

# **HEALING AS A MECHANISM FOR PERPETUATING POPULAR KNOWLEDGE IN MEDICINAL PLANTS IN BRAZIL: A LITERATURE REVIEW**

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**Abstract:** The use of plants in healing rituals has a symbolic value of care and health and constitutes alternative and popular traditional knowledge in health care. In some cases, the use of medicinal plants is the only medical resource present in communities far from medical centers. Objective: to study the stimulation of the practice of using medicinal plants and the presence of citations about the importance of the figure of the healer and the healer in these activities. This is an integrative review of the literature, in order to investigate previous knowledge on the topic and build a critical analysis from it. A qualitative analysis of the selected articles took place, of which 21 articles were found in databases, however, only 6 were selected for further study, of these, only 3 mentioned blessing practices and healerism in their analyses, interfacing with the use of medicinal plants. Finally, medicinal plants and herbal medicines are truly mechanisms of great importance in the perpetuation of popular knowledge in Brazil. Furthermore, the figure of the healer was found to be a reference in care practices, in the management of medicinal plants and in the perpetuation of traditional knowledge.

**Keywords:** Traditional Medicine Professionals; Complementary Therapies; Cultural Characteristics; Herbal Medicine.

## INTRODUCTION

The act of blessing is a traditional, ancient and worldwide practice, whose trajectory is based on the health-disease process and the use of medicinal plants for curative purposes by traditional communities. According to Marin and Scorsolini-Comin (2017), blessing, like other popular religious and medical practices, began to develop in Brazil during the colonial period, in the 17th century, the scarcity of traditional medical resources and oral transmission of beliefs, legends and spirituality perpetuated the medicinal use of

plants, roots, herbs and essences.

The use of plants in healing rituals has a symbolic value of care and health and is considered one of the most common popular religious practices, with the work carried out, for the most part, by women called faith healers/healers, who have a high level of knowledge on medicinal leaves and herbs. Furthermore, this figure makes a great contribution to needy communities and rural areas, due to the free service (DE SOUZA et al, 2021).

Such points are important for the aim of the present study: the interlocution of health processes produced by healers/healers with the use of medicinal plants and how such a figure is important to preserve the cultivation and use of medicinal plants, as well as transgressing the current hegemonic knowledge, taking into account the importance of valuing traditional and sociocultural knowledge in the use of herbs, whether through leaves, fruits, stems, roots (ARAÚJO et al., 2023).

The current study focuses on the topic due to the curiosity of understanding the figure of the faith healer in traditional communities, their relationships, their work and their importance in the history of that people. The importance of this study lies in the interest of highlighting unconventional health practices that focus on culture, faith and healing. Activities that are concerned with people's biopsychosocial well-being and take into consideration, people's individual and collective reality, since health production is a device that ranges from health technologies that consider the subject and their particularities to mechanized forms of Careful.

The general objective of this work is to study the stimulation of the practice of using medicinal plants and the presence of citations about the importance of the figure of the healer and healer in these activities, and as specific objectives to identify, through

an integrative review, the importance of the figure of the healer and healer to perpetuate the use of medicinal plants, through searches on scientific data platforms for articles that discuss the role of healers and healers in the perpetuation of traditional knowledge.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This is an integrative review of the literature, in order to investigate previous knowledge on the topic and build from it, a critical analysis aiming to narrow existing theoretical gaps. The production of this work followed the following steps: selection of the theme and guiding research question, definition of inclusion and exclusion criteria, identification of pre-selected and selected studies, categorization of selected studies, analysis and interpretation of results and presentation of the review knowledge (BOTELHO; CUNHA; MACEDO, 2011).

In the first stage, the guiding question was defined: how can the figure of the healer be an important way of maintaining the use of medicinal plants and traditional medicine? Based on this inquiry, articles were searched in the following databases: Virtual Health Library (VHL/LILACS), Scielo, Periódico CAPES, PubMed. The descriptors used were written in the search column in the database in the following sequence: Healers, Medicinal Plants, Phytotherapy, Traditional Medicine and Brazil. The inclusion criteria were: studies exclusively on the Brazilian scenario, published between 2012 and 2022 and written in Portuguese, English or Spanish. When the same article was identified in more than one database, only one version of the duplicate studies was maintained. This was followed by manual analysis of titles, abstracts, authors, year of publication, study period, target group and methodology adopted.

For qualitative analysis, an analysis was carried out based on hermeneutics-dialectics,

so that the analyzed content was ordered and categorized based on the pre-defined thematic text. Researchers identified keywords or phrases within search relevance. Then, the resulting product was explored to develop a structure into themes to facilitate the understanding of the texts, read in full. Finally, to arrive at the contribution gained by the study in relation to what is pointed out by the theoretical framework, the researchers made the categorization based on the treatment of the material and theorization about the data following the basis established by Minayo (2002).

As this was a bibliographic study, it was not necessary to request approval from the Ethics Committee to carry out the study. It is declared that there are no conflicts of interest of the authors in the management of the results.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 21 articles were found, of which: Four belonged to Periódicos CAPES and 17 to the Virtual Health Library (VHL/Lilacs). Of these 21 articles, 15 were discarded because they did not correspond to the inclusion criteria applied in the research. Furthermore, given the complexity of the issue that involves the perpetuation of popular knowledge and traditional medicine through traditional medicine, it is worth noting that the number of articles presented that could be used in the work's theme is not very significant. Of the 21 articles that appeared on the search portals, only 6 were selected for further study, of which only 3 mentioned the practices of blessing and healing in their analyses, interfacing with the use of medicinal plants.

Thus, with the aim of systematizing articles that discuss the role of healers in the perpetuation of traditional knowledge in a clear way, the information collected in all works, a table was constructed, which contains the name of the article, the authors, the

objectives of the studies, and the perspective on the role of healers in the perpetuation of popular knowledge and the use of medicinal plants.

It was identified that the perspectives on medicinal plants and healing practices among healers and healers is present in three of the six articles, they are: "The use of medicinal plants and the role of faith in family care", "Popular healing practices and the use of medicinal plants by riverside mothers in child care" and "Popular use of medicinal plants in wound healing: implications for nursing". The mentions made in the articles directly relate the role of healing practices in the perpetuation of popular knowledge and the use of medicinal plants, going in the same line as the issue raised in the present work (PIRIZ et al., 2015; LIMA et al., 2017a; LIMA et al., 2017b).

Regarding the importance of the figure of the healer and the healer for the perpetuation of the use of medicinal plants, it was noticed that the population has confidence in traditional wisdom in the figure of the healer, especially the healer, a respected woman, who was widely cited in the works. It was noticed that the knowledge of these women was passed from generation to generation regarding how to bless and knowledge of the species used in different ways, in addition to religious beliefs related to medicinal plants (LIMA et al., 2017b).

However, citizens of local communities and health professionals were also cited as having information about medicinal plants. In this context, it is worth noting that most of the therapeutic purposes of these vegetables have their use scientifically proven. Furthermore, it was observed that diseases may have their etiology related to mystical aspects, known as cultural diseases, whose cure is directly associated with the figure of healers. Health problems and physical illnesses present a

Article	Authors (Year)	Goals	Considerations/conclusions
Compilation of surveys on the use of medicinal plants in Rio Grande do Sul	Dresch RR <i>et al</i> (2021)	Consolidate the study base into a list of the species most used for medicinal purposes in the state.	The work culminated in the publication of the State List of Medicinal Plants of interest to the SUS in Rio Grande do Sul (REPLAME/RS). There was no mention of the use of medicinal plants by healers, only the cataloging of species.
The use of medicinal plants and the role of faith in family care	Lima CAB, <i>et al</i> (2017)	Understand the use of medicinal plants and the role of faith in the family care system.	The use of medicinal plants and faith in family care go beyond biological health. This care system involves reciprocity, bonding, ethics and the gift of healing. Healers/healers and the ritual of blessing are important for the self-care of this social group. The species were catalogued.
Popular healing practices and the use of medicinal plants by riverside mothers in child care	Lima RFS, <i>et al</i> (2017)	Analyze popular healing practices with medicinal plants by riverside mothers in caring for their children.	The work mentioned healers, faith healers and specialists in healing practices present in the community, reiterating their importance, and cataloged all the species used and their use.
Popular use of medicinal plants in wound healing: implications for nursing	Piriz MA, <i>et al</i> (2015)	Identify medicinal plants recommended for treating wounds.	It addresses the role of healers/healers in perpetuating knowledge about medicinal plants used in wound healing. The species were catalogued.
Use of herbal medicines and medicinal plants in different segments of society	Gadelha, CS <i>et al</i> (2015)	Evaluate the use of home remedies in Primary Care and the variables that influenced users' choice of this type of therapy.	The work did not mention the use of medicinal plants by healers. The species were catalogued.
Use of medicinal plants as home remedies in Primary Care in Blumenau, Santa Catarina, Brazil	Zeni, ALB <i>et al</i> (2017)	Evaluate the use of herbal medicines and medicinal plants in basic health in Sousa PB, by health professionals and patients.	The work did not mention the use of medicinal plants by healers. The species were catalogued.

Table 1 - Description of the articles selected for this integrative literature review

Source: Own author

variety of therapeutic resources, with the association of allopathy and popular herbal medicine being common (PIRIZ et al., 2015; LIMA et al., 2017a; LIMA et al., 2017b).

It is worth mentioning that all species mentioned in the studies were, in some way, catalogued, helping to promote the safe use of species by the population and increasing access to qualified information for health professionals on the topic. Regarding the citation of the figure of the healer or healer, most works highlight the relationship between the practice of blessing and the use of medicinal plants. However, studies have shown that the promotion of safe use and perpetuation of traditional knowledge about medicinal plants permeates different segments of society, as well as the family and community environment in its socioeconomic and geographic specificities through figures who are also important in this process, they are : mothers in the domestic environment - resulting from gender issues in relation to the social roles of care practices - and community leaders (DRESCH et. al, 2021; LIMA, et. al, 2017a; LIMA, et. al, 2017b; PIRIZ, et. al, 2015; GADELHA et. al, 2015; ZENI, et.al, 2017).

Thus, when considering that the articulation of science with the perspective of care, through traditional knowledge, values and strengthens in an integral way, skills to improve professional practice and care in health professionals, it can result in a form of strengthening community ties between professionals and users of health services and promoting interest and increased scientific research on the topic.

In this sense, it is clear that this situation is related to the development of this work, considering that healers, as well as other agents in social dynamics, are reference people in communities with great influence on health professionals, in the process's health-disease and academic research on the therapeutic use

of medicinal plants.

## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

It can be concluded, from this integrative literature review, that medicinal plants and herbal medicines are truly mechanisms of great importance in the perpetuation of traditional medicine and popular knowledge in Brazil. It was evident that, although there is no uniqueness of the subjects who perpetuate these practices, we have the great role of the faith healer woman as the main one cited in the possession of ancestral knowledge about medicinal plants, followed by historically established social figures who share this knowledge in their communities. and health professionals working in primary health care, mostly.

Furthermore, the figure of the healer was found to be a reference in care practices, in the management of medicinal plants and in the perpetuation of traditional knowledge. Therefore, this figure must be preserved for the purposes of promoting health and perpetuating Traditional Medicine, always safely in conjunction with health professionals with training in phytotherapy, who are still scarce given their demand. Furthermore, there was a lack of studies on the topic to the detriment of the importance of such work for maintaining and disseminating knowledge about the use of medicinal plants in different social contexts.

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