

An Enquiry into the efficacy of *Dutsi-nga-lum*, a unique healing therapy in the Traditional Bhutanese Medicine

*Sangay Wangdi Dy. Dean Student Affairs
Faculty of Traditional Medicine*

Abstract

Dutsi-nga-lum is one of the most important and popular forms of therapies in Traditional Bhutanese Medicine that is prescribed for at least 13 different types of ailments. This study is intended to assess the efficacy and side effects of various therapies based on *Dutsi-nga-lum*. A total of 226 patients (informants) undergoing *dutsi-nga-lum* therapies were interviewed using a structured questionnaire to self-reporting of their experience with the *dutsi-nga-lum* based therapies. Of the total 226 informants, 72% responded that the *dutsi-nga-lum* treatments were effective in treating their ailments, while 28% of the informants were not sure of the result. The study found that *dutsi-nga-lum* based therapies are very effective in treating various ailments.

Introduction

Lum is one of the five main therapies in Bhutanese Traditional Medicine. It is an important form of therapy used in treating various ailments and disorders in human health. The traditional medical text of *gSo-ba Rig-pa* defines *Dutsi-nga-Lum* as a formulation that conquers the destructive forces and effects of evil spirits that bring sufferings to human beings, causing diseases. It is a traditional medicine formulary used for the treatment of arthritis, neurological diseases, gout, swollen limbs and joints, skin disorders, muscle aches, rigid and stiff backbones, and old infectious wounds and in regenerative treatment of the five vital organs namely, heart, lungs, liver, spleen and kidneys.

Dutsi-nga-lum formulation is also used in general spa treatments, which helps to mask foul body odor, achieve smooth soft fair skin, brings about relaxation of muscles after a tiring game of sports and strenuous exercise and helps to lose excess weight. Three different types of *dutsi-nga-lum* therapies are currently made available. They are: *Chulum* (herbal bath), *Langlum* (steam bath) and *Lang-dhug* (local steaming) as shown in the picture below.



The purpose of conducting this study was to assess the benefits of various therapies based on *Dutsi-nga-lum* which is one of the most popular services provided at the National Traditional Medicine Hospital (NTMH) in Thimphu.

The therapies are used in the treatment of various ailments and many patients undergo these therapies at NTMH every day. Therefore, this study, the first of its kind, attempts to understand the therapeutic benefits of the three main types of *Dutsi-nga-lum* therapies; namely, *Lang-dhug* (local steaming), *Langlum* (steam bath) and *Chulum* (herbal bath) in treating various ailments.

Method

The study area selected for this study was National Traditional Medicine Hospital (NTMH) in Thimphu and Traditional Medicine Unit in Paro District hospital.

A total of 226 individuals were randomly selected from among the patients who visited the NTMH for the *Dutsi-nga-lum* therapies during the three years period, 2011-2014. All the informants were above the age of 18 years. A prior informed consent was obtained from all the informants who participated in the study.

The informants were interviewed individually by using a structured questionnaire to collect data on the benefits and efficacy of the three types of therapies separately. The self assessed benefit reports gathered from the informants were transcribed in the computer, ensuring the protection and confidentiality of the information gathered. The data collected were classified and categorized into various categories which were analyzed using simple statistics, the Microsoft Excel Programs.

Result

Results of the study showed that 72% of the informants reported *dutsi-nga-lum* therapies as beneficial in treating their ailments while 28% of them were not sure about the effects of the therapies (Table 1).

Table 1. The reports of informants on the various “dutsi-nga-lum” therapies

	Response	No of Patients	% of Patients
1	Beneficial	163	72
2	Not Beneficial	0	0
3	Don't Know	63	28
	Total	226	100

The patients were interviewed on discomforts and side effects of the therapies during the actual therapy from the herbal bath mixture and their responses recorded (table 2).

Table 2. The response of patients on the discomforts experienced while undergoing “Dutsi-nga-lum” therapies.

	Response	No of Patients	% of Patients
1	Experienced discomforts	22	10
2	No discomfort	174	77
3	Don't Know	30	13
Total		226	100

As indicated above, a total of 22 patients experienced some form of discomfort especially mild headache and feeling of nausea while undergoing *dutsi-nga-lum* therapies. Majority of patients (77%) experienced no such discomfort during the therapy. The responses of the informants to drug therapy and *dutsi-nga-lum* therapies were recorded to assess their preference for the two different therapies (Table 3).

Table 3. Responses of patients on the benefits of drug and *Dutsi-nga-lum* therapies.

	Response	No of Patients	% of Patients
1	Drug Therapy is beneficial	73	32.3
2	<i>Dutsi-Nga-Lum</i> is beneficial	145	64.2
3	Don't Know	8	3.5
Total		226	100

The results in the table 3 indicate that 64.2% of the patients felt that *dutsi-nga-lum* therapies were beneficial while only 32.3 % of the patients felt that drug therapy was beneficial for their ailments. This shows that more people feel *dutsi-nga-lum* therapies to be beneficial than the drug therapy, while 3.5 % of the patients did not know the differences between the two therapies.

Table 4. The patients with various diseases who visited NTMH for *dutsi-nga-lum*-

Sl. No	Disease category	Age distribution						Total
		18 to 30		31 to 60		61 and above		
		M	F	M	F	M	F	
1	Skin disease	19	11	0	5	2	3	40
2	Ulcer	0	3	1	2	1	1	8
3	Backache	2	5	12	11	12	12	54
4	Lower abdominal cool disease	11	5	6	9	5	5	41
5	Piles	11	2	8	9	4	0	34
6	Accidental pains	0	1	5	2	2	1	11
7	Nerve problems	19	14	17	21	11	14	96
8	Arthritis	4	5	16	14	6	6	51
9	Disease of the bile and phlegm	2	0	2	4	4	0	12

10	Disease of the bile and wind	3	3	0	8	3	4	21
11	Infected localized wound	3	0	0	0	0	0	3
12	Swollen testicles	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
13	Oedema	2	1	3	5	2	1	14
Total		77	50	70	90	52	47	386

Table above indicates that about 13 different ailments were being treated by dutsi-nga-lum at NTMH. The age group of patients ranged from 18 years and above.

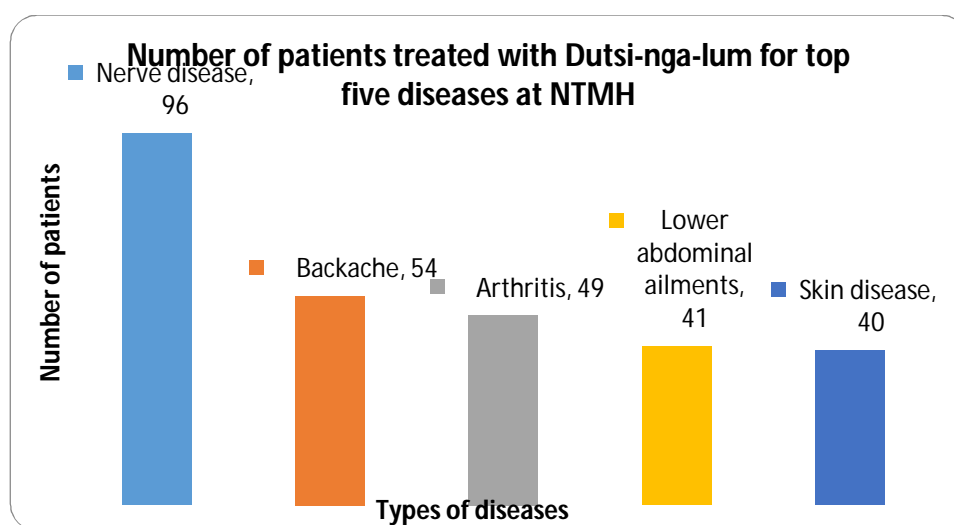


Figure 2. Top five diseases treated with dutsi-nga-lum at NTMH in 2011

The figure above show the five top diseases treated by *dutsi-nga-lum* based therapies. It is evident that the largest number of patients undergoing “Dutsi-nga-lum” based therapies composed of people with some form of neurological disorders. The second highest category was those suffering from chronic as well as acute backaches followed by arthritic patients, lower abdominal ailments and skin diseases.

Discussion

While the *dutsi-nga-lum* is claimed to have various healing powers in the literature, there was no evidential proof to indicate that it is actually effective in treating various ailments. Our study confirmed that the different *dutsi-nga-lum* therapies were beneficial in treating various diseases.

As evidenced from the research finding, *dutsi-nga-lum* therapies were most popular for the treatment of neurological disorders, backaches, arthritis, lower abdominal ailments related to cold element and skin diseases. The three therapies of *dutsi-nga-lum* were used for the treatment of 13 different ailments in all age ranges above 18 years old.

The discomforts and side effects of the therapies were as expected. The available literature advises people with high blood pressure and high wind element to avoid such therapies. The study has

confirmed that almost 10 % of the patients surveyed reported discomforts from *dutsi- nga-lum* therapies such as nausea, headache and dizziness.

The patients complained that there was no standard time on how long the therapy must be undertaken. Some patients were made to undergo therapy for 30 minutes while some were made to undergo for 45 minutes or more. As per the texts the patients must be given therapy in progressive and later in descending manners. For example if the therapy is for one week, the patient must first start the therapy for 15 minutes on the first day, 30 minutes on the second day, 45 minutes on the third day and peaking for one hour on the fourth day. The therapy after the fourth day must be progressively reduced. -Such practice was not observed at NTMH.

The other observation made during the study was that there is no proper referral systems and basis on when to provide the *dutsi-nga-lum* therapy and when to provide the drug therapy. For most part the patient requests the Drungtsho for *dutsi-nga-lum* therapies and he/she relents to the patients' request. Further, majority of the patients (64%) stated that *dutsi-nga-lum* therapies were beneficial whereas only (32%) of the patients reported drug therapy to be beneficial.

Unlike the popular notion that mostly older people come to seek traditional medicine services, the result from the survey questionnaire found that there was neither gender bias nor age group bias in people seeking *dutsi-nga-lum* therapies. All age groups and both genders sought traditional medicine services in almost equal proportions.

Limitation of the study

The study did not have any clinical and medical test parameters to confirm the efficacy and effectiveness of the *dutsi-nga-lum* therapies. The study was a self assessed report based on a set of questions put by the researcher to the informants directly.

Conclusion and recommendation

As stated in the discussion and the result sections, about 10% of the patients surveyed reported some form of side effects from the *dutsi-nga-lum* therapies. However, the staffs providing the therapies were not properly trained and no standard operating procedures were available neither in providing the various therapies nor for dealing with patients suffering from side effects of the therapies. This must be rectified in providing quality services and in ensuring the safety of the patients.

There must be proper SOPs and practices must be aligned as prescribed in the texts. There should be proper referral systems and criteria set on when and how the different therapies must be given to the patients for quality services.

In the future more scientific based study must be carried out to objectively validate the perceived benefits of the *dutsi-nga-lum* therapies. A study could also be conducted on each category of *dutsi-nga-lum* therapies for specific ailments with larger subject population using structured questions in the future to assess the benefits of each therapy.

Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge the Faculty of Traditional Medicine for providing the funding support for this research, the National Traditional Medicine Hospital and Menjong Sorig Pharmaceutical for enabling access to their facilities, the Royal University of Bhutan for guidance and

encouragement to carry out research on traditional medicines. I also thank my family for their constant support and understanding during this work. Lastly, I thank Mr. Ugyen Dendup, Head of MSP for translating my report into English despite his busy schedules.

References:

1. *Throru Tsaynam, (2000) Sorig Juzhiyi Drelchen Drangsong Zhelung, Silthren Mirig PaytruenKahng*
2. *Lunrig Tendhar, (2004) Juzhiyi Dhatroel Namgyel Arurai Threngwa, Janak Mirig PaythreunKhang*
3. *Yuthog Nyingma YontenGembo, (1999) sMenZhung Cha Lak Chobgyeth, BoethZhung MentsiKhang*
4. *Khewang Kempa Tsewang, (1997) Chimajuiigi Namsheth Laklen Seljeth, BoeZhung Mentsikhang*
5. *Yuthog Je, (1982) Sorig Tsigzoe Yuthog Gongjen, Mirig Paytruenkhang*
6. *Lopen Ludrub, sMencheth Dawai Gyelpo, BoeZhung Mentsikhang*
7. *Lobzang Tenzin, Boegi Sorig Lopthey, BoeZhung Mentsikhang*
8. *Menjong Sorig Pharmaceuticals (2007) Nyerkhor sMenjor Chimeth Duzi Bumzang,*
9. *Samten, (1996) Sorig Nyingdhu Charing Sarpa, Boejong Mimang Paytreunkhang*
10. *Tenzin Phuntsho, (1976) Drimeth Shelgong dang Shelthreng, Tsomoen Mimang Paytreunkhang*
11. *Sorig Zinchongtewa, (2008) ChethNgai Lamtoen Phenthey Norbu Threngwa*
12. *Menjong Sorig Zotruenkhang (2012) Druk Ranglug Nangpai Mengi Jordab,*