

ACCEPTANCE OF ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE IN BANGLADESH: A STUDY ON HOMEOPATHY



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ABSTRACT

Homeopathy is widely recognized globally, including in Bangladesh, as part of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) acknowledged by the World Health Organization (WHO). It is noted for effectively treating various conditions without adverse effects, which has garnered significant interest. This recent study investigated the acceptance of homeopathic medicine among Bangladeshi people, surveying 157 respondents. The participants comprised of 64.3% males and 35.7% females; among them a large majority (88.5%) had at least a graduate-level education, and 72.6% belonged to middle-class families. Interestingly, middle-aged individuals (45.2%) showed a particular affinity for homeopathy. This study revealed a high awareness levels among the respondents, with 89.8% familiar with homeopathic medicine and 86.6% erudite about its utilization. In addition, safety was mentioned by 65.6% of respondents, affordability by 55.4%, and effectiveness in many cases by 44.9%. However, all the above points collectively influenced their preference for homeopathy. There was a consensus among 69.4% of respondents advocating for integrating homeopathy into mainstream healthcare. The study participants endorsed few ideas including ensuring quality control of homeopathic medicines, promoting research initiatives, and providing greater integration opportunities for homeopathic practitioners within the healthcare system.

KEYWORDS: Homeopathy, less side effects, low price alternative, popular medicine

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Introduction

In the last few decades, there has been a notable increase in interest towards complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) therapy in the world (Kessler, Davis et al. 2001). Recent research indicates a growing global recognition of CAM, including in the United States of America (Barnes, Powell-Griner et al. 2004, Frass, Strassl et al. 2012). Number of systematic review found effectiveness and acceptance of CAM, such as acupuncture in managing chronic pain conditions (Ernst and Lee, 2015), herbal medicine in anxiety, depression, and insomnia (Sarris et al., 2020), chiropractic in musculoskeletal issues (Bishop et al., 2018). Nonetheless, the acceptance of alternative medicine is influenced by a multitude of factors, including perceived efficacy, safety, cultural relevance, open dialogue, mutual respect, and shared

decision-making and patient-provider communication (Verhoef et al., 2016, Bishop & Lewith, 2010).

Homeopathy, a brainchild of Hahnemann, was constructed on the Hippocrates philosophy 'like cures like', is recognized by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a member of CAM, and one of the worlds' fastest-growing alternative medicine (Bellavite, Conforti et al. 2005, Piolot, Fagot et al. 2015). Researchers found homeopathic medicine could be useful in treating childhood diseases including ear infection, influenza and respiratory allergies (Mathie et al., 2017), have potentials to maintain better quality life (Bell et al., 2018), potential benefits observed in chronic back problems, headaches, and anxiety (Debas, Laxminarayan et al. 2011), and a safer alternative to conventional treatments, particularly for chronic diseases that require long-term prescription (Thompson et al.,

2016). It is found effective in several clinical conditions including diarrhea (Jacobs, Jimenez et al. 2000, Ghosh 2010), rheumatic diseases, Skin diseases, ENT diseases, and musculoskeletal diseases (Hasan, Kayes et al. 2019). Moreover, many researchers endorsement of homeopathy as "effective, cost-effective, and safe" underscores its acceptance and status on par with conventional medicine (Dantas and Rampes 2000, Bornhöft, Wolf et al. 2006, Banerjee, Chakrabarty et al. 2010). Homeopathy had a great prevalence in early twentieth century, however a stable time also experienced in late twentieth to early twenty-first century (Ernst and Kaptchuk 1996, Relton, Cooper et al. 2017). Homeopathic consultations provide customized attention, compassionate communication, and collaborative decision-making, which contributes not only physical but also emotional and mental well-being (Katz et al., 2019). Homeopathic medicine is widely accepted and integrated into conventional healthcare in many countries which queries for special attention to validate as a legitimate alternative therapeutic choice (Dantas et al., 2018). Despite facing skepticism, homeopathy has been becoming popular attributable to its numerous evidences, however, there is still a limitation of scientific data on mechanism of action of homeopathic medicine (Fisher and Ward 1994, Ernst 2001, Kenny 2002). Recently a few group of researchers obtained that homeopathy is popular among the young, female, affluent, and highly educated population which weaken the cynicism of homeopathy (Trichard, Chaufferin et al. 2005, Shah, Mubeen et al. 2010, Snow 2012, Klein, Torchetti et al. 2015, Belmi, Neale et al. 2020, Islam and Rashid 2023). To our surprise cancer patients opt for homeopathy, despite the lack of scientific evidence supporting their efficacy (Rashid, Akram et al. 2011, Long, Steadman et al. 2014).

Apart from the above, there are more reasons which helps people to accept homeopathic medicine, several of them are affordability (Eisenberg, Davis et al. 1998), dissatisfaction with conventional healthcare services and a sense of frustration (Jacobs, Jimenez et al. 2000), comfortableness (Reza, Sikdar et al. 2021), and low-grade service by conventional medicine service providers and lack of satisfaction with the given services (Karmakar P et al. 2012). However, the main accusation was slow progress, what represses the acceptance of homeopathy in somewhat (Nayak, Singh et al. 2012).

Most of the homeopathic medicine originated from various medicinal plant, and Bangladesh is blessed with numerous medicinal plant species (Yusuf, Chowdhury et al. 1994). In

Bangladesh, homeopathic medicine is more available than conventional medicine (Rashid, Akram et al. 2011), gains trust from intra-personal communications between patients (Hasan, Kayes et al. 2019).

There is scarcity of large scale study on measuring popularity of Homeopathy medicine, however, few survey found that a major portion of European are fond of homeopathic medicine and they accepted it over other CAM (Furnham, Vincent et al. 1995, Cooper, Harris et al. 2013). In the Asia region, including Bangladesh, homeopathic medicine is a more recognized system of medicine and practiced in various tiers of society (Cukaci, Freissmuth et al. 2020, Shahjalal, Chakma et al. 2022). Eventually, it becomes necessary to reassess the popularity of homeopathy and to eliminate the fundamental reasons supporting it. This current study aimed to assess the present status of homeopathy acceptance among the Bangladeshi population.

Methodology

A both qualitative and quantitative study was conducted by using an in-depth interview approach among a 157 random individuals of Dhaka city, the capital of Bangladesh, to gather comprehensive data on the acceptance of homeopathy in Bangladesh. Individuals of 18+ years of age with a stable mental health were included in this study. The quantitative phase was involve conducting surveys to assess their awareness, usage, and perceptions of homeopathy. The qualitative phase was consisting of in-depth interviews with healthcare professionals to explore their attitudes towards homeopathy and its integration into mainstream healthcare. All the data were analyzed using SPSS, and related ethical clearance was collected from the ethical committee and director of the Institute and informed consent from obtained from the participants.

Results

There were 157 (N=157) participants enrolled for this survey study, among them 64.3%, (n=101) participants were male, and 35.7%, (n=56) were female (Table 1).

The participants were grouped in five different age groups. Among the contributors highest 45.2%, (n=71) were from 46-55 age group, followed by 28.7%, (n=45) from 36-45 age group, and 15.3%, (n=24) were from 26-35 age group. There were 6.4%, (n=10) participants form 56+ age group, and the lowest 4.5%, (n=7) from 18-25 years' age group (Table 1, Figure 1).

Table 1. Distribution of the participants according to gender, age group, level of education, and monthly family income

Traits	Frequency	Percent
Female	56	35.7
Male	101	64.3
Age group		
18-25	7	4.5
26-35	24	15.3
36-45	45	28.7
46-55	71	45.2
56+	10	6.4
Level of education		
Primary School	5	3.2

Secondary School	5	3.2
Higher Secondary	8	44.6
Graduate	69	43.9
Postgraduate	70	44.6
Family Income (BDT)		
Below 10,000	5	3.2
10,000-20,000	15	9.6
20,001-30,000	23	14.6
30,001-50,000	29	18.5
Above 50,000	85	54.1

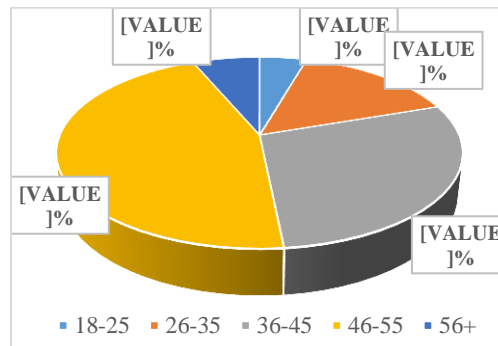


Figure 1. Ratio of the participants according to the age group

The survey encompassed participants with diverse educational backgrounds. The majority (44.6%, n=70) had postgraduate qualifications, followed closely by university students (43.9%, n=69). A smaller portion were college students (5.1%, n=8),

while 3.2% (n=5) had secondary school certificates, and another 3.2% (n=5) had primary school certificate (Table 1, Figure 2).

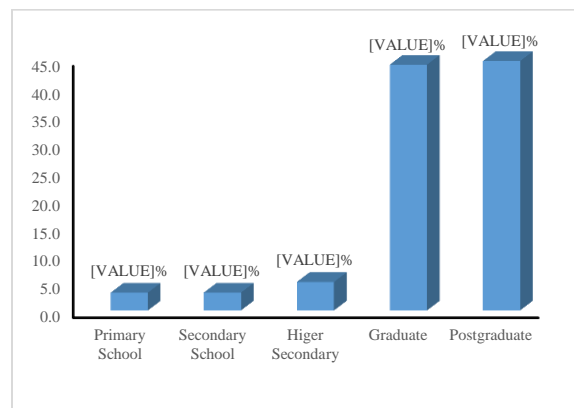


Figure 2. Distribution of the participants according to their level of education

The study also revealed the socio-economic status of participants, shedding light on the relationship between the study topic and family economic status, potentially influencing the acceptance of homeopathic medicines. Among participants, 54.1% (n=85) had a family income above 50,000 taka, followed by 18.5% (n=29) with incomes between

30,000-50,000 taka. Additionally, 14.6% (n=23) fell within the 20,000-30,000 taka income bracket, while 9.6% (n=15) ranged between 10,000-20,000 taka. The lowest bracket, below 10,000 taka, comprised 3.2% (n=5) of participants (Table 1).

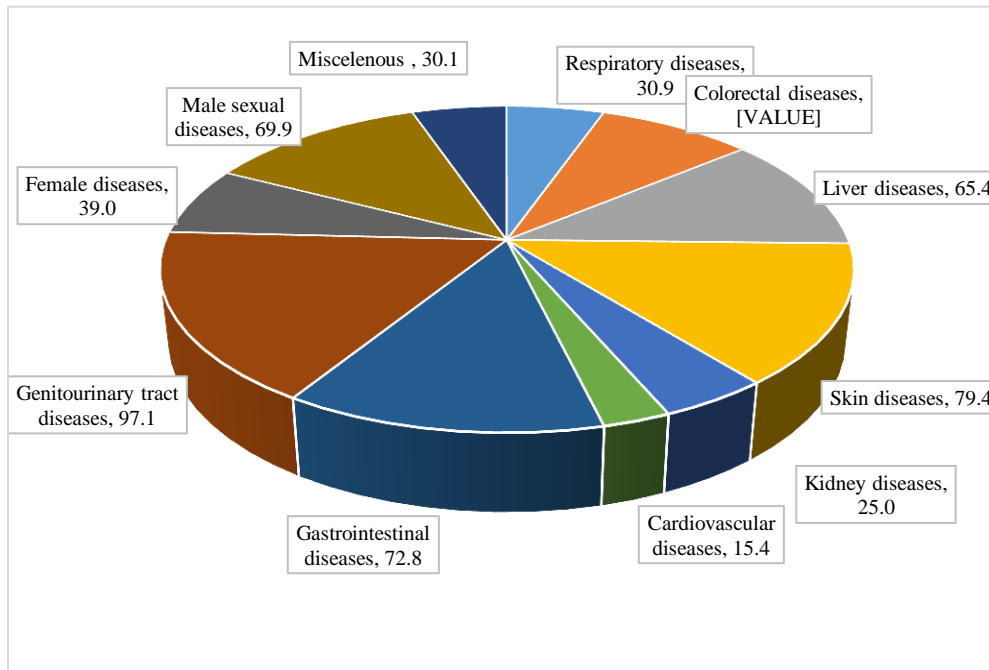


Figure 3. Distribution of participants according to use of homeopathic medicine services

Participant’s usage and awareness about homeopathic medicine

Among the participants, 89.8% (n=141) were aware of homeopathic treatment services, while 10.2% (n=16) had no prior knowledge. Interestingly, 86.6% (n=136) of participants had utilized homeopathic medicine, with 13.4% (n=21) abstaining. Among those who used it, 86.6% reported its efficacy across various ailments. The most common were genitourinary tract diseases (97.1%, n=132), followed by skin diseases (79.4%, n=108), gastrointestinal tract diseases (72.8%, n=99), male sexual diseases (69.9%, n=95), and liver

diseases (65.4%, n=89). Furthermore, 49.3% (n=67) used it for colorectal diseases, 39.0% (n=53) for female diseases, and 30.9% (n=42) for respiratory tract diseases. A smaller percentage used it for kidney diseases (25.0%, n=34) and cardiovascular diseases (15.4%, n=21). In addition, 30.1% (n=41) used homeopathic remedies for miscellaneous ailments (Figure 3). Among participants, 44.9% (n=61) found homeopathic treatment 'very effective', 33.1% (n=45) considered it 'somewhat effective', and 14.0% (n=19) deemed it 'not effective'. Additionally, 8.1% (n=11) couldn't assess and responded with 'don't know' (Table 2).

Table 2. Distribution of respondents opinion on awareness of Homeopathy medicine

Awareness to Efficacy of homeopathy	Frequency	Percentage
Don't Know	11	8.1
Not Effective	19	14
Somewhat Effective	45	33.1
Very Effective	61	44.9

Perceptions and Attitudes of the participants

Among participants, 55.4% (n=87) preferred homeopathy for its affordability, while 51.6% (n=81) selected it for its perceived effectiveness. Additionally, 48.4% (n=76) found it

easily accessible. Dissatisfaction with conventional medicine drove 39.5% (n=62) towards homeopathy, while 15.9% (n=25) embraced it due to cultural beliefs (Table 3, Fig 4).

Table 3. Distribution of response on Perceptions and Attitude about homeopathy among the user

Reasons to take homeopathy	Frequency	Percentage
Cultural Belief	25	15.9
Dissatisfaction with conventional medicine	62	39.5
Easily accessible	76	48.4
Perceived effectiveness	81	51.6
Affordability	87	55.4

Safety of Homeopathy medicine		
Don't Know	24	15.3
Equally Safe	23	14.6
Less Safe	7	4.5
Safer	103	65.6
Homeopathy should be integrated into mainstream healthcare		
No	19	12.1
Not Sure	29	18.5
Yes	109	69.4

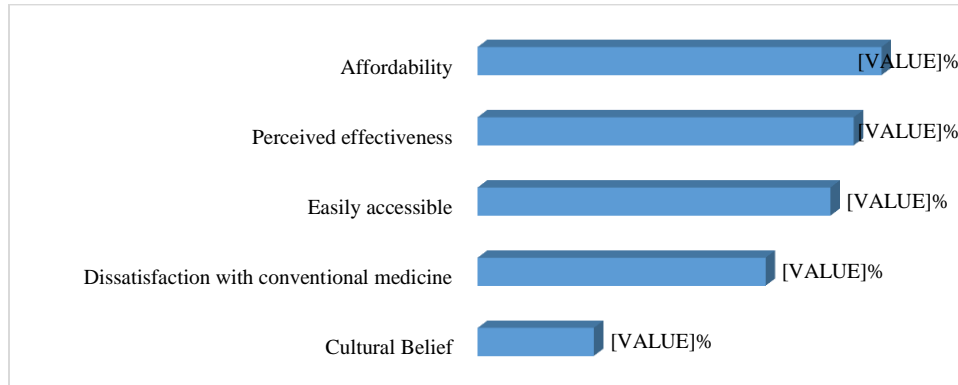


Figure 4. Distribution of the participant’s response on ‘Influencing factors to choose Homeopathy’

Participants largely considered homeopathic medicine safe, with 65.6% (n=103) viewing it as "safer" compared to conventional medicine. Additionally, 14.6% (n=23) saw it as "equally safe". However, 4.5% (n=7) expressed concerns about its safety, while 15.3% (n=24) were undecided (Table 3, Figure 5).

A majority of the participants of 69.4% (n=109) believe homeopathy should be included in the main stream healthcare services in Bangladesh, and around 12.1% (n=19) denied this. Conversely, 18.5% (n=29) was confused as they stated ‘Not sure’ (Table 3).

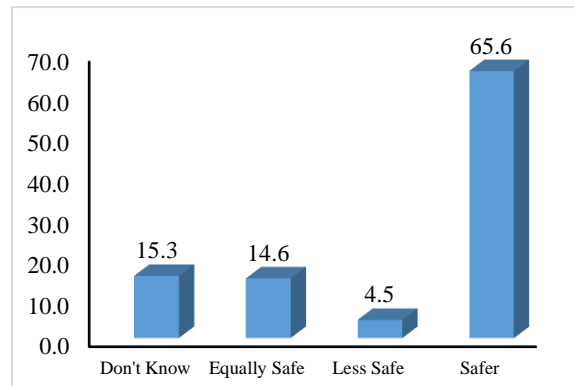


Figure 5. Distribution of the participant’s response on ‘Rate safety of homeopathic medicine’

Healthcare Professional Perceptions

Out of all participants, 49.7% (n=78) were healthcare professionals, while 50.3% (n=79) were non-healthcare professionals. Among healthcare professionals, 21.1% (n=15) were allopathic medicine specialists, 16.9% (n=12) were nurses, and 22.5% (n=16) were shop pharmacists.

Furthermore, 26.8% (n=19) specialized in homeopathic medicine, 9.9% (n=7) in Ayurveda, and 12.7% (n=9) in Unani medicine. Among non-healthcare professionals, 16.5% (n=13) worked in government services, 32.9% (n=26) owned small businesses, 27.8% (n=22) held private employment, and 22.8% (n=18) were housewives (Table 4).

Table 4. Distribution of the participants according to their specialty

Healthcare professional			Non-healthcare professional		
Specialty	Frequency	Percentage	Specialty	Frequency	Percentage
Allopathic medicine	15	21.1	Govt. service	13	16.5
Nurse	12	16.9	Small business	26	32.9
Pharmacist (Shop)	16	22.5	Private service	22	27.8
Homeopathy medicine	19	26.8	House wife	18	22.8
Ayurveda medicine	7	9.9			
Unani medicine	9	12.7			

General Attitudes towards Homeopathy

Participants had varied opinions on the efficacy of homeopathic medicine. A majority, 69.4% (n=109), believed

in its effectiveness, while 10.8% (n=17) held negative views. However, 19.7% (n=31) were unsure about its efficacy (Table 5).

Table 5. Distribution of the participant's general attitude towards homeopathy

Efficacy of Homeopathy	Frequency	Percentage
No	17	10.8
Not Sure	31	19.7
Yes	109	69.4
Inclusion of homeopathy in healthcare's curriculum		
No	17	10.8
Not Sure	37	23.6
Yes	103	65.6
Homeopathy plays a role in community		
Don't Know	10	6.4
Negative	11	7.0
Neutral	31	19.7
Positive	105	66.9

A significant portion, 65.6% (n=103) of respondents, support including homeopathic medicine in health professionals' curriculum, while 10.8% (n=17) oppose it, and 23.6% (n=37) were not sure. Around 66.9% (n=105) respondents believe homeopathy has a positive impact in the community, with 19.7% (n=31) expressing neutrality, 6.4% (n=10) stating uncertainty, and 7% (n=11) holding negative views (Table 5). Amidst the participants, 63.1% (n=99) of respondents think homeopathy is more popular in certain socio-economic groups, while 17.8% (n=28) disagree, and 19.1% (n=30) were unsure. A calculated 69.4% (n=109) of respondents agreed to considering homeopathic medicine in the future, 19.7% (n=31)

were undecided, and 10.8% (n=17) refused to consider it for any health conditions.

Future suggestion

In the study, 86.6% of participants (n=136) stressed the need to standardize homeopathic medical college education. Additionally, 74.5% (n=117) emphasized ensuring the quality of practicing homeopathic physicians, while 65% (n=102) highlighted the importance of maintaining quality homeopathic medicines. Moreover, 62.4% of respondents (n=98) called for increased research in homeopathy, and 42.7% (n=67) advocated for expanding homeopathic medicine facilities in government hospitals at various levels (Table 6).

Table 6. Distribution of suggestions of the respondents to develop the quality of homeopathic services

Suggestions	Frequency	Percentage
Physician's quality should be maintained	117	74.5
Homeopathic medical college's education should be standard	136	86.6
Ensure quality of medicine	102	65.0
Increase homeopathic medicine facilities in different tiers of hospitals	67	42.7
Increase research	98	62.4

*Multiple answers

Discussion

This study was conducted within 157 randomly selected participants where 64.3% were male and 35.7% were female participants. Most of the participants 95.5% (n=150) were from 26-56+ years' age group, only 4.5% participants were from 18-25 age group. Among the participants a calculated 43.9% and 44.6% completed graduation and post-graduation respectively. The above mentioned criteria of the participants reflects that this was well educated study sample to achieve a well judge opinion.

The participant's family income was sorted to evaluate the financial status of the respected participants, however, it was found that a calculated 42.7% of the participants were from lower middle income group, and 54.1% were from middle income group. This statements conveys that the study sample covered lower to middle income groups of Bangladeshi population.

This current study revealed that homeopathy is accepted by majority (86.6%) of the respondents, and they used homeopathic medicines for various health conditions including genitourinary tract diseases (97.1%), skin diseases (79.4%), and gastrointestinal tract diseases (69.9%). Among the respondents less than half (44.9%) found homeopathy medicines were 'Very effective' while one third (33.1%) of the respondents found 'Somewhat effective'. Out of these respondents 55.4% pointed 'Affordability' of the medicine and 51.6% marked 'Perceived effectiveness' as the prime influencing factor to choose homeopathic medicine. However, a large portion (39.5) choose homeopathy from the dissatisfaction with conventional medicine. Two-third of the respondents (65.6%) chosen homeopathy as 'Safer' which is one of the fundamental point to accepting this treatment.

Amid the respondents, almost half (49.7%) were healthcare professionals including Specialized Allopathic doctors (21.1%), nurse (16.9%), Pharmacist-shop (22.5%), Homeopathic doctor (26.8%), Ayurvedic doctors (9.9%) and Unani doctors (12.7%). The other 50.3% respondents included Govt. service (16.5%), small business (32.9%), and Private service (27.8%). A substantial population (69.4%) selected 'Yes' for Homeopathy, while 10.8% against of it. Around 65.6% respondents stated to include homeopathy in healthcare professional's curriculum. However, 66.9% respondents remarked that homeopathy plays an important role community, and 63.1% of the respondents observed that homeopathy is popular in certain socioeconomic group. While respondents expressed support for the homeopathic medicine system, 86.6% highlighted the need to standardize the education level of homeopathic medical colleges, and 74.5% emphasized the importance of maintaining the quality of homeopathic doctors.

This study revealed that around 97.1% of the respondents used homeopathic medicines for genitourinary tract diseases, 79.4% used for Skin diseases, 72.8% used for gastrointestinal diseases. This finding replicates a previous nationwide survey conducted by Hasan *et al.* (Hasan, Kayes *et al.* 2019), which also legitimate this current survey.

There were 44.9% of the respondent who expressed homeopathic medicine is 'very effective', and 33.1% found that 'somewhat effective'; this statements found similar to a recent study (Hamre, Glockmann *et al.* 2023). Most of the respondents, 55.4% raised affirmative answer homeopathic

medicine's affordable price, and 69.4% voted homeopathy is safe which is supported by Haque *et al.* (Haque, Das *et al.* 2016).

Among the participants 49.7% were health professional, and 50.3% were non-healthcare professionals. There were participants from various profession including Allopathic doctors 9.6% (n=15). Within this study population 10.8% (n=17) of these respondents found homeopathy ineffective, however, 69.4% (n=109) of the respondents found homeopathy effective. The quality of education of the homeopathic medical colleges should be upgraded to international standard as stated by 86.6% (n=136) of the respondents which is also mentioned by Kaur *et al.* (Kaur, Chalia *et al.* 2019).

Every research endeavor encounters its own limitations, one of which is often sample size. Despite the limitation of this current study in a small population sample, its findings remained consistent with previous studies, indicating its generalizability.

Conclusion

Homeopathy holds significant promise as an alternative healthcare option in Bangladesh, with widespread acceptance and potential for integration into mainstream healthcare. By paying attention to the recommendations, such as improving education, research, and infrastructure, Bangladesh can harness the benefits of homeopathy to enhance overall healthcare delivery and outcomes. We welcome further investigation including a large population to reaffirm these outcomes.

Author Contribution

Conceptualization: N.P., N.H and N.A.R.; formal analysis: N.P. and N.H.; writing – original draft preparation: N.P., and N. H.; Writing- review and editing: N.P., N.H., N.A.R., M.A.H.B., M.S.R., M.M., M.R.A., and R.A.R; Supervision: N.P. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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