
**TRADITIONAL MEDICINE AND MEDITERRANEAN VEGETATION IN
PORTUGUESE COMMUNITY, EUROPE**

Maria Inês Pires Neves Esteves¹
Olga Duarte Silva²
Maria Corette Pasa³

ABSTRACT:(TRADITIONAL MEDICINE AND MEDITERRANEAN VEGETATION IN PORTUGUESE COMMUNITY, EUROPE). Ethnomedicine is a way of recording traditional customs concerning the use of plants by communities. The present study constitutes a contribution to the ethnobotanical study of the medicinal and aromatic plants used in the Idanha-Nova Village in Portugal. The corpus of the work is composed of 40 individuals between the ages of 45 and 100. In the methodology was applied semistructured interviews, direct observation, oral history, guided tour and photographic record. Some 60 plants were identified, with emphasis on poejo, neveda, and lemon balm, wild Malvae, seven-sangria grass, corn beards and wild life. The plants are mostly used in the form of tea, for treatments of constipation, menstrual pains, urinary infections and wound infection. The Mediterranean culture is expressive as it brings traditional knowledge closer to the local ethnomedicine.

Keywords: Mediterranean culture, ethnobotany, traditional community

RESUMO: A Etnomedicina constitui um modo de registar os costumes tradicionais relativos à utilização das plantas pelas comunidades. O estudo aqui apresentado constitui um contributo para o estudo etnobotânico das plantas medicinais e aromáticas usadas na Aldeia de Idanha- Nova, em Portugal. O *corpus* do trabalho está composto por 40 indivíduos com idades entre os 45 e os 100 anos. Na metodologia foi aplicado entrevistas do tipo semi-estruturada, observação direta, história oral, turnê guiada e registro fotográfico. Foram identificadas cerca de 60 plantas, com destaque para poejo, néveda, e erva-cidreira, Malvas silvestres, a erva-das-sete-sangrias, barbas do milho e salva-brava. As plantas são na sua maioria utilizadas sob a forma de chá, para tratamentos de constipação, dores menstruais, infeções urinárias e infeção de feridas. A cultura mediterrânea é expressiva ao aproximar os conhecimentos tradicionais à etnomedicina local.

Palavras-chave: Cultura mediterrânea, etnobotânica, comunidade tradicional

¹MSc. Faculdade de Coimbra. Portugal. E-mail: mipnesteves@gmail.com

²Dra. Departamento de Farmácia. FFULisboa. Lisboa. Portugal. E-mail: osilva@campus.ul.pt

³Dra. Departamento de Botânica e Ecologia. IB. UFMT. E-mail: pasaufmt@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

The traditional medicine is practiced by ethnic groups, which through interdisciplinary methods of ethnobotany and anthropology, focuses on traditional knowledge that is transmitted between generations through orality (WHO, 2002). We define the traditional medicine as not only mere practices but also a study of much knowledge, and beliefs that incorporate herbal, animal or mineral remedies, spiritual therapies, manual techniques and exercises; they are also applied singly or in combination to maintain well-being, as well as to treat, diagnose, or prevent diseases (WHO, 2007).

For Voeks (2017), ethnobotany is the study and interpretation of human knowledge about the cultural meaning, management and traditional uses of flora elements, and describes it as a dynamic relationship between plants and people.

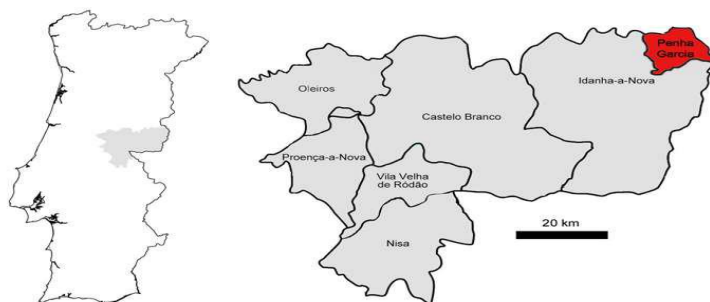
Emphasizing the importance of plant resources in traditional medicine, as an alternative therapy for the treatment of diseases, the aim was to register cultural repertoires involving local ethnobotanical knowledge.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Study site

Indanhaa-Nova community is a Portuguese village (40° 2 '36, 55 "N and 6° 58 '40,93" W) characterized by Mediterranean vegetation (Figure 1). Idanhaa-Nova is a small village belonging to Portugal, the area under study is characterized as belonging to the Mediterranean Region, Western Mediterranean Sub-region, Mediterranean-Ibero-Atlantic Province, Luso-Extremaduran Subprovince, Sector Toledano-Tagano, Sub-sector Hurdano-Zezerense, Superdistrito Cacerense (Costa, 1998). The community consists mainly of elderly people, mostly of European origin and Afro-Portuguese minority, who came after the independence of the former Portuguese colonies in Africa (M'Bokolo, 2007). In total, 40 people were interviewed, being women (80%) and men (20%). The interviewee's age ranged from 45 to 100 years. The economy is based on small subsistence farming

Figure 1. Indanhaa-Nova Community. Portugal. Europe.



Fonte: Adapted de <http://www.naturtejo.com/>. 2017.


We application of ethnobotanical techniques such as semi-structured interviews (Minayo 1994; 2007), direct observation, guided tour and oral history (Meihy 1996).

The identification followed Nova Flora de Portugal (Franco, 1984), and vouchers were deposited in LISC (Herbarium of the Tropical Research Institute, Lisbon). In the community data were recorded as the plant uses, forms of uses, used parts, dosages and health-related categories, such as medicines, food, mystical, and religious. The indications were grouped based on the classification of diseases proposed by International Classification of Diseases (ICD 10) of the World Health Organization (WHO, 2014).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In total, 40 people were interviewed, being (32) the female gender and the male relative. This ratio is perfectly justifiable because the woman is usually at home taking care of the house and the children, revealing their knowledge in the health care of the family. with the majority of those interviewed with incomplete elementary school. In these communities the traditional knowledge is expressive among the elderly and the cultural transmission between the generations still exists and predominant religion is Catholic

We recorded 62 medicinal species useful for the day-to-day health treatment, with the highest frequencies of citation being:



Poejo, Erva das Azeitonas (*Mentha pulegium* L.) 38 referências
 Néveda (*Calamintha nepeta* L.) 25 referências
 Erva-cidreira (*Melissa officinalis* L.) 19 referências
 Malvas (*Malva sylvestris* L.) 19 referência
 Erva das Sete Sangrias (*Lithodora diffusa* (Lag) I.M. Johnston) 18 ref.
 Barbas do milho (*Zea mays* L.) 18 referências
 Salva-brava (*Phlomis lychnitis* L.) 17 referências
 Laranjeira (folha ou flor) (*Citrus sinensis* (L) Osbek) 16 referências
 Erva-prata, Erva Mijateira (*Paronychia argentea* Lam.) 14 referências
 Arnica (*Arnica montana* L.) 13 referências

Poejo is clearly the most commonly referred plant for the treatment of colds. Recent studies show that Portuguese poejo actually has antimicrobial properties, explaining the qualities that were attributed to the ingestion of tea by the villagers (TEIXEIRA, 2012).

The neveda is the most used herb in the village to minimize menstrual pain. The collection of this plant involves a certain secrecy, according to the informant testimony:

“...the neveda must be harvested and brought indoors in secret, were it not for the "outsiders", that is, the men, to know that the girl was with the period - the use of the plant in these situations is not at all devoid of scientific background: the spasmolytic and relaxing properties explain the calming effects attributed to it. It is also added to this information that it has different effects at different times of the year: plants harvested in winter have a greater anti-inflammatory and cytoprotective effect, while plants harvested at spring / summer have a more antioxidant effect.) It should be noted, finally, that the secrecy referred to in relation to the harvest of the neveda shows how much the use of the plant is known, even by the men, revealing to the its effectiveness and the corresponding "universalism" of its use.”

The *Lithodora diffusa* herb, as a blood purifier, whose use is governed by the ritual of "3, 5 or 7" days (always a number "in pernão", that is, odd) number of annual uses. Studies corroborate that there is indeed a synergistic effect of the plant compounds in the sense of increasing body vasodilation (KREPSY, 2012).

The Malvas are, without exception, referred to as a plant used for treatments of the skin, either for external use (local washes) or for internal use, in ointments or taken as tisane, orally. They are especially referred to with calming effects, both at the level of wounds and at the level of intestinal problems. Currently, its effects on the treatment of constipation (increasing not only the frequency of exits, but also their consistency), but also their anti-inflammatory effects (reducing local edema by reducing the migration of leukocytes to the affected area (USUI, 2015).

Although the Malvas are the most commonly referred wound treatment plant in this Arnica deserves special attention because it has been indicated by 13 informants as being exclusively used for wounds. This is often referred to by the older informants as "Hypericão" or "Hypericão da Terra", due to the similarities with the common Hypericão do Gerês, which, although it was referred to and used by some people, was not a plant that could be found nearby. Arnica has currently been the target of studies for its inclusion in cosmetic potentials for the treatment of hyperpigmentation of the skin or in combination with other treatments (microcurrent therapy) to minimize and accelerate wound healing (AL CFE, 2012; USUI, 2015).

As for *Phlomis lychnitis* a plant long used for digestive treatments, such as bad dispositions and nausea. Such was the efficacy recognized to the plant that although it was not so easily found in the vicinity of the village, it was brought from outside to be stored and used for such evils. This plant was easily found near the Spanish stream, from where it was brought and stocked. More recently, its anti-inflammatory efficacy has been recognized in gastrointestinal disorders, such as Inflammatory Bowel Diseases (ALGIERI, 2013).

As regards the provenance of medicinal plants, it was found that they were harvested, for the most part, in the countryside. Later they developed in the gardens for the sake of convenience, which were brought from the field previously. Only recently has a plant salesman emerged in the village (interviewed 11) who sells them to most of the other interviewees who are now aging and are unable to move to the usual collection sites. It was also mentioned that it was customary to have the sharing of plants among the inhabitants of the village, whenever necessary, and the same with other categories of uses of the products, such as food, ornamental, firewood, etc.

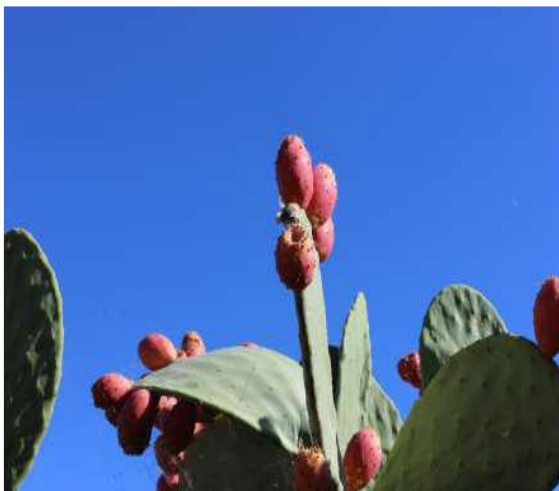
It has also been unanimously stated that plants are always used than medicines from the pharmacy, due to the isolation of the locality in relation to health establishments. Even for milder ills, such as colds or stomachaches, it was easier and quicker to access plants than to look for a "healer" because they were far from us.

In the sequence, other species mentioned in the Portuguese community.



A. *Geranium purpureum* L. (erva São Roberto) B. *Paronychia argentea* Lam. (erva prata)

Fonte: acervo dos autores. 2016.



C. *Opuntia maxima* Mill. (figueira-chumba)



D. *Malva sylvestris* L. (malva)

Fonte: acervo dos autores. 2016.



E. *Umbilicus rupestris* (salisb.) Dandy in Ridd. (marrolhos)



F. *Olea europaea* L. (oliveira)

Fonte: acervo dos autores. 2016.

Ethnobotanical uses and health treatments:

- A. *Geranium purpureum* - Used for pain treatments of stomach, liver, bladder and colitis. Used in the form of tea, or in soups with bread, dipped in the water of the plant.
- B. *Paronychia argentea* - Used for treatments of urinary infections, in the form of tea.

"... cut a leaf of the fig tree in half, sprinkle it with sugar or honey and then close it again with a string, letting it hang over a bowl, for the sap to drain. This liquid (syrup) is taken for coughs and colds" (Informant V.E. 89 anos).

- C. *Opuntia máxima* - Used for treatment of coughs and colds. The structure used is the fig, in the form of syrup.
- D. *Malva sylvestris* - Used for urinary infections, constipation, purulent wounds, ocular infections, hemorrhoids, inflammation in general, washing of the face and washing of the "lower parts". Used in the form of tea, to drink and / or in the form of clisteres to wash the "low parts".
- E. *Umbilicus rupestris* - Used for burns and wounds in the form of a hot implant "... the leaf is heated to the fire, anointed with olive oil and then applied over the affected area".
- F. *Olea europaea* - The leaf is used for heart problems such as low blood pressure or low blood pressure and cholesterol. Prepare the tea with three olive leaves for the portion equivalent to a bottle. Scientific studies prove the benefits of oil to hoemem health (SILVA, et al. 2012).

CONCLUSIONS

Ethnobotanical knowledge was more consolidated in the interviewees older people, especially those who have been throughout their life or part of it, linked to the work of the countryside and to the practice of traditional medicine.

In the local community, the use of plants for the treatment of diseases is an integral part of Portuguese culture and contributes significantly to the approximation of empirical practices to modern science.

REFERENCES

Al CFE. Effects of microcurrent application alone or in combination with topical *Hypericum perforatum* L. and *Arnica montana* L. on surgically induced wound healing in Wistar rats. *Homeopathy*. 2012. p. 147-153.

ALGIERI F. Intestinal anti-inflammatory activity of hydroalcoholic extracts of *Phlomis purpurea* L. and *Phlomis lychnitis* L. in the trinitrobenzenesulphonic acid model of rat colitis. *Journal of Ethnopharmacology*. 2013. p. 750-759.

COSTA J. *Biogeografia de Portugal Continental: Quercetea*; 1998.

FRANCO J. *Nova Flora de Portugal*: Escolar Editora. 1984.

KRESPY, P. B. Chemical Composition and Vasodilatation induced by *Cuphea carthagenensis* preparations. *Phytomedicine* 19. 2012. p. 953-957.

M'BOKOLO, E.M. *África Negra: História e Civilizações do século XIX aos nossos dias*. Lisboa: Edições Colibri. Lisboa. Portugal. 2007.

MEIHY, J.C.S.B. *Manual de História Oral*. São Paulo, Loyola. SP. 1996.

MINAYO, M.C. de S. *O desafio do conhecimento: pesquisa qualitativa em saúde*. 10. ed. São Paulo: Hucitec, São Paulo. 2007.

MINAYO, M.C de S. O desafio da pesquisa social. In: MINAYO, MCS. (org.) **Pesquisa social**: teoria, método e criatividade. 29. ed. Petrópolis, RJ: Vozes. Rio de Janeiro. 1994.

SILVA O.M.D, Viegas. S; Mello, S. Anti-*Helicobacter pylori* activity of *Terminalia macroptera* root. *Fitoterapia* 83(5):872-878. 2012.

TEIXEIRA, B. European Pennyroyal (*Mentha Pulegium*) from Portugal: Chemical composition of essential oil and antioxidant and antimicrobial properties of extracts and essential oil. *Industrial Crops and Products* 36. p. 81-87. 2012.

USUI, K. Identification of HSP70-inducing activity in *Arnica montana* extract and purification and characterization of HSP70-inducers. *Journal of Dermatological Science*. 2015. p. 67-75.

VOECKS, R. A. Ethnobotany. *Internacional Encyclopedia of Geography*. John Wiley & Sons (editors). DOI: 10.1002/9781118786352.wbieg0300. 2017.

WHO. World Health Organization. *Reducing Risks, Promoting Healthy Life. World Health Organization*: Geneva. 2002.

Disponível em: http://www.who.int/whr/2002/en/whr02_en.pdf. Acesso em: 04 de junho de 2017.

WHO. Classificação estatística internacional de doenças problemas relacionados à saúde, Tenth ed. Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo. 2007.

WHO. World Health Organization. *International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems*. 2014.

Disponível em: <http://apps.who.int/classifications/icd10/browse/2014/>. Acesso em: 24 fev. 2017.