

**Medical Ethnobotany of the Q'eqchi Maya: Perceptions and botanical treatments related to women's health.** (Oral Presentation)

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**Introduction**

The Q'eqchi are the third largest Maya population in Guatemala and currently occupy the largest geographic area of any other ethnolinguistic group in the country. Like most Maya communities, the Q'eqchi of the eastern lowlands maintain a rich tradition of Maya medical beliefs and practices that include the use of the native flora to treat a variety of illnesses, including women's health.

**Objectives**

To document Q'eqchi perceptions and botanical treatments related to issues of pregnancy, menstruation, and menopause and to test extracts of these plants in biological assays relevant to women's health.

**Methods**

Participant observation, semi-structured interviews, plant walks, and focus groups were used to interview 50 Q'eqchi individuals, including 5 male healers, 5 female midwives, and 8 postmenopausal women. Voucher specimens and screening-sized samples were collected and dried in a solar-electric herb dryer.

**Results**

A total of 48 medicinal plants used to treat women's health conditions were documented followed by the evaluation of 19 species in bioassays relevant to women's health. Results of field interviews indicate that Q'eqchi cultural perceptions affect women's health experiences, while laboratory results provide scientific support for the traditional uses of herbs for women's health in Guatemala. Piperaceae is a plant family of prominent medical value among the Q'eqchi with laboratory results suggesting that it merits further research for the treatment of the psychological and physiological changes associated with menstruation and menopause.

**Conclusion**

Considering the rich historical and contemporary tradition of Maya medicine in Guatemala, multi-disciplinary initiatives, including contributions from the fields of anthropology, botany, biology, chemistry, and pharmacology make significant contributions towards preserving Maya medical traditions in Guatemala, while supporting safety and efficacy of the herbal remedies for Guatemalan women.

**Keywords:** Guatemala; Menopause, Herbal medicine

**Selected references:**

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