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"Filling gaps and removing traps
for sustainable resource management"

Urban Ethnobotany: Medicinal Plants Used for the Treatment of Noncommunicable Diseases in Santa Marta, Colombia

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Abstract

Colombian population is considerably threatened by noncommunicable diseases. However, as traditional medicine is still popular in Colombia, the local people do not hesitate to use medicinal plants for the treatment of a wide range of health disorders. This research aimed to inventory medicinal plants used for the treatment of obesity, diabetes, hypertension and heart diseases available within local herbal shops (herboristerías). Data were collected in the period from September 2016 till February 2017 in 7 herboristerías in the city of Santa Marta through semi-structured and open-ended interviews. First, the informants (herbalists in the sampled shops) was asked for the basic socio-economic information about the shop and the informant. Subsequently, the informants were asked to mention all plants prescribed for the treatment of each targetted disease and the plant parts used, mode of preparation and application. The study documented 53 folk taxa corresponding to 56 plant species, and belonging to 35 botanical families. The most frequently reported plant species were *Anacardium occidentale*, *Moringa oleifera* and *Bauhinia sp.* for the treatment of diabetes; *Marrubium vulgare* in obesity; *Salvia palifolia* for the treatment of hypertension; and *Phthirusa stelis* in heart diseases. Quantitative ethnobotanical indices were calculated to determine the most important species to treat each disease type and to compare the species variability among herboristerías. In general, there is a wide range of medicinal species. Across herboristerías 30 unique species were documented, meaning the Informant Consensus Factor was generally low. We also documented promising plant species which were not subjected to phytochemical research so far.

Keywords: Diabetes, heart diseases, hypertension, medical plants, obesity, South America

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