

Oral presentation

Marketplace plants used in ceremonial cleansing among Highland Qechuans of Ecuador

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Introduction. Ceremonial cleansing plays a vital role in indigenous societies where “folk illnesses” such as susto (fright) are common. Indigenous Andean Qechuans commonly use cleansing plants to treat susto and related “folk illnesses”.

Objectives. To record, characterize and compare market plants used in ceremonial cleansing among Ecuadorian highland Qechuans. To define knowledge and methods of ceremonial cleansing.

Methods. Individual interviews were conducted with 22 vendors at 13 Andean marketplaces ranging from Ibarra in the north to Cuenca in the south. Plants were collected for voucher specimens. Regression analysis (RA) determined preferentially selected plant families and hierarchical cluster analysis demonstrated the relationship between marketplaces and cleansing plants.

Results. A total of 102 species from 50 plant families was reportedly used for cleansing. Mal aire (bad air), mal energia (bad energy) and susto were prominent ailments treated. Two types of ceremonial cleansing methods were recorded: banos (bath) and limpia (cleansing). Both methods employed dulce (sweet) and amargos (bitter) plants. Cluster analysis demonstrated that markets of Pujilli and Otobato were the most floristically related while Cuenca was the least related of the 13. Lamiaceae had the highest number of plant species (15) used in ceremonial cleansing. According to residual of RA, Lamiaceae (12.89) was the most selected and Orchidaceae (-3.73) was the least selected family. The Andean region provided the greatest number of native species (52%).

Conclusion. Highest residual of RA demonstrated preferential selection of Lamiaceae over other plant families. Similarity in market flora can be partially explained by similarity in geographic location. Further, limited markets having the fewest species shared a similar flora despite being widely separated. Knowledge of plants used in ceremonial cleansing was prevalent throughout the study area with minor variation in species employed.

Keywords: Andes, Indigenous societies, susto, mal aire, regression analysis

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