing breast engorgement, Although Fenugreek seed poultice demonstrated higher effectiveness and faster relief compared to cold cabbage leaves. The authors recommended further randomized controlled trials to explore the non-specific effects of these two interventions.

Theme 2: Perceived Benefits of Cabbage Leaves and Fenugreek among Lactating Mothers

A total of 8 studies were found in the nursing literature from 2018 to 2023. The first study was conducted in Indonesia, Napisah *et al.,* (2021), and his colleagues. The study aimed to determine the effect of cabbage leaf compress and lactation management on relieving engorgement during the lactation period. Employing a quasi-experimental design, a purposive sample of 60 lactation mothers, 30 mothers in the control group, and 30 mothers in the intervention group, which included applying a cabbage leaf compress on women's breasts and providing education, while the control group received standard treatment according to hospital polices. Data analysis involved the Wilcoxon signed-rank test and the NGain score test. Results showed a reduction in breast engorgement in the intervention group, with an effectiveness of 77.56%. The study concluded that the use of cabbage leaves with education during the postpartum period was effective in relieving breast engorgement, providing a cost-effective intervention option for developing countries and evidence-based recommendations for healthcare providers and breastfeeding women. Future qualitative research is recommended to explore women's experiences with these interventions and their feasibility for application in home settings.

In their study conducted in Turkey, Ozkaya and Korukcu (2023) aimed to understand the effect of cold cabbage leaf application on breast engorgement and pain during the postpartum period through a systematic review and meta-analysis. Between June and September 2021, the researchers systematically searched Turkish and English databases using specific keywords. A total of 25,996 results were obtained from the database search,

and eight studies were included for analysis. The results showed there was a significant effect on breast pain after applying a cold cabbage leaf compress. Meanwhile, no significant effect of reducing on breast engorgement. This study emphasized the need for more experimental studies.

In their study conducted in Indonesia, Kulsum *et al,* (2023) aimed to apply midwifery intervention to mothers in continuity of care to address breastfeeding problems during the postpartum period. Using a descriptive research approach with a case study method, the study involved six respondents with varied postpartum cases. Pregnancy care was conducted according to standard care protocols, and interventions were tailored to individual complaints, including the use of cabbage leaf compresses. The results indicated that continuity of care midwifery intervention effectively addressed breastfeeding problems, with patients reporting improved milk flow and reduced breast tension and fullness. The study highlighted the significance of continuity of care in managing postpartum breastfeeding issues, particularly through the utilization of home-based interventions like cabbage leaf compresses.

In Egypt, Masoud (2018) conducted a study aiming to assess the effectiveness of cabbage leaves in the postnatal period to relieve breast engorgement. The researcher utilized a quasi-experimental design with a purposive sample of 100 participants who were diagnosed with breast engorgement, which was conducted in the post-natal unit. The findings revealed a significant effect of cabbage leaf compression in relieving breast engorgement.

Meanwhile, Shawahna *et al,* (2018) conducted a Delphi study to achieve unanimity among healthcare providers and breastfeeding women on the potential benefits and harms of using fenugreek as a galactagogue. Involving healthcare providers and breastfeeding women, the study identified 21 potential harms and 14 potential benefits of fenugreek use for increasing human milk supply. The findings underscored the importance of discussing these potential risks and benefits during clinical consultations to ensure informed decision-making regarding fenugreek supplementation for lactating women.

A further study conducted in Indonesia, by Rahmah (2022) and his colleagues, conducted an experimental study aimed to address the issue of breast engorgement during lactation by developing and testing a cabbage leaf gel formulation. A total of 32 lactating mothers were participants in this study. Divide into two groups, the first group of 16 mothers received cabbage gel, while the other group received hospital standard care BID for a total of 4 days. However, Cabbage leaf gel showed a significant reduction in breast engorgement scores compared to standard care, suggesting its suitability as a practical intervention for breast engorgement during lactation.

Simbar *et al,* (2022) from Iran conducted a triple-blind randomized clinical trial aiming to compare the effect of a combination of "honey and fenugreek" with "fenugreek" alone on breastfeeding success among 75 breastfeeding mothers. The study found that the group using fenugreek had a marked increase in breastfeeding success score compared to the fenugreek-only group, suggesting a notable improvement in breastfeeding success with the combination.

Additionally, Eittah and Ashour (2019) from Egypt investigated the efficacy of cold cabbage leaves compresses versus warm compresses on breast engorgement and pain among 100 postnatal mothers. The researchers use a simple randomization by dividing it into two groups. The 50 mothers received cold cabbage leaves compresses, and the other used warm compresses. The study revealed in both groups a highly significant improvement in reducing engorgement and pain, with a higher improvement observed in the cold cabbage leaves group, suggesting the efficacy of cold cabbage leaves compress in relieving breast engorgement and pain.

Theme 3: The attitudes of lactating mothers and healthcare providers towards the use of cabbage leaves and fenugreek

A total of 9 studies were found in the nursing literature published from 2018 to 2024, investigating breastfeeding mothers' and healthcare providers' attitudes toward the use of traditional complementary and integrative medicine TCIM. In this context, First, Lactating mothers express positive attitudes towards cabbage leaves and fenugreek, as they perceive them as effective in relieving breast engorgement and swelling. Studies such as those conducted by Razmjouei et al. (2020) in Iran and Natalia (2024) in Indonesia highlight the perceived benefits reported by breastfeeding women, including significant reductions in breast swelling and engorgement severity. Additionally, Rahmah et al. (2022) in Indonesia demonstrated that mothers view cabbage gel treatment as a practical and effective solution for alleviating breast engorgement, further supporting the positive attitudes towards these interventions.

Vardanjani *et al,* (2021) in Iran conducted a cross-sectional study to explore the traditional, complementary, and integrative medicine (TCIM) used among 483 lactating mothers and its extent. The study found a high prevalence of TCIM product use, with recommendations from medical staff or relatives being the most common reason for consumption (64.9%). However, only a minority of mothers disclosed TCIM product use to healthcare providers (27%), highlighting the need for standardized approaches, evidence-based studies, and further evaluation of the effectiveness and safety of TCIM is necessary.

A further study, Eid and Jaradat (2020) conducted an ethnopharmacological cross-sectional survey in Palestine to explore the use and extent of herbal regimens among pregnant and lactating women. The study involved 350 participants. The result showed that Fenugreek (Trigonella arabica) is one of the most utilized plants by mothers during lactation. Recommendations were made to decrease the potential risks associated with incorrect herbal product use during pregnancy and lactation, emphasizing the importance of collaboration among researchers, healthcare professionals, and women to improve maternal and infant health outcomes.

In a study conducted by Mohanty, (2020) a cross-sectional descriptive study among 100 women attending Mother and Child Health Clinic using a questionnaire aimed to investigate women's attitudes towards the use of traditional complementary and alternative medicine (T&CAM) during pregnancy and postnatal period, relaived that a majority of the respondents had positive attitudes on the use of T&CAM, and prefer safe practices.

Healthcare providers also acknowledge the potential benefits of cabbage leaves and fenugreek in lactation management. Research by Khalid and Mohamed (2020) in Malaysia and Hassan *et al,* (2020) in Egypt reveals that healthcare professionals recognize these traditional remedies as viable options for relieving breast engorgement among lactating women. Furthermore, Shawahna *et al,* (2018) conducted a study involving healthcare providers and breastfeeding women, which identified the benefits of fenugreek seeds in increasing breast milk supply, further illustrating healthcare providers' positive attitudes towards these interventions.

Overall, the collective findings from these studies indicate a shared understanding among both lactating mothers and healthcare providers regarding the effectiveness and potential benefits of cabbage leaves and fenugreek in managing breast engorgement during lactation.

CONCLUSION

The review of literature provides significant insights into the traditional utilization of cabbage leaves and fenugreek in lactation management, elucidating their perceived benefits and effectiveness in alleviating breast engorgement among lactating mothers. Across various studies conducted in Malaysia, Iran, Egypt, and Indonesia, researchers have delved into the cultural and traditional practices associated with these herbal remedies in postpartum care.

Khalid and Mohamed (2020) highlighted the enduring integration of traditional practices, including herbal remedies, into modern healthcare systems, underscoring the cultural significance and adaptability of these interventions. Similarly, Razmjouei *et al.,* (2020) underscored the efficacy of various non-pharmacological treatments, such as cabbage leaves and herbal compresses, in addressing breast engorgement in breastfeeding women, emphasizing the importance of natural alternatives during lactation.

Focusing specifically on cabbage leaves, Natalia (2024) and Hassan et al. (2020) demonstrated through studies in Indonesia and Egypt, respectively, the effectiveness of cold cabbage leaf compresses in reducing breast engorgement and swelling among lactating mothers. These findings bolster the traditional practice of cabbage leaves as a viable and cost-effective intervention, particularly beneficial in resource-constrained settings.

In regard to fenugreek supplementation, Shawahna *et al,* (2018) and Sevrin et al. (2020) provided valuable insights into its perceived benefits and underlying molecular mechanisms as a galactagogue. While fenugreek has exhibited promising outcomes in enhancing milk synthesis and secretion in lactating rats (Sevrin *et al.,* 2020), its implications for breastfeeding women necessitate further exploration and dialogue among healthcare providers and lactating mothers (Shawahna *et al.,* 2018).

In addition to individual studies, systematic reviews and meta-analyses, such as those by Ozkaya and Korukcu (2023), have contributed to understanding the effectiveness of applying cold cabbage leaf compression in relieving breast pain and engorgement. However, the lack of consensus on its impact on breast engorgement highlights the imperative for additional experimental studies and standardized protocols to assess its efficacy in lactation management.

Overall, the synthesis of literature underscores the significance of integrating traditional practices and natural remedies, such as cabbage leaves and fenugreek, into lactation management. While these interventions have shown promising results in relieving breast engorgement and enhancing milk production, further research is warranted to elucidate their mechanisms of action, optimal dosages, and potential side effects. Collaborative endeavors among healthcare providers, researchers, and lactating mothers are crucial to facilitating informed decision-making and fostering the comprehensive overall health of lactating mothers and their infants.

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