

Using gSo-Rig medicine as a remedy to quit smoking and drinking: A pilot study

Ngawang Choden. Drungtsho Trainee 4th Year FoTM

Abstract

gSo-ba Rigpa is a traditional way of healing diseases which came into existence in 1967. Both allopathic and traditional medicines are freely accessible to the people in our country. In fact, traditional medicine has been seen as an inquiry to easy and availed method of medication. Series of traditional medicines have been recognized as an effective solution for various diseases. The recent initiation taken by one of the traditional physician indicates that some of the traditional medicines can also be taken as remedy to abstain from drinking and smoking. This is a small scale study which is undertaken to find the overall information about the remedy, giving priority to its effectiveness. The study was conducted at National Traditional Medicine Hospital using purposeful sampling method as an academic requirement as per the curriculum.

Background

Drinking and smoking are two different lifestyle habits adopted by large number of people around the world. Alcohol is deeply rooted in Bhutanese culture. At the same time, smoking is another challenge that prevails in Bhutanese society. A study by Dendup (2016) found that people consume alcohol in hazardous manner. Some villagers begin their day with alcohol and end with it too. Tshering (2008) claims that in ancient times, drinking only included homemade products of nine cereals which is locally known as *ara*. In these modern times, alcohol is brewed of different ingredients which contains chemicals and other toxins. According to Tobgay (2015), the number of alcoholics has been

increasing rapidly every year in Bhutan. It is observed that drinking has now become common for most of the people.

People tend to drink when they are out of mood or whenever they are hooked up in trouble. Drinking is thought to sweep away their worries and erase bad memories. However, people not only drink alcohol but abuse it. The *Root Tantra* and *Explanatory Tantra* of *gSo-ba Rig-pa* states that taking right amount of local alcohol (*ara*) helps in maintaining normal metabolism in our body. It also suggests taking some amount of *ara* if you wish to gain body weight. Yet, people tend to misunderstand the difference between the need of drinking and excessive drinking. According to WHO (2015), Bhutan has the highest per capita alcohol consumption in South Asia in the year 2012. It is also confirmed that the royal government spends over Nu.30 million every year to treat alcohol related patients.

The harmonious environment in the family is often destroyed by alcohol abuse. There are many victimized women in the country facing domestic violence as a result of alcohol abuse and children are left behind uncared, who later on follow their parents' footsteps. According to RENEW (2014), personal relationships can be torn apart and social issues will keep rising as a result of increasing alcohol consumption. According to traffic police, the main causes of injury and death in our country are driving under the influence of alcohol. Death from liver damage due to excessive consumption of alcohol ranged from 129 in 2014, 140 in 2012 and 169 in 2011. (Annual Health Bulletin, 2014)

Meanwhile, there is an increasing trend in smoking, though it is largely banned in public places. Many youngsters are addicted to chewing tobacco, which is locally known as *baba*. Tshering (2010) proclaims that the royal government of Bhutan has started to enforce strict penalties for smokers and tobacco consumers. Yet, maximum number of people remains addicted to it. Tshering (2016) said

that respiratory illness is a leading cause of death in Bhutan, and smoking worsens it further. According to the Oral Health Center (2015) chewing tobacco is a risk factor for the development of oral cancers. Despite being injurious to health, it is seen that smoking multiplies numerous chaos in our life.

Bhutan is a country where Buddhism has flourished predominantly. “Buddhism strongly advises against the use of anything that clouds the mind” (Sherpa, 2014). Alcohol consumption is said to be inconsistent with Buddhist quest to understand and develop the mind. Lama Zhenphen Zangpo, who works for youth, said when people drink heavily or uses any harmful substances, they become mindless and careless in action. He also said that the Buddha advised people to make five commitments, and one among them is to abstain from taking intoxicants. All these statements claim that drinking and smoking are unhealthy both from the point of health and spiritual understanding. Nevertheless, people persist on drinking and smoking in today’s era by forgetting the harmful effect of it.

Owing to this issue, DrungtshoTandinPhurba, Chief Physician from the Department of Traditional Medicine Services at Kawajangsa has recently come up with the idea of controlling the abuses of alcohol and tobacco with Bhutanese traditional medicines. He tested the medicines with a group of tobacco consumers in 2010 at Parohospital. The outcome had been significant to most of the patients he had prescribed so far. According to him, the medicines not only help people to give up drinking and smoking, but it also help to quit chewing *doma*. People longing to get rid of alcohol and tobacco are seen lined up in front of the Drungtsho’s chamber. “My idea is not based on any evidence, yet there are rumors across the Himalayan Kingdom saying that Bhutanese traditional medicines are good solutions for alcohol and tobacco addictions” (Phurba ,2017,personal communication). He also added that around 4000 people were

prescribed with those medicines and 25% of them turned to be effective. However, no empirical study has been carried on this issue. Hence, the present study is undertaken in order to provide scientific evidence to Bhutanese Traditional Medicines as a remedy for giving up the habits of drinking and smoking. Further this study was undertaken as a part of academic requirement of the student.

Aims

This study is undertaken to investigate the use of *gSo-ba –rigpa* medicines as a remedy to quit drinking and smoking habits.

Objectives

- ✓ To determine the drinking and smoking attitude among Bhutanese youth.
- ✓ To verify whether so-rig medicines are helping to quit drinking and smoking or not.
- ✓ To find out the rate of alcoholic and smoking treatment till date.
- ✓ To determine people's attitude towards recent medication on drinking and smoking.
- ✓ To collect feedback from the patients who sought medication.

Methods

This research project was held at National Traditional Medicine Hospital (NTMH) at Kawajangsa. Participants were selected using purposeful sampling method. 20 participants attempted the questionnaire and in-depth interviews were carried out with 10 of them who had visited the hospital to seek treatment. 20 other participants were engaged in face to face interview. The participants consisted of both genders (18 male and 22 female). A few of the participants who attempted questionnaire were asked in-depth questions as per the response

given by them. DrungtshoTandinPhurba, the chief physician participated in the study. The necessary documentary sources and the overall record were reviewed from the dispensary section.

Ethical Consideration

The most important step in this study was to seek informed consent from the individual participants. The participants selected were introduced to the study beforehand by informing them about the overall purpose of the study. The informed consent was taken from the participants only after they had clear insight into the research design and their role in the study. The participation was voluntary and they were given the full right and freedom to withdraw from the study at any time. There was no risks and inconvenience caused during the time of data collection. No other people have access to the research documents besides the researcher and the participants. All research documents, consisting mainly of questionnaires and process notes were destroyed upon the completion of the research.

Data analysis

Data was analyzed using Microsoft Excel Database and Microsoft worksheet.

Results and Discussion

Traditional Medicines which help to give up drinking and smoking

Giwam 9, conventionally used for treating liver diseases was found to help quit drinking. It consists of 9 herbal medicines such as *Meconopsis simplicifolia*, *aristolochiagriffithii*, *Saussurea aappacorydaliscrispa* etc. Each dosage contains 3 tablets which are administered with warm boiled water. It was advised to be taken whenever people had the urge to drink alcohol which gave them the same taste.

Chongzhi6, conventionally used to treat stomach disorder has been prescribed to give up smoking and chewing tobacco. It is consisted of 6 components called *Punicagranitum*, *Piper pedicellatum*, *Ellettariacardamomum* and *Inularacemosus*. A single capsule can be divided into 3 doses. *Chongzhi 6* is expected to help recover lung inflammation which is caused due to smoking. Similarly, *Pangyen 15* is prescribed for the people who consume betel nut (doma).

Reasons for visiting NTMH

Around 1500 people have approached for the medicines that helped stop drinking and smoking in the clinic at Kawajangsa hospital and more than 1000 people outside the clinic. He has visited three schools at Mongar where students addicted were seeking his help. Around 800 students from Gelephu, Bajo, Thinleygang, Dechencholing and Changjiji are also taking the medicines. More than 200 people visited for the prescription every week at Traditional Medicine Hospital. 2230 came for the medicines to stop drinking and 456 for smoking. People also visit with the purpose to stop chewing betel nut with the medicine he suggested. 1756 people have approached for all the three categories above. Around 100 people have been able to completely stop drinking and smoking as per the *Drungtsho's* record.

Why people visit Traditional Medicine Hospital?

The main reason behind for visiting the hospital is to avoid drinking and smoking which most of them feel is very bad. They are very eager to listen what the *Drungtsho* has to say about their habit. They are truly influenced by the counseling *Drungtsho* gives them before prescribing. Some people even promise in front of him and start taking medicines. Out of forty respondents 37 of them feel that drinking is a bad habit and bad for health. No one feel that drinking is fashion or a good habit. However, they point out that they have been in drinking

by the time they realized. The study found that the large number of unemployed people consume alcohol besides their knowledge. The house wives residing in Thimphu areas tend to gather together at home and often drink(Figure 1).

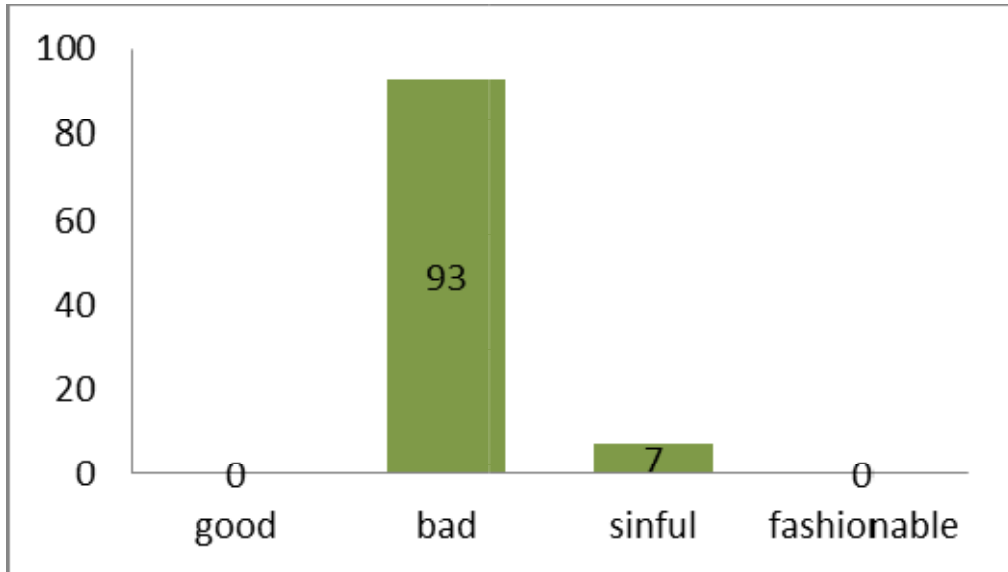


Figure1. People's attitude towards drinking.

People's attitude towards smoking

The term "attitude" here describes people's opinion about smoking. None of the respondents feel that smoking is good for them. The least number of participants feel that smoking is sinful (Figure 2). Some youths after realizing the negative impacts of smoking intend to avoid it. The school going students are taking an initiative to stop from smoking before they are too late. More than 200 students from Thimphu have started taking the traditional medicines for smoking. They also expressed the positive impacts of traditional medicines which are beneficial for their health and reputation as a result of being able to quit smoking. It is also observed that people could stop chewing tobacco by taking traditional medicine called *Chongzhi 6*. The physician says that it is not necessary to stop chewing betel nut because it helps to keep the teeth strong. Therefore, he advises people

to control it. Almost all the respondents experienced the positive impact after taking this medicine and keeps on enquiring for more medicines.

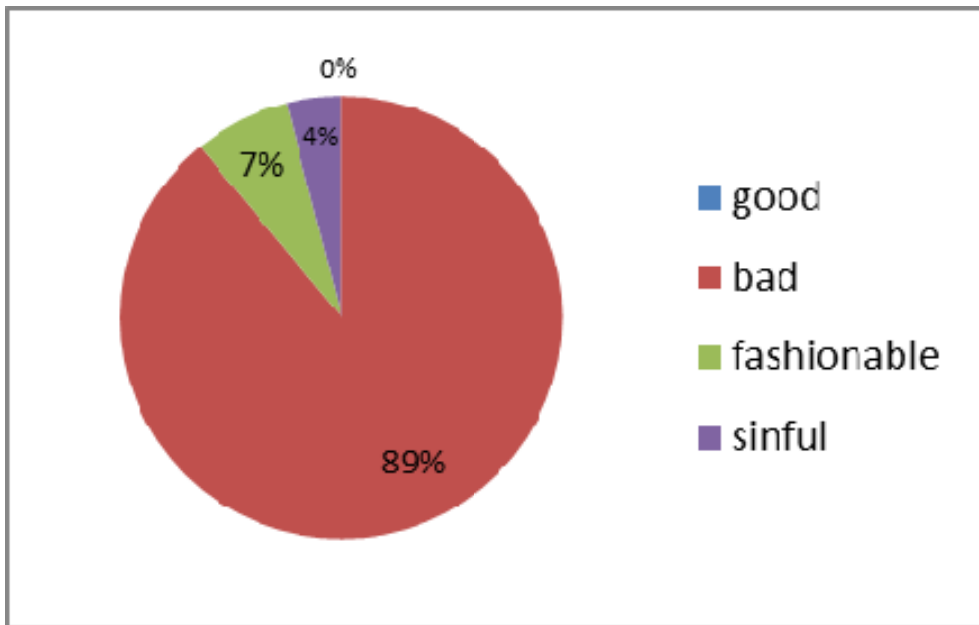


Figure2. People's attitude towards smoking and chewing tobacco

Temptations that make people to drink and smoke

The study also attempted to find out how often people drink and smoke. The majority of the informants said that they drink thrice a day and smoke frequently. When enquiring about the date they started drinking and smoking, most of them cannot exactly remember when they got into it. The maximum numbers of participants drink out of their enjoyment and some as an addiction. (Figure3). The respondents also spoke about other temptation that makes them drink, such as:

- As a refreshment after heavy works.
- Underenforcement by colleagues.
- The feeling of need to taste everything.
- As pain reliever of chronic headache.

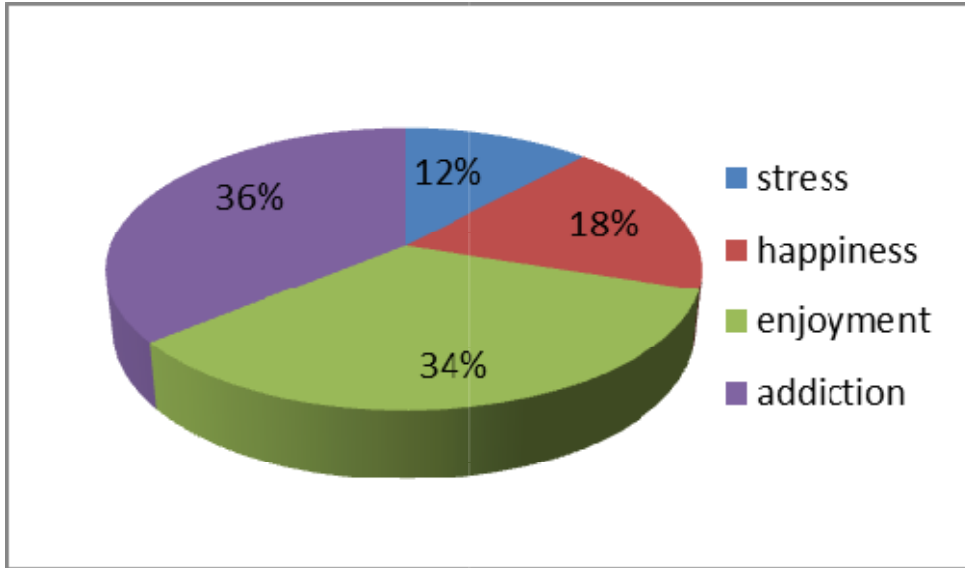


Figure3. Temptations that make people drink.

Sources of information about Traditional Medicines in Bhutan

People were aware about Traditional Medicines and its uses in quitting drinking and smoking mainly through media. Some of them were influenced to come after hearing it from their friends and relatives (Figure4). The participants also extended the response with the feelings and gratitude they felt upon hearing about it.

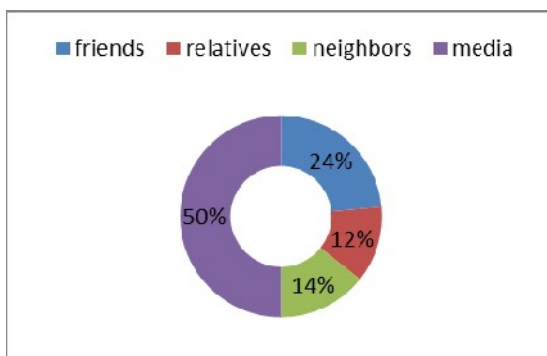


Figure4. Source of information about TM helping to give up drinking and smoking

The maximum numbers of informants are satisfied with the medication they receive from the *Drungtsho* and his counseling. It seems like people are mentally

influenced by the power of his speech, more than that of medicines. For instance, many participants expressed that it is not the medicine alone that they are up to. His counseling really helps to change their mind. People also agreed about the positive impact of medicines they take without leaving any complain of side effects. Moreover, they also added saying that they can totally trust the Bhutanese Traditional Medicines in terms of avoiding their habit of drinking and smoking.

Number of people who have taken the traditional medicines for smoking and drinking

As per the record mentioned by the physician, there is an increase in the number of people who visit for the medicines monthly. The table below shows the overall record of people who visited for the medicines within four months.

Month	Drinking	Smoking\chewing	Betel nut
February	44	42	39
March	65	54	44
April	76	82	76
May	99	87	78

Figure 5. Number of people who have visited TMH to stop drinking, smoking and chewing betel nut

Challenges faced by Drungtsho

The most common challenge faced is the insufficient amount of medicines. Since those medicines are mainly prescribed for other diseases, it often runs out of stock due to which he receives complains from the administration. Since his idea is not based on any scientific evidence, he lacks adequate cooperation from other

physicians and the administration. There is no clinical trial carried out to prove whether his idea works out accurately or not. Therefore, the administration and the related traditional health workers are responsible for all those works to be carried out. As a health trainee, I also feel that we should share responsibility in shaping his idea of stopping drinking and smoking with the help of traditional medicines.

Brief history on introduction of *gSo-ba rig-pa* medicines for drinking and smoking

TandinPhurba, the physician from NTMH is the one who generated an idea of introducing traditional medicines to help people to stop drinking and smoking. In 2011, when he was serving at Parohospital and saw a plastic of baba falling down from the patient's pocket in his chamber. Henceforth, he was forced to think of other alternatives for that substance called *baba*. Then he started to pretest that patient from Parowith *Chongzhi* 6. After returning from his master's degree studies, he continued to generate new idea of treating people in case of drinking and smoking too. Coinciding with the Birth Anniversary of the crown prince, he was requested to introduce the idea in Bhutan Broadcasting Service. That is how the news spread around the nation.

Conclusion

The overall findings of the study indicate that Gso-rig medicines are effective in helping people quit drinking alcohol and smoking. People residing in Thimphu areas reported evidence of positive effect of the medicines towards their health. A significant number of people come to seek traditional medicine treatment for alcohol and tobacco addiction and they are happy and satisfied with the services it provides.

In Bhutan *gSo-ba Rig-pa* plays a vital role in maintaining the health care system. The findings of the study indicated that many people choose to visit NTMH for the treatment. Respondents also reported that the traditional system of health care should be further developed in order to serve the health needs of the people of our country.

Recommendations from the study

Nowadays most people prefer to visit traditional medicines hospital looking for medicines to quit smoking and drinking. People suggest for the further improvement in medical services and production unit for more medicines. Hence, more initiatives could be taken by the government to create adequate awareness among the people about the negative impacts of drinking and smoking.

Although many people are seeking the help of traditional medicines to quit drinking and smoking, there has been no scientific evidence to prove its efficacy. Hence, more scientific studies such as clinical trials needs to be conducted in this area to provide valid evidence and confidence among the people, thereby helping to make the practice more official and legalized.

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