

## ORIGINAL RESEARCH

# Knowledge, Attitudes and Opinions of Physicians on Cups Treatment

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### Abstract

**Objective:** The aim of this study is to determine the knowledge, attitudes and thoughts of physicians about complementary medicine and cupping therapy in particular.

**Material-Method:** Between October 1, 2018 and December 10, 2018, a questionnaire consisting of 27 questions was applied face-to-face to 435 physicians working in various health institutions in Ankara and who agreed to participate in the survey voluntarily. Chi-square analysis and logistic regression analysis methods were used in the evaluation of the data. The significance level was taken as 0.05 in the interpretation of the results.

**Results:** The person's liking to practice medicine, having sufficient knowledge about traditional medicine, receiving training on traditional medicine, practicing traditional medicine, having him and his relatives practice traditional medicine, having positive and negative knowledge and experience about cupping, are effective in welcoming cupping practice positively ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**Conclusion:** In line with the findings of our study, most of the physicians think that they have insufficient knowledge about traditional and complementary medicine practices. In order to fill this gap, it can be considered to focus on pre-graduate and post-graduate education programs. By increasing the theoretical and practical applications related to traditional and complementary medicine methods, physicians can be placed at the center of these applications. As the use of traditional and complementary medicine treatment methods becomes more common in society, healthcare professionals have a great responsibility to inform the patients and to administer the treatments correctly.

**Keywords:** Cupping Therapy, Traditional Medicine, Complementary Therapies, Alternative Medicine

### INTRODUCTION

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), traditional medicine is defined as the whole of knowledge, skills and practices that can be explained or not based on theories, beliefs and experiences specific to different cultures, which are used to protect, diagnose, improve or treat physical and mental diseases as well as to maintain health.<sup>1</sup>

Practices related to traditional and complementary medicine are increasing in our country as well as in the world. The methods defined by the regulation in our country; hypnosis, apitherapy, reflexology, phytotherapy, leech, homeopathy, chiropractic, cupping, larvae application, mesotherapy, prolotherapy, osteopathy, ozone application and music therapy.<sup>2,3</sup>

Cupping therapy, one of these methods, is a universal treatment method that has been used in the East and West for centuries. It was first used in history by the Assyrians. It was applied with tools such as animal

horns and bamboo in the 3500s.<sup>4,5</sup>

Cupping therapy has spread to many European and US countries through Egypt. In England, the practice of the Cup dates back hundreds of years. "The Lancet," one of the leading medical journals, is named after the practice of cupping therapy.<sup>6</sup>

Although the mechanism of action of cupping therapy is not fully understood today, there are various hypotheses and scientific studies related to it. It is argued that cupping therapy has positive neural, metabolic, immunological, hematological and psychiatric effects. It is stated that cupping therapy is a good deep tissue massage method.<sup>7,8,9</sup>

As with other traditional methods of medicine, the application of cupping therapy by competent and authorized people is extremely important for patient health. The application of cupping therapy by unauthorized persons does more harm than good to the patient and undermines the confidence in this

treatment method.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, in order to prevent illegal and uninformed practices, the authority to apply any of the traditional and complementary medicine methods has been given by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Turkey to only physicians and dentists only, limited to their own fields, with the regulation published in the Official Gazette No. 29158 on October 27, 2014.<sup>10</sup>

Although only certified physicians and dentists are authorized to apply cupping therapy by the Ministry of Health, there are still many non-physicians who still practice this treatment. Cupping treatment practice by incompetent people is a threat to public health, but it casts a shadow over the effectiveness and reliability of this treatment method.<sup>7</sup> For this reason, physicians should be involved in this platform both in practice and education in order for cupping therapy to become widespread in the society on scientific and ethical grounds. For this purpose, the knowledge and opinions of physicians who are practitioners of complementary medicine are important for the applicability of traditional medical practices.

The aim of this study is to reveal the knowledge, attitudes and thoughts of physicians who are practitioners of traditional medicine methods about cupping therapy.

#### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

In this study, a questionnaire with 27 questions was used to determine the knowledge, attitudes and thoughts of traditional medicine practitioners about cupping therapy. The study was conducted with the approval of the Ethics Committee of Health Practice and Research Center of Health Sciences University, Keçiören, dated 26.09.2018 and numbered 1762. Between October 1, 2018 and December 10, 2018, a face-to-face questionnaire was applied to physicians working in various health institutions under the roof of Health Sciences University in Ankara, with their written consent (based on volunteerism). In addition to the questions that included information such as place of work, medical status, branch, age, gender, and the year spent in the profession, the questionnaire was applied to the physicians, whether they like to practice medicine, whether they have sufficient knowledge about traditional medicine, the source of information about traditional medicine, any branch of traditional medicine. whether he has education and if so, which branch he has studied, whether he has practiced any branch of traditional medicine, whether his relatives have had traditional medicine practice, whether he has welcomed the cup application, the reasons for your positive and negative opinion,

whether there are situations that will change the negative opinion, Questions were asked about whether he had positive or negative information about the cup application, whether he had a positive or negative experience with the cup application, and whether he wanted to take part in a scientific study about the cup application. Data were collected from a total of 435 physicians who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. The limitation of the study is that it was conducted only in various centers in the province of Ankara.

Evaluation of the data was done using SPSS 22.0. Descriptive) statistics (percentage for categorical data, mean and standard deviation for numerical data of all variables are presented. The effect of other variables on the positive response of cupping therapy was examined by binary logistic regression analysis. Chi-square analysis was applied for the relationship between categorical variables. The significance level was taken as 0.05 in the interpretation of the results.

#### **RESULTS**

Of the 435 physicians who participated in the study, 23.4% were specialists, 65.7% were assistants and 10.8% were general practitioners. According to their field of study, 87.4% work in hospitals, 8% in FHCs and 4.6% in other health care institutions. The distribution according to their speciality is; Family Medicine 38.3%, Internal Medicine 13.1%, General Practice 10.6%, Pediatrics 8.9%, Emergency 3.9%, Anesthesia and Resuscitation 3.2%, Other 19%. The mean age of the participants was  $30.2 \pm 5.25$  years, and the mean length of professional experience was  $5.64 \pm 5.17$  years (Table 1). When we examine the answers given by the physicians to the questions about traditional medicine (Table 2); while 22.5% of the participants thought that they had sufficient knowledge about traditional medicine, 77.5% of them stated that they did not have enough information. It was stated that 47.8% of the information about traditional medicine was obtained from the media. The rate of those who received any training on traditional medicine is 10%. Acupuncture, aromatherapy, bioresonance, phytotherapy, hypnotherapy, cupping, hirudotherapy, mesotherapy, prolotherapy, manual therapy, ozone, leech are their training areas. It was observed that the most training was received in the application of cups. 8% of the physicians stated that they practice a branch of traditional medicine. The rate of those who practice traditional medicine is 20%, and the rate of those who have their relatives practice traditional medicine is 29%.

**Table 1.** Distribution of physicians participating in the survey according to certain characteristics

Survey Question	Categories	(n)	(%)
Physician status	Specialist	102	23.40
	Assistant	286	65.70
	General practitioner	47	10.80
Field of study	Hospital	380	87.40
	Family health center	35	8.00
	Other health institutions	20	4.60
Branches	Family medicine	167	38.30
	Internal medicine	57	13.10
	General practitioner	46	10.60
	Pediatrics	39	8.90
	Emergency	17	3.90
	Anesthesia and reamination	14	3.20
	Public health	12	2.80
	Other	83	19.00
Gender	Female	262	60.20
	Male	173	39.80
Do you like to practice medicine?	Yes	346	79.54
	No	89	20.46

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics of the questions asked about cupping therapy

Survey Question	Categories	(n)	(%)
Do you have enough knowledge about traditional medicine?	No	337	77.50
	Yes	98	22.50
What is your source of information about traditional medicine?	Media (TV, internet, magazine etc.)	296	47.82
	Scientific resources (education, publication, etc.)	189	30.53
	Other	134	21.65
Do you have training in any branch of Traditional Medicine?	Yes	42	9.66
	No	393	90.34
Do you practice any branch of traditional medicine?	No	401	92.20
	Yes	34	7.80
Have you made yourself a traditional medicine practice?	Yes	85	19.54
	No	350	80.46
Have your relatives had traditional medicine practice?	Yes	125	28.74
	No	310	71.26
Do you welcome the Cup application?	Yes	235	54.00
	No	200	46.00
What are the reasons for your positive opinion?	Experience	128	30.55
	Scientific resource (education, publication, etc.)	93	22.20
	Religious reasons	88	21.00
	Media (TV, magazine, internet, etc.)	57	13.60
	Other	53	12.65
What are the reasons for your negative opinion?	Scientific resource (education, publication, etc.)	96	37.65
	Media (TV, magazine, internet, etc.)	38	14.90
	Experience	31	12.16
	Other	90	35.29
Are there situations that will change your negative opinion?	No	111	63.87
	Yes	86	36.13
Did you get any negative information about the cup application?	Yes	146	33.56
	No	289	66.44
Did you get positive information about the cup application?	Yes	234	53.79
	No	201	46.21
Have you had a negative experience with the Cup app?	Yes	34	7.82
	No	401	92.18
Have you had a positive experience with the Cup app?	Yes	115	26.44
	No	320	73.56
Have you heard of negative scientific study about the cup application?	Yes	48	11.03
	No	387	88.97
Have you heard of the positive scientific study about the cup application?	Yes	104	23.91
	No	331	76.09
Would you like to take part in a scientific study about the cup application?	Yes	187	42.99
	No	248	57.01

If we examine the opinions of the physicians on cupping, which is a method of traditional medicine, while the rate of those who welcomed the use of cups was 54%, it was seen that the rate of those who viewed it negatively was 46%. While 31% of the physicians who view cupping therapy positively express a positive opinion based on experience, 38% of those who have a negative opinion about the application view cupping therapy negatively in line with the information they have obtained from scientific sources. The rate of those who have a positive opinion of this practice for religious reasons is 21%. 63% of those who have a negative opinion about cupping stated that there is no situation that would change their current opinion. The rate of those who had previously received negative information about the cup application was 34%, and the rate of those who had received positive information was 54%. The rate of those who have had a negative experience with the cup application is 8%, and the rate of those who have had a positive experience is 26%. While the rate of physicians encountering positive scientific studies on cupping therapy is 24%, the rate of physicians encountering negative scientific studies is 11%. It has been observed that the rate of those who want to take part in a scientific study on cupping therapy is 43%.

According to the results of the chi-squared analysis shown in Table 3, the relationship between the status of the physician, the place where the physician works, and gender was not found to be significant ( $p > 0.05$ ). The fact that the person likes to practice medicine, thinks that he has sufficient knowledge about traditional medicine, receives training in traditional medicine, practices traditional medicine, has himself and his relatives practice traditional medicine, and has positive and negative knowledge and experience about cupping is effective in the positive acceptance of cupping practice ( $p < 0.05$ ). While 56.4% of those who like to practice medicine positively agree with the application of cups, 55.1% of those who do not like medicine are negative about the application of cups. While 56.4% of those who like to practice medicine have a positive attitude towards cupping, 55.1% of those who do not like medicine have a negative attitude towards cupping. While 66.3% of those with sufficient knowledge of traditional medicine responded positively to the practice, 50% of those without sufficient knowledge reported positive and 50% negative opinions. It was observed that 86% of those who had received training in traditional medicine and 50% of those who had not had a positive attitude towards the practice. 97% of

those who practice traditional medicine and 85% of those who have used traditional medicine on themselves and their relatives have a positive view of cupping therapy. While 66% of those who have negative information about cupping have a negative view of its use, 82% of those who have positive information about it welcome its use. While 79.4% of those who had a negative experience with cupping have a negative opinion of the practice, 96.5% of those who had a positive experience with cupping have a positive opinion of the practice. While 69% of those who had heard negative scientific studies about cupping had a negative view of the practice, 81% of those who had heard positive scientific studies welcomed the practice. While 82% of those who wanted to participate in a scientific study about cupping welcomed the practice, 67% of those who did not want to participate in a scientific study welcomed the practice negatively.

#### **Results of logistic regression analysis**

In the logistic regression analysis, the variable of "welcoming the cup application positively" was the dependent variable, liking medicine, having knowledge about traditional medicine, having education about traditional medicine, practicing traditional medicine, having traditional medicine applied to himself and his relatives, positive about the cup. Negative knowledge and experience, hearing positive-negative scientific studies about the cup, participating in a scientific study about the cup were taken as independent variables (Table 4). According to the Hosmer-Lemeshow goodness of fit test, the logistic regression model was found to be appropriate. The variables found significant in the model are "positive-negative knowledge and experience about cupping therapy" and "willingness to participate in a scientific study about cupping". From the corresponding parameter (-2.3) in the model, it can be understood that having negative information about cupping therapy has a negative effect on positive acceptance of cupping therapy. Having positive information about cupping increases the positive acceptance of cupping by 17.74 times ( $p < 0.05$ ). Negative experience with cupping had a negative effect on positive acceptance of cupping (-3.06). A positive experience with cupping increased the positive response to cupping by 43.9 times ( $p < 0.05$ ). Hearing negative scientific studies about cupping therapy had a negative effect on the positive reception of cupping therapy (-1.53). The desire to conduct scientific research on cupping treatment increased the positive response rate of cupping by 3.6 times ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**Table 3.** Chi-square analysis results

Questions	Categories	Cup Positive Reception		p value	
		Yes	No		
Physician status	Specialist	N %	47 46.1%	55 53.9%	0.165
	Assistant	N %	160 55.9%	126 44.1%	
	General practitioner	N %	28 59.6%	19 40.4%	
Field of study	Hospital	N %	206 54.2%	174 45.8%	0.947
	Family health center	N %	18 51.4%	17 48.6%	
	Other health institutions	N %	11 55.0%	9 45.0%	
Gender	Female	N %	145 55.3%	117 44.7%	0.28
	Male	N %	90 52.0%	83 48.0%	
Do you like to practice medicine?	Yes	N %	195 56.4%	151 43.6%	0.035
	No	N %	40 44.9%	49 55.1%	
Do you have enough knowledge about traditional medicine?	Yes	N %	65 66.3%	33 33.7%	0.004
	No	N %	170 50.4%	167 49.6%	
Do you have training in any branch of Traditional Medicine?	Yes	N %	36 85.7%	6 14.3%	<0.001
	No	N %	199 50.6%	194 49.4%	
Do you practice any branch of traditional medicine?	Yes	N %	33 97.1%	1 2.9%	<0.001
	No	N %	202 50.4%	199 49.6%	
Have you made yourself a traditional medicine practice?	Yes	N %	72 84.7%	13 15.3%	<0.001
	No	N %	163 46.6%	187 53.4%	
Have your relatives had traditional medicine practice?	Yes	N %	106 84.8%	19 15.2%	<0.001
	No	N %	129 41.6%	181 58.4%	
Did you get any negative information about the cup application?	Yes	N %	49 33.6%	97 66.4%	<0.001
	No	N %	186 64.4%	103 35.6%	
Did you get positive information about the cup application?	Yes	N %	191 81.6%	43 18.4%	<0.001
	No	N %	44 21.9%	157 78.1%	
Have you had a negative experience with the Cup app?	Yes	N %	7 20.6%	27 79.4%	<0.001
	No	N %	228 56.9%	173 43.1%	
Have you had a positive experience with the Cup app?	Yes	N %	111 96.5%	4 3.5%	<0.001
	No	N %	124 38.8%	196 61.3%	
Have you heard of negative scientific study about the cup application?	Yes	N %	15 31.3%	33 68.8%	0.001
	No	N %	220 56.8%	167 43.2%	
Have you heard of the positive scientific study about the cup application?	Yes	N %	84 80.8%	20 19.2%	<0.001
	No	N %	151 45.6%	180 54.4%	
Would you like to take part in a scientific study about the cup application?	Yes	N %	153 81.8%	34 18.2%	<0.001
	No	N %	82 33.1%	166 66.9%	

**Table 4.** Logistic regression analysis result

Independent variables	B	S.E.	Wald	df	p value	Exp(B)	95% C.I.for EXP(B)	
							Lower	Upper
Do you like to practice medicine? (1)	0.147	0.38	0.151	1	0.697	1.158	0.552	2.429
Do you have enough knowledge about traditional medicine? (1)	0.027	0.44	0.004	1	0.95	1.028	0.436	2.424
Do you have training in any branch of Traditional Medicine? (1)	1.342	0.97	1.902	1	0.168	3.826	0.568	25.755
Do you practice any branch of traditional medicine? (1)	-2.19	1.48	2.206	1	0.138	0.112	0.006	2.016
Have you made yourself a traditional medicine practice? (1)	0.662	0.7	0.903	1	0.342	1.939	0.495	7.603
Have your relatives had traditional medicine practice? (1)	0.78	0.47	2.739	1	0.098	2.181	0.866	5.49
Did you get any negative information about the cup application? (1)	-2.3	0.43	28.19	1	<0.001	0.1	0.043	0.234
Did you get positive information about the cup application? (1)	2.876	0.4	52.15	1	<0.001	17.737	8.127	38.711
Have you had a negative experience with the Cup app? (1)	-3.06	0.95	10.31	1	0.001	0.047	0.007	0.304
Have you had a positive experience with the Cup app? (1)	3.783	0.88	18.44	1	<0.001	43.931	7.816	246.9
Have you heard of negative scientific study about the cup application? (1)	-1.53	0.8	3.706	1	0.054	0.216	0.046	1.028
Have you heard of the positive scientific study about the cup application? (1)	1.089	0.61	3.19	1	0.074	2.972	0.899	9.822
Would you like to take part in a scientific study about the cup application? (1)	1.287	0.34	14.12	1	<0.001	3.623	1.851	7.088
Constant	-1.7	0.38	20.28	1	<0.001	0.184		

## DISCUSSION

Practices related to traditional and complementary medicine are increasing in our country as well as in the world. There are different thoughts and opinions about these practices among physicians who are authorized to perform traditional and complementary medicine practices. Some of the physicians apply and recommend traditional and complementary medicine practices to their patients. Some physicians, on the other hand, find these treatment methods unreliable and oppose them for various reasons. As in our country, there are different opinions among physicians regarding traditional and complementary medicine practices in the world. With this study, we aimed to determine the knowledge, attitudes and thoughts of physicians about cupping therapy and to

reveal the reasons underlying their different opinions. In a study by Özçakır et al. on general practitioners, 51% of the physicians stated that they believed that complementary and traditional medicine was beneficial.<sup>11</sup> While 54% of the physicians participating in our study welcomed cupping therapy, 46% stated that they viewed cupping therapy negatively, and it is seen that almost similar rates were obtained with the literature.

The relationships between the variables of having positive knowledge about cupping therapy and receiving education about traditional medicine and the variable of positive acceptance of cupping were found to be statistically significant ( $p < 0,05$ ). In a study conducted by Mahapatra et al. in the USA in

2017, it was reported that after the complementary medicine education given to medical school students, there was an increase in complementary medicine practices and positive attitudes towards it, which supports the results of our study.<sup>12</sup> In another study published in Israel in 2018, 22 nurses were given complementary medicine training, and their thoughts on complementary medicine were compared before and after these trainings. After the training, it was determined that the positive thoughts of the nurses about complementary medicine increased. At the same time, the nurses stated that the success of the treatment increased by using more complementary medicine methods more in the treatment of patients.<sup>13</sup> Sönmez et al., in their study conducted in Düzce in 2018, found a positive and significant relationship between the status of students having traditional and complementary medicine practices and their knowledge about these practices.<sup>14</sup>

Jump et al., in their study on 138 physicians in the USA, stated that 34.8% of physicians who had personally experienced one of the complementary medicine practices considered complementary medicine as a legitimate treatment method.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Zhang et al. examined the attitudes and behaviors of primary health care providers in the USA and found that positive results reinforced positive opinions about the effectiveness of complementary medicine practices among patients, their families, friends, and colleagues.<sup>16</sup> In a study published in 2014 by Wahner-Roedler et al., it was reported that the most important factors affecting physicians' attitudes about complementary medicine were personal experience and recommendations of respected colleagues who used therapy on their own.<sup>17</sup> In our study, the relationship between having a positive experience with cupping and welcoming cupping was found to be statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ), and it was concluded that having a positive experience increased the rate of positive cupping by 43.9 times.

Zhang et al. determined that scientific resources are effective on thoughts about complementary medicine.<sup>16</sup> Wahner-Roedler et al. found that scientific studies have an effect on physicians' views on complementary medicine.<sup>17</sup> In our evaluation, a statistically significant relationship was found between hearing positive scientific studies about cupping treatment and positive acceptance of cupping ( $p < 0.05$ ). It was concluded that hearing positive scientific studies increased the rate of positive response to sand application by 2.9 times.

Göker et al. conducted a study between 2012 and

2013 on the knowledge of dermatologists in Turkey regarding alternative and complementary medicine methods. The study found that 67.5% of physicians had little to no knowledge, while 13% had no knowledge at all. In another study by Özçakır et al., 60.8% of participants reported insufficient knowledge about traditional and complementary medicine.<sup>18</sup> In the study conducted by Özçakır et al., 60.8% of the participants stated that their knowledge level about traditional and complementary medicine was insufficient.<sup>11</sup> In the study of Ziodeen et al. on pediatric residents in the USA, it was reported that the biggest obstacle for physicians to recommend traditional and complementary medicine methods to their patients is their limited knowledge of the subject.<sup>19</sup> 22.5% of the physicians participating in our study stated that they had sufficient knowledge about traditional medicine, and 77.5% stated that the level of knowledge was insufficient. This rate reveals that the level of knowledge of doctors about traditional and alternative medicine is insufficient. The absence of any training on traditional and alternative medicine, both before and after graduation, may explain the low level of knowledge.

43% of the physicians in our study expressed interest in participating in a scientific study on cupping therapy. In a study conducted in the surgical service in Sweden, 27.8% of the participants expressed interest in participating in complementary and alternative medicine projects, and 61.2% believed that more research funds should be allocated for complementary and alternative medicine research.<sup>20</sup> In our study, 84.8% of participating physicians whose relatives received cupping therapy reported a positive attitude towards it. According to Oral et al., 73.2% of those who have used traditional and complementary medicine decided to have the practice done based on recommendations from relatives, friends, and neighbors.<sup>21</sup>

Additionally, 46% of the physicians in our study had a negative opinion about cupping therapy. The Turkish Medical Association (TBB) has expressed a negative opinion regarding traditional and complementary medicine methods due to the lack of scientific and reliable studies. According to a study by Ziodeen et al., 66.2% of physicians believe that there is insufficient evidence to support these practices.<sup>19</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Physicians' lack of knowledge about traditional and complementary medicine and the finding that positive knowledge increases the positive response to

cupping therapy suggests that pre- and post-graduate training on traditional and complementary medicine should be emphasized. In order to fill this gap, it can be considered to focus on pre-graduate and post-graduate education programs. Plans can be made to add theoretical and practical applications related to traditional and complementary medicine methods to the education curriculum of medical faculties.

The fact that experience has a positive effect on welcoming cupping therapy indicates that clinical studies in which physicians are involved should be increased. The lack of scientific resources related to traditional and complementary medicine practices causes physicians to approach these methods with suspicion. It is thought that scientific resources should be increased by encouraging physicians to do research on this subject and supporting scientific studies to be carried out. The number of traditional and complementary medicine practice centers in health institutions should be increased and physicians should be placed at the center of these practices. At the same time, it is suggested that scientific studies should be carried out in the light of the data to be obtained from these centers.

Many participants cited the media as a reason for their positive or negative opinions. Physicians should be provided with more accurate information on this subject with the resources to be published in the media.

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More than half of the physicians participating in our study reported that they did not want to take part in a scientific study on cupping therapy. They also cited the scientific source among the reasons for their positive and negative opinions about cupping therapy. By supporting the studies to be done in this field and encouraging physicians to participate in these studies, the number of scientific resources and the thought of physicians to participate in scientific studies can be increased.

Many physicians think that they have insufficient knowledge about traditional and complementary medicine practices. Considering that the use of traditional and complementary medicine treatment methods is becoming increasingly common in the society, healthcare professionals have a great duty and responsibility to inform patients and to administer treatments correctly.

Multicenter studies with more participants are needed to evaluate the status of traditional and complementary medicine practices in Turkey.

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