Herbs and Spices Found in a Grocery Store Where Low-Income Mexicans Frequently Shop

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Summary
We used photography to document the herbs & spices available to a low-income, primarily Mexican community near our university. While we were looking for culinary agents, we failed to consider the importance of medicinal & functional herbs to this community. We attribute this “novel” finding to ethnocentric bias and encourage other researchers to involve community members in the research design process.

Methods
- H&S from the largest grocery store frequented by the low-income Mexican community in New Brunswick, NJ were analyzed for this descriptive study.
- Health permission from the store manager, photographs were taken of all H&S for sale in the store.
- H&S from the photographs were documented in Microsoft Excel.
- When H&S names differed between Spanish and English, they were translated into English by a bilingual research assistant.
- An Internet search was conducted to discover the uses of H&S unfamiliar to the research team.

Introduction
- Nutrition educators often advise consumers to use herbs and spices (H&S) to flavor food without adding excess fat and sodium.
- Behavioral interventions that promote H&S use may be effective in lowering sodium intake! Improving diet quality and influencing vegetable consumption among adolescents.
- H&S intake in the US has been reported to differ among racial/ethnic groups. Yet, research of H&S preferences in immigrant groups, particularly those from Latin America, has been limited.
- Understanding H&S preferences among various populations, including immigrant groups, will allow nutrition educators to deliver nutritionally competent nutrition education to those groups.

Objective
Document and investigate H&S available to a low-income Mexican & Mexican-American community in New Brunswick, NJ.

Results
- Of all the H&S documented, 45 did not appear on previously developed lists of H&S used for culinary purposes in the United States.
- Of those, 21 were identified as having medicinal and functional uses, but were usually grouped with the other H&S at the store.
- Many of the medicinal and functional H&S are brewed into herbal teas and used for a variety of remedies (see Table).
- Many of these medicinal and functional uses had mixed evidence to their efficacy and/or were not available in the English scientific literature.

Table: Purported medicinal and functional benefits of select herbs and spices found in a Latin grocery store in New Brunswick, NJ

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish Name</th>
<th>English Name</th>
<th>Medicinal/Functional Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ajenjo</td>
<td>Wormwood</td>
<td>Anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, pain relief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arnica</td>
<td>Arnica</td>
<td>Anti-inflammatory, pain relief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borraxa</td>
<td>Borage</td>
<td>Respiratory treatment, anti-inflammatory, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bronquisan</td>
<td>Bronchial blend</td>
<td>Sore throat &amp; respiratory treatment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cola de caballo</td>
<td>Field horsetail</td>
<td>Edema, renal &amp; urinary tract treatment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diabetsan</td>
<td>Sugar balance tea</td>
<td>Blood sugar regulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epazote de rama</td>
<td>Epazote branch</td>
<td>Gastrointestinal &amp; intestinal parasite treatment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flor de manzanilla</td>
<td>Chamomile flower</td>
<td>Anti-inflammatory, gastrointestinal treatment, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hercampuri</td>
<td>Hercampuri</td>
<td>Weight loss supplement, liver detoxifier, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hierba infante</td>
<td>Manayapa</td>
<td>Circulation improvement, skincare supplement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hierba luise</td>
<td>Lemon-verbenia</td>
<td>Gastrointestinal &amp; insomnia treatment, pain relief, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoja deaguacate</td>
<td>Avocado leaf</td>
<td>Antidiarrheal, anti-inflammatory, kidney stone treatment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoja de Guayaba</td>
<td>Guava leaf</td>
<td>Gastrointestinal, diabetes, &amp; wound treatments, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoja desen</td>
<td>Senna leaf</td>
<td>Laxative, weight loss supplement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoja detilto</td>
<td>Linden leaf</td>
<td>Anti-inflammatory, hypotensive, anxiety &amp; stress reliever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prosttan tea</td>
<td>Prostate care tea</td>
<td>Prostate &amp; urinary tract treatment, BPH treatment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruda</td>
<td></td>
<td>Gastrointestinal, respiratory, &amp; circulatory treatment, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Té de kiti kito</td>
<td>Kita kito tea</td>
<td>Weight loss supplement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Una degato</td>
<td>Cat's Claw</td>
<td>Immune system booster, OA and RA symptom reliever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valeriana</td>
<td>Valerian</td>
<td>Insomnia &amp; sleep disorder treatment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Liver cleanser tea</td>
<td>Liver detoxifier, hypercholesterolemia treatment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References

Conclusions & Implications for Practice
A descriptive analysis of H&S in a Latin grocery store in New Brunswick, NJ found that although many unfamiliar H&S were indeed culinary ingredients, 21 had medicinal and functional uses, with most of them being used in herbal teas.
- This “novel” finding may be attributed to ethnocentrism, a phenomenon in which outside cultures are evaluated using a dominant, “in-group” culture as a standard.
- This has been documented among healthcare professionals, even those who are also deemed “culturally competent.”
- Involving community members in the development of culturally relevant nutrition education materials can mitigate misattributions made due to ethnocentric bias.
- It may beehove nutrition professionals to undergo more training on cultural cuisine and traditional medicine to better understand Latin and immigrant populations.

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