



A Scoping Review of Indigenous Medicinal Knowledge in Somalia: An African Perspective

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Abstract

Indigenous medicinal knowledge (IMK) is a significant component of healthcare in Somalia, particularly within obstetrics and gynaecology. This knowledge system, however, remains largely undocumented and is vulnerable to erosion from socio-political factors and modernisation. A systematic mapping of its scope is a necessary step towards informed preservation and potential integration. This scoping review aimed to map the available literature on Somali IMK specific to women's health. Its objectives were to catalogue the documented medicinal plants and practices, identify the gynaecological and obstetric conditions they are used to treat, and to analyse gaps in the existing research. The review was conducted according to the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) methodology for scoping reviews. A systematic search was performed across several academic databases and grey literature sources. Included studies focused on IMK applications in Somali women's health. Data were extracted and analysed thematically. The search identified a limited but relevant body of literature. Findings indicate a predominant use of herbal preparations, primarily for managing pregnancy-related complaints, postpartum care, and gynaecological infections. Many documented remedies originate from a narrow range of plant families, such as Fabaceae and Lamiaceae. Critical gaps were noted, including a substantial lack of clinical data on safety and efficacy, and minimal documentation of the associated socio-cultural rituals and belief systems. Somali IMK for women's health constitutes a rich repository of practice that is critically under-researched. Current literature serves mainly as a catalogue of plant use, with insufficient engagement with knowledge holders or assessment of health outcomes. This highlights its vulnerable state and the need for ethically conducted research. Future work should prioritise ethical, community-participatory documentation to preserve IMK. Interdisciplinary studies evaluating the safety and efficacy of prevalent remedies are essential. Furthermore, the development of policy frameworks to protect intellectual property and integrate validated practices should be considered. Indigenous knowledge, traditional medicine, Somalia, obstetrics, gynaecology, medicinal plants, scoping review. This review provides a consolidated overview of the documented scope of Somali indigenous medicinal knowledge in women's health, clarifies its current research limitations, and proposes directions for future ethical and interdisciplinary enquiry.

Keywords: *Indigenous medicinal knowledge, Traditional medicine, Somalia, Obstetrics and gynaecology, Scoping review, African traditional medicine, Ethnomedicine*



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