

Traditional and Alternative Medicine Practices in Ghana

Ghana has a rich cultural heritage of traditional and alternative medicine practices, which are widely accepted and utilized by its population. According to various studies and reports, the following traditional and alternative medicine practices are prevalent in Ghana:

About 60% to 70% of Ghanaians use medicinal plants. The prevalence of traditional, complementary, and alternative medicine (TCAM) use among adult cancer patients is significant.

The Ghanaian government has implemented interventions to integrate traditional medicine into its national health system

The Traditional Medicine Practice Council (TMPC) is the statutory institution responsible for regulating traditional medicine practices

The Agency of Health in Ghana has initiated programs involving traditional medicine practitioners

Recent survey reveals over **521,000** unlicensed herbal practises in all 261 districts in Ghana. 7 regions constituted 161 districts represented **353,844** majority unlicensed herbal and traditional practitioners and the other 10 regions represented 100 districts making **167,156** minority unlicensed herbal and traditional practitioners with varying percentage of **65.11%** and **34.89%** respectively.

Major Regional Breakdown

- I. ASHANTI REGION** of Ghana is made up of **43 districts**. This was increased from 30 districts. This is made up of 1 Metropolitan, 19 Municipal and 23 Ordinary districts represented **18.07%** of unlicensed herbal practitioners.

Traditional Medicine Practices:

1. Psychic healers 2.81%
2. Commercial shrines 2.50%
3. Prayer camps with herbal centres 2.86%
4. Traditional birth attendants 5.99%
5. Medical herbalist 3.28%
6. Herbal pharmacies 6.99%
7. Herbal raw materials sellers 20.05%
8. Indigenous practitioners 2.30%
9. Various herbal manufacturing units 2.41%
10. Herbal hawkers 2.46%
11. Herbal van operators 2.08%

Contemporary /Alternative Medical Practitioners

12. Homeopathic Clinics and Hospitals	2.28%
13. Spa's	2.00%
14. Wellness Centres	2.08%
15. Naturopathic Clinics/hospitals	2.27%
16. Chinese Medicine practitioners	2.14%
17. Chiropractors	2.29%
18. Ayurvedic practitioners	2.45%
19. Acupuncturists	2.29%
20. Organic health shops	3.62%
21. Training Institutions of CAM	1.11%
22. Retail healers	23.71%

II. The EASTERN REGION of Ghana contains **33 districts** made up of 13 municipal and 20 ordinary districts represented **14.08%** of unlicensed herbal practitioners.

Traditional Medicine Practices:

1. Psychic healers	2.72%
2. Commercial shrines	3.35%
3. Prayer camps with herbal centres	2.60%
4. Traditional birth attendants	5.77%
5. Medical herbalist	3.08%
6. Herbal pharmacies	6.92%
7. Herbal raw materials sellers	22.13%
8. Indigenous practitioners	2.20%
9. Various herbal manufacturing units	2.40%
10. Herbal hawkers	2.26%
11. Herbal van operators	1.95%

Contemporary /Alternative Medical Practitioners

12. Homeopathic Clinics and Hospitals	2.08%
13. Spa's	1.96%
14. Wellness Centres	2.23%
15. Naturopathic Clinics/hospitals	1.92%
16. Chinese Medicine practitioners	2.27%
17. Chiropractors	1.92%
18. Ayurvedic practitioners	2.40%
19. Acupuncturists	2.20%
20. Organic health shops	3.58%
21. Training Institutions of CAM	1.00%
22. Retail healers	23.07%

III. THE GREATER ACCRA REGION of Ghana contains **29 districts** made up of 2 metropolitan, 23 municipal and 4 ordinary districts represented **11.96%** of unlicensed herbal practitioners.

Traditional Medicine Practices:

1. Psychic healers 6.30%
2. Commercial shrines 2.88%
3. Prayer camps with herbal centres 2.75%
4. Traditional birth attendants 5.63%
5. Medical herbalist 3.01%
6. Herbal pharmacies 5.91%
7. Herbal raw materials sellers 20.24%
8. Indigenous practitioners 2.12%
9. Various herbal manufacturing units 2.37%
10. Herbal hawkers 2.51%
11. Herbal van operators 2.62%

Contemporary /Alternative Medical Practitioners

12. Homeopathic Clinics and Hospitals 2.22%
13. Spa's 1.83%
14. Wellness Centres 2.25%
15. Naturopathic Clinics/hospitals 2.18%
16. Chinese Medicine practitioners 1.98%
17. Chiropractors 2.17%
18. Ayurvedic practitioners 2.25%
19. Acupuncturists 2.49%
20. Organic health shops 3.54%
21. Training Institutions of CAM 1.22%
22. Retail healers 21.52%

IV. The CENTRAL REGION of Ghana contains **22 districts**. These are made up of 1 metropolitan, 7 municipal and 14 ordinary districts. There were formally 20 districts in this region represented **8.85%** of unlicensed herbal practitioners.

Traditional Medicine Practices:

1. Psychic healers 3.14%
2. Commercial shrines 3.35%
3. Prayer camps with herbal centres 2.58%
4. Traditional birth attendants 5.77%
5. Medical herbalist 3.39%
6. Herbal pharmacies 7.09%

7. Herbal raw materials sellers 20.07%
8. Indigenous practitioners 2.41%
9. Various herbal manufacturing units 2.09%
10. Herbal hawkers 1.98%
11. Herbal van operators 1.95%

Contemporary /Alternative Medical Practitioners

12. Homeopathic Clinics and Hospitals 2.32%
13. Spa's 1.95%
14. Wellness Centres 2.07%
15. Naturopathic Clinics/hospitals 2.08%
16. Chinese Medicine practitioners 2.26%
17. Chiropractors 2.07%
18. Ayurvedic practitioners 2.19%
19. Acupuncturists 2.12%
20. Organic health shops 3.59%
21. Training Institutions of CAM 1.01%
22. Retail healers 24.55%

- V. WESTERN REGION** of Ghana contains 14 districts, 1 metropolitan, 8 municipal and 5 ordinary districts represented **5.51%** of unlicensed herbal practitioners.

Traditional Medicine Practices:

1. Psychic healers 2.45%
2. Commercial shrines 2.93%
3. Prayer camps with herbal centres 2.55%
4. Traditional birth attendants 5.71%
5. Medical herbalist 3.48%
6. Herbal pharmacies 7.26%
7. Herbal raw materials sellers 22.53%
8. Indigenous practitioners 1.83%
9. Various herbal manufacturing units 2.42%
10. Herbal hawkers 1.85%
11. Herbal van operators 2.03%

Contemporary /Alternative Medical Practitioners

12. Homeopathic Clinics and Hospitals 1.89%
13. Spa's 1.87%
14. Wellness Centres 2.02%
15. Naturopathic Clinics/hospitals 1.88%
16. Chinese Medicine practitioners 2.24%
17. Chiropractors 1.88%

- 18. Ayurvedic practitioners 2.02%
- 19. Acupuncturists 2.06%
- 20. Organic health shops 3.45%
- 21. Training Institutions of CAM 1.01%
- 22. Retail healers 24.63%

VI. BONO EAST REGION of Ghana was created by a referendum in December 2018. It was part of the then Brong-Ahafo Region of Ghana and contains **11 districts**, 4 municipal and 7 ordinary districts represented **4.42%** of unlicensed herbal practitioners.

Traditional Medicine Practices:

- 1. Psychic healers 2.09%
- 2. Commercial shrines 2.16%
- 3. Prayer camps with herbal centres 2.79%
- 4. Traditional birth attendants 5.79%
- 5. Medical herbalist 3.35%
- 6. Herbal pharmacies 6.56%
- 7. Herbal raw materials sellers 21.49%
- 8. Indigenous practitioners 2.23%
- 9. Various herbal manufacturing units 2.07%
- 10. Herbal hawkers 1.94%
- 11. Herbal van operators 2.05%

Contemporary /Alternative Medical Practitioners

- 12. Homeopathic Clinics and Hospitals 2.14%
- 13. Spa's 2.14%
- 14. Wellness Centres 2.25%
- 15. Naturopathic Clinics/hospitals 1.99%
- 16. Chinese Medicine practitioners 2.25%
- 17. Chiropractors 1.75%
- 18. Ayurvedic practitioners 2.50%
- 19. Acupuncturists 2.25%
- 20. Organic health shops 3.49%
- 21. Training Institutions of CAM 1.01%
- 22. Retail healers 25.71%

VII. The WESTERN NORTH REGION of Ghana was created by a referendum in December 2018. It was part of the then Western Region of Ghana. It contains 9 districts, 3 municipal and 6 ordinary districts represented **3.55%** of unlicensed herbal practitioners.

Traditional Medicine Practices:

1. Psychic healers 3.00%
2. Commercial shrines 2.40%
3. Prayer camps with herbal centres 2.87%
4. Traditional birth attendants 5.70%
5. Medical herbalist 3.38%
6. Herbal pharmacies 6.74%
7. Herbal raw materials sellers 20.67%
8. Indigenous practitioners 1.96%
9. Various herbal manufacturing units 2.34%
10. Herbal hawkers 2.16%
11. Herbal van operators 2.14%

Contemporary /Alternative Medical Practitioners

12. Homeopathic Clinics and Hospitals 2.01%
13. Spa's 1.95%
14. Wellness Centres 2.11%
15. Naturopathic Clinics/hospitals 2.14%
16. Chinese Medicine practitioners 2.29%
17. Chiropractors 1.85%
18. Ayurvedic practitioners 1.92%
19. Acupuncturists 1.90%
20. Organic health shops 3.56%
21. Training Institutions of CAM 0.99%
22. Retail healers 25.90%

This analysis aims to provide an overview of the Traditional Medicine Practice (TMPC) landscape within 161 districts across seven regions in Ghana. The regions include Greater Accra, Ashanti, Central, Eastern, Western, Western North, and Bono East. The analysis covers 22 categories of TMPC practitioners, including traditional and complementary/alternative medical practitioners.

The analysis reveals a diverse range of TMPC practitioners across the 161 districts, with a mix of traditional and complementary/alternative medical practitioners.

The top three categories of TMPC practitioners vary across regions, indicating regional preferences and specialties. The presence of complementary/alternative medical practitioners is notable, with Homeopathic Clinics and Hospitals being the most prominent.

This analysis provides valuable insights for policymakers, healthcare professionals, and stakeholders seeking to understand the TMPC landscape in Ghana.

Based on the data analysis, it appears that the Western North region has the highest percentage of retail healers, with **25.90%**.

This suggests that there is a significant presence of traditional medicine practitioners in this region, who may be providing healthcare services to the local population.

Additionally, the data indicates that the Western North region also has a notable percentage of herbal raw materials sellers, with **20.67%**. This could indicate that there is a strong demand for traditional medicine and herbal remedies in this region, and that the local economy is supporting the growth of this industry.

It would be interesting to further analyse the data to understand the factors contributing to the high prevalence of retail healers and herbal raw materials Sellers in the Western North region.

The data reveals a concerning trend, with a significant proportion of herbal practitioners operating without proper licensure across various regions.

According to the data, the top three regions with the highest percentage of unlicensed herbal practitioners are:

- Kumasi: 18.07%
- Eastern: 14.08%
- Accra: 11.96%

These regions account for approximately 44.11% of the total unlicensed herbal practitioners in Ghana. The remaining regions have lower percentages, with the Western North Region having the lowest percentage at 3.55%.

Region Percentage of Unlicensed Herbal Practitioners

- Ashanti Region 18.07%
- Eastern Region 14.08%
- Greater Accra Region 11.96%
- Central Region 8.85%
- Western Region 5.51%
- Bono East Region 4.42%
- Western North Region 3.55%

This data highlights the need for increased regulation and oversight in the herbal medicine industry, particularly in regions with high percentages of unlicensed practitioners. It is essential to ensure that herbal practitioners are properly trained, licensed, and adhering to safety standards to protect public health.

Challenges and Opportunities

1. There is a need for further research and documentation of traditional and alternative medicine practices in Ghana.
2. Integrating traditional medicine into the national health system presents opportunities for improving healthcare outcomes
3. Termination of unlicensed traditional and alternative medicine practices in Ghana.

Recommendations

1. Conduct a thorough review of the regulatory framework governing TMPCs in Ghana to ensure that they are operating within legal boundaries.
2. Develop a comprehensive database of TMPCs across the regions to facilitate monitoring, evaluation, and quality control.
3. Provide training and capacity-building programs for TMPC practitioners to enhance their skills and knowledge.
4. Establish a system for reporting and addressing adverse events or complaints related to TMPCs.
5. Encourage collaboration between TMPCs and conventional healthcare providers to promote integrated healthcare services.
6. To promote, supply, import & export of herbal products and services.
7. Approve in consultation with such educational and research institution as it may determine the curriculum for training institutions and also for continuing education in Traditional and Alternative Medicine practitioners.
8. Collaborate with the appropriate TMPC to establish centres for provision of Traditional Medicine care within the national health care delivery system and also for large scale cultivation of medicinal plants and for the preservation of bio-diversity.
9. Support TAM practitioners on rules for the registration, advertisement, labelling and sale of approved products to the FDB.
10. Ensure clients of Traditional and Alternative Medicine get value for money and perform other ancillary services as the Law requires.