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The prevalence and perceived efficacy of medicinal plants used for stomach ailments in the Amathole district municipality, Eastern Cape, South Africa

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The high rate of immuno-compromised individuals in South Africa has been associated to the increase of different kinds of stomach related infectious diseases such as persistent diarrhoea, gastroenteritis and candidemia. An estimated 70–80% of black people in South Africa consult with traditional healers before consulting with formal health care services. The aim of this study was therefore to evaluate the prevalence and perceived efficacy of medicinal plants used in the management of stomach ailments in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. The study was carried out by interviewing 101 local inhabitants in 4 locations of the Amathole District of the Eastern Cape. A total of 101 informants with a mean age of 33.56 participated in the study, comprising 53 (52%) males and 48 (48%) females. Twenty three plant species distributed in 15 families and 19 genera were cited for the treatment of one or more stomach disorders. The most representative family was Xanthorrhoeaceae (3 species) while Apiaceae, Apocynaceae, Euphorbiaceae, Fabaceae and Lamiaceae were represented by 2 species each. The species with the highest use-values (UV) were *Aloe tenuior* (UV=12), *Strychnos henningsii* (UV=11), *Sonchus asper* (UV=10), *Ricinus communis* (UV=12), *Hypoxis argentea* (UV=10), while *Acacia mearnsii*, *Acokanthera oppositifolia* and *Zingiber officinale* each had a use-value of 9. Herbs constituted 44%, trees 13% and shrubs 43%. The leaves (57%) were the most frequently used plant part for the treatment of the stomach diseases, followed by the bark and root (10%) each. Seven methods of preparations were mentioned, among which infusion (34%) was the most frequently mentioned, followed by decoction (23%) and juice (16%). Administration of the different plant parts was mainly oral (100%).

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