

Herbal Products, COVID-19 Pandemic and Consumption Trends in Sri Lanka

M.L.D. Nipunika* and D.A.M. De Silva

*Department of Agribusiness Management, Faculty of Agricultural Sciences,
Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, Belihuloya 70140, Sri Lanka
mldnipunika@gmail.com

COVID-19, deadly virus claimed thousands of lives around the world including hundreds in Sri Lanka threatening to the mankind. The first era of the pandemic spread without treatment and the second stage or new normal moving with waiting for the vaccines, rumors on side effects of the vaccine. Ayurveda products are recognized and considered as remedy based on traditional practices of many Asian nations including Sri Lankans. Present study attempts to identify the consumption trends of herbal products during the COVID-19 pandemic and explore the consumer behavior. Special concerns were to find out the consumer knowledge and beliefs on consumption of herbal products for the prevention of COVID-19 infection. Study sample comprised of 134 participants aged above 18 years. Primary data were collected through self-administered structured questionnaire. Descriptive analysis used mainly to describe the dimensions. Study shows that 89% participants used herbal products during the pandemic period. Among them 41% reported that they prepared herbal products at their home. 50% who tried herbal products during this period are mainly motivated by the recommendations received from the family, friends or relatives. Before pandemic, herbal porridge (72%) was the most used herbal product. During the pandemic paspanguwa (83%) and steam inhalation (81%) was the most used herbal remedies. In addition, 2% of participants used herbal drinks introduced by Ministry of Indigenous Medicine. Of the sample, 72% participants had a general knowledge about herbal products while 90% participants were willing to know further. Majority, (67%) was concerned on the product manufacturer. Control and regulation mechanism on production of herbal products were key concern of 90% of the consumers while 88% highlighted the need of government intervention in public awareness of the benefits of the products. There was a significant increase in the consumption of herbal products among Sri Lankans, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the main factor influencing was immunity boosting capability of herbal products. Consumers highlighted the need of safety and quality control mechanism for herbal products available in local market.

Keywords: COVID-19, Herbal product, Consumer behavior