



## Review Article

# A Descriptive Review of Graduate Nursing Theses on the Use of Complementary and Alternative Medicine in Children in Turkey\*

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### Abstract

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**Objective:** The aim of this study is to examine postgraduate nursing theses conducted in Türkiye that involve the use of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) in children."

**Method:** Data were obtained by searching the National Thesis Center Database of the Council of Higher Education the keywords "child, mother, parent, alternative treatment."

**Results:** A total of seven postgraduate nursing theses related to complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) were identified between 2012 and 2024. Of these, one was a doctoral dissertation and six were master' s theses. The first thesis on this subject was conducted in 2012. Most of the theses were descriptive in design. The findings indicated that parents utilize CAM methods for their children and believe in their effectiveness. Furthermore, it was noted that nurses can integrate CAM practices into nursing care. However, the number of theses focusing on the use of CAM in children remains limited. Increasing the number of studies in this area could provide valuable guidance for future research.

**Conclusion:** "Upon examination of the postgraduate nursing theses, it was found that the majority were descriptive in nature and primarily focused on families' use of CAM methods for their children and their level of knowledge regarding these practices."

**Keywords:** Alternative treatment, Child, Mother, Parent

## INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines traditional medicine as *“the sum of knowledge, skills, and practices based on theories, beliefs, and experiences indigenous to different cultures, used in the maintenance of health as well as in the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of physical and mental illness”* (Kılıç & Soylar, 2019). Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) practices are often perceived as natural and harmless. Their non-invasive nature, ease of use, accessibility, and relatively low cost contribute to their widespread popularity (Groenewald et al., 2017; Akça et al., 2021). Globally, the use of CAM varies by socioeconomic development. In developed countries, the usage rates are relatively moderate—42.1% in the United States and 49.3% in France. In contrast, developing countries report significantly higher rates: 71% in Chile, 70% in China, and approximately 80% across African nations (Çınar et al., 2019; Kılıç & Soylar, 2019). In our country, the use of traditional and complementary medicine (TCM) has notably increased in recent years, especially among children. Studies have reported a wide range of usage rates, from 18.5% to as high as 95% (Akçay & Yıldırımlar, 2017; Güraslan Baş et al., 2016; Özdemir et al., 2020; Kaplan et al., 2023; Hepokur et al., 2023).

In pediatric care, families often resort to Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) methods out of a desire to alleviate their child's symptoms before seeking help from formal healthcare services, driven by anxiety and concern (Jong et al., 2020; Stampini et al., 2019; Kaplan et al., 2023). Several other factors also influence this decision, including the family's inability to effectively manage a child's chronic illness, fear of medication side effects, dissatisfaction with conventional treatments, and recommendations from relatives or acquaintances (Akçay & Yıldırımlar, 2017; Tural Büyük et al., 2022; Sezer Efe et al., 2020).

It is well documented that families frequently use CAM methods without consulting healthcare

professionals, and in some cases, they may deliberately withhold this information from them (Akçay & Yıldırımlar, 2017; Wopker et al., 2020). However, the unregulated use of CAM methods—particularly before a proper medical diagnosis or pharmacological treatment—can delay accurate diagnoses and effective interventions, potentially leading to adverse health outcomes, serious complications, and even life-threatening conditions in children (Tural Büyük et al., 2022; Çekiç et al., 2022; Hazır & Bozkurt, 2022).

Pediatric nurses play a crucial role in recognizing inappropriate or potentially harmful practices, promoting healthy lifestyles, and supporting the development of positive health behaviors in both children and their families (Çelik et al., 2021). Given the significant influence families have on the use of CAM for their children, nurses must take on a guiding and educational role. Since CAM practices can directly affect a child's health, nurses should routinely inquire about their use during health assessments, anamnesis, or clinical procedures to ensure that holistic and safe care is delivered (Kaplan et al., 2023).

To provide high-quality, patient-centered care, pediatric nurses must be able to anticipate and identify unsafe or ineffective CAM practices that may negatively impact a child's condition. This requires a comprehensive understanding of CAM and a holistic care approach aligned with principles of patient safety (Çelik et al., 2021). Although studies conducted in Türkiye suggest that nurses generally have a positive attitude towards CAM, their knowledge levels are often insufficient (Tural Büyük & Bayrak, 2021). Therefore, it is essential that pediatric nurses receive structured education to enhance their understanding of CAM and ensure that care is grounded in scientific evidence and clinical competence (Çırık & Efe, 2017).

The aim of this study is to examine postgraduate nursing theses conducted in Türkiye within the field of nursing that focus on the use of complementary and alternative therapies in

children, both in terms of quantity and content. By analyzing trends in these studies, the research seeks to create a data pool for future researchers, facilitate access to existing findings, and identify gaps in the literature—including unexplored topics, variables, and clinical practices—thereby guiding future studies in this field. The purpose of this study is to examine postgraduate nursing theses in Türkiye that focus on the use of complementary and alternative therapies in children. Specifically, the study aims to analyze these theses in terms of their publication year, type, research objectives, methodologies, and key findings.

### Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. In which years were postgraduate nursing theses on the use of complementary and alternative therapies in children published in Türkiye?
2. What types of postgraduate nursing theses have been conducted on the use of complementary and alternative therapies in children in Türkiye?
3. What are the primary objectives of these postgraduate nursing theses?
4. What are the general findings reported in postgraduate nursing theses related to the use of complementary and alternative therapies in children in Türkiye?

### METHOD

This retrospective descriptive study was conducted by reviewing the National Thesis Center database of the Council of Higher Education of Türkiye between April 10 and 20, 2025 (<https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/>). The database was searched using relevant keywords such as “child,” “mother,” “parent,” and “alternative therapy.” The titles and abstracts of the retrieved theses were screened for relevance.

Theses that were not within the field of nursing or did not focus on individuals within the pediatric age group were excluded from the study. Following the keyword search, postgraduate nursing theses related to the topic and conducted between 2012 and 2024 under the Institute of Health Sciences, Department of Nursing, and Department of Pediatric Nursing were included in the analysis.

As a result of the search, a total of 7 relevant theses were identified within the field of nursing that addressed the use of complementary and alternative therapies in children during the specified period.

### Data Analysis

In this study, the current status of postgraduate nursing theses conducted by nurses on the use of complementary and alternative therapies in the pediatric age group was examined based on various variables. A “Thesis Review Form,” developed by the researcher, was utilized to analyze the identified theses. This form was designed to evaluate multiple aspects, including the publication years of the theses, the universities where the studies were conducted, departmental distribution, research methods, study types, sample sizes, research objectives, and key findings. The collected data were organized into tables to facilitate comparison and systematic analysis.

### RESULTS

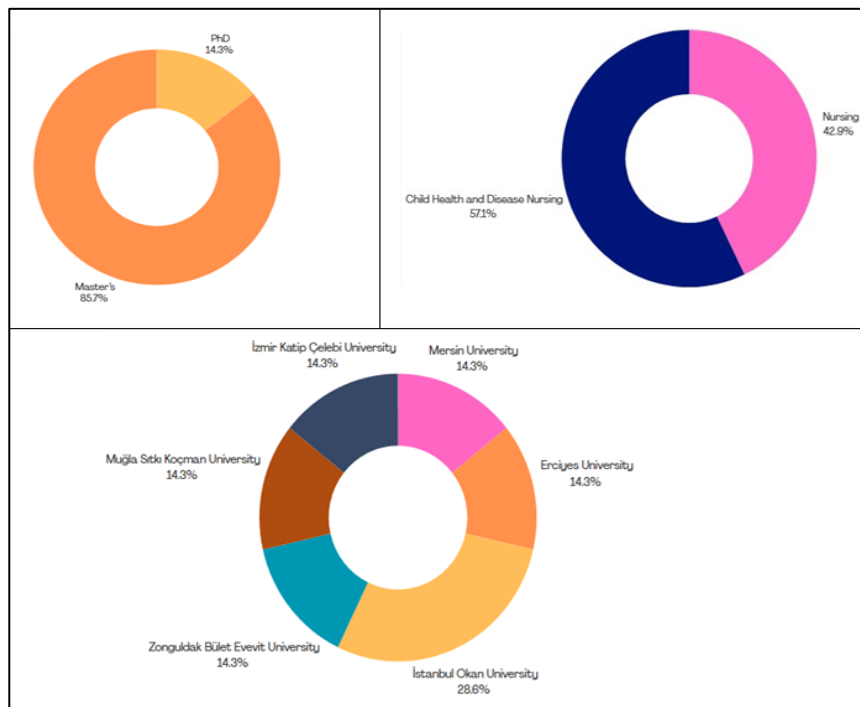
It was found that 85.7% of the theses were master’s theses, while 14.3% were doctoral dissertations. Regarding the publication years, each thesis was published in a different year. In terms of institutional distribution, 14.3% of the theses were conducted at Mersin University, İzmir Katip Çelebi University, Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University, and Zonguldak Bülent Ecevit University, respectively, while 28.4% were completed at Istanbul Okan University. Additionally, 57.1% of the theses were carried out within the Department of Pediatric Nursing, and

42.9% were conducted in the Department of Nursing (Table 1). (Figure 1).

Details including the publication year, thesis title, study objectives, sample size, study design, and findings of the master's and doctoral theses are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 1.** Distribution of theses by year of publication, department, and universities

	Content	n	%
<b>Thesis Type</b>	PhD	1	14,3
	Master's	6	85,7
<b>Year of Publication</b>	2012	1	14,3
	2014	1	14,3
	2018	1	14,3
	2019	1	14,3
	2022	1	14,3
	2023	1	14,3
	2024	1	14,3
<b>Affiliated University</b>	Mersin University	1	14,3
	Erciyes University	1	14,3
	İstanbul Okan University	2	28,6
	Zonguldak Bülent Ecevit University	1	14,3
	Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University	1	14,3
	İzmir Katip Çelebi University	1	14,3
<b>Nature of the Study</b>	Descriptive type	1	14,3
	Randomized controlled experimental	1	14,3
	Descriptive and cross-sectional type	4	57,1
	Cross-sectional, comparative, correlational descriptive	1	14,3
<b>Academic Department</b>	Nursing	3	42,9
	Child Health and Disease Nursing	4	57,1



**Figure 1.** Thesis type, academic department affiliated university

**Table 2.** Analysis of Master's and PhD theses

Author/Year	Thesis Title	Type of Thesis	Objective	Sample Size	Type of Study	Result
Gülhan Yeter 2012	Use of Complementary and Alternative Therapy for Symptoms in Pediatric Cancer Patients	MsD	The aim is to determine the reasons and rates of complementary and alternative therapy use for symptoms in pediatric cancer patients.	85 family members of children	Descriptive type	Family members use CAM for symptoms and wish to be informed about CAM by the nurses who are primarily responsible for the patients' care.
Selda Yüzer 2014	The Effect of Acupressure and Massage on Easing Breathing in Children with Respiratory Distress	PhD	To determine the effectiveness of acupressure and massage in children with respiratory distress.	A total of 78 pediatric patients, with 26 in the acupressure group, 25 in the massage group, and 27 in the control group.	Randomized controlled experimental	It is recommended to include acupressure and massage among nursing practices, and to inform nurses about complementary and alternative therapy practices during their training and in-service education, as well as to increase studies related to this topic.
Yurdagül Hazır 2018	Investigation of Complementary and Alternative Therapy Practices in Children with Upper Respiratory Tract Infections	MsD	It is an investigation of the complementary and alternative therapy practices used in children with upper respiratory tract infections.	236 parents	Descriptive and cross-sectional type	It was determined that the majority of parents used complementary and alternative therapies when their child had an upper respiratory tract infection, and that herbal treatments were most commonly used for cough and sore throat. Additionally, it was found that as parental education increased, the rate of complementary and alternative therapy use decreased.

Necip Erdem Gökçe 2019	Breastfeeding Self-Efficacy and the Tendencies of Using Complementary and Alternative Therapies to Increase Breast Milk in Mothers with Infants Aged 0-12 Months	MsD	The aim is to determine the tendencies of mothers with infants aged 0-12 months who continue breastfeeding, regarding their self-efficacy in breastfeeding and the use of complementary and alternative therapies to increase breast milk.	154 mother	Descriptive and cross-sectional type	Healthcare professionals are advised to prepare training programs that will strengthen mothers' perceptions of breastfeeding self-efficacy, inquire about the use of complementary and alternative therapies, provide information, and be aware of their responsibilities.
Selda Aktağ 2022	Determining the Use of Complementary and Alternative Therapies and Attitudes Towards Holistic Complementary and Alternative Medicine in Parents with Children Aged 0-18 Years	MsD	Determining Parents' Use of Holistic Complementary and Alternative Medicine Methods and Their Attitudes.	401 parents with children aged 0-18 years.	Descriptive and cross-sectional type	It has been determined that parents who obtain their knowledge about complementary alternative medicine from different sources use these methods on their children and have attitudes towards complementary alternative medicine that are above average.
Edibe Ece Onur 2023	Investigation of the Use of Traditional and Complementary Medicine for Children by Parents of Children Diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder and the Factors Affecting Its Use	MsD	The aim of this study is to examine the use of traditional and complementary medicine (TCM) by parents of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and to investigate the factors that influence their use of these treatments.	149 parents of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) aged 0-18 years.	Cross-sectional, comparative, correlational descriptive.	Of the mothers, 27.5% reported having knowledge about traditional and complementary therapies, with 29.3% of the information sources being special education teachers. 73.2% of the mothers consulted the child's doctor while using traditional and complementary therapies, and 78.0% stated that they benefited from their use.
Mine Ersan 2024	The study aims to determine the usage of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) methods by parents in relieving the pain of children with chronic illnesses and to identify the methods used.	MsD	It is to determine the usage of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) methods by parents in alleviating the pain of children with chronic illnesses and to identify the methods used.	The families of 100 children with chronic diseases and pain complaints.	Descriptive and cross-sectional type	It has been found that CAM methods are widely used by parents, and these methods are effective in managing children's pain.

## DISCUSSION

This study revealed that postgraduate nursing theses on the use of complementary and alternative therapies (CAM) in children within Türkiye are predominantly master's theses and are largely conducted within the field of pediatric nursing. Notably, only one thesis employed a randomized controlled trial design, while the remaining studies were descriptive in nature.

The reviewed theses primarily focused on identifying CAM methods used by families of children with conditions such as autism, cancer, and other chronic illnesses, as well as CAM applications utilized by families to manage acute symptoms, including respiratory system complaints. The findings consistently indicated that families frequently resort to CAM methods for their children and actively seek information from healthcare professionals regarding these practices. Additionally, the theses not only assessed families' knowledge and practices concerning CAM but also investigated their attitudes toward CAM in certain studies.

## CONCLUSION

The review of postgraduate nursing theses revealed that the majority of studies were descriptive and primarily focused on families' use of CAM methods for their children and their level of knowledge regarding these practices.

It is essential for pediatric nurses to possess comprehensive knowledge about the potential risks, benefits, and limitations of CAM therapies and to effectively educate mothers and families on these issues. Future research should prioritize conducting multi-center studies to determine the nationwide prevalence of CAM use among families. Moreover, it is recommended that more randomized controlled trials be undertaken within the field of pediatric nursing to positively impact families' knowledge, practices, and attitudes toward CAM.

A review of international academic literature revealed that there is a limited number of postgraduate theses focusing on the use of

complementary and alternative therapies (CAM). Among the available studies, it was found that families of children diagnosed with conditions such as cancer, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and cerebral palsy (CP) commonly resort to CAM methods such as music therapy and acupuncture. These studies also reported that healthcare professionals generally held a positive attitude toward the use of CAM. However, they consistently emphasized the need for further rigorous research to establish the scientific validity, safety, and effectiveness of these therapies.

## Limitations

The findings of this study are limited to postgraduate nursing theses on the use of complementary and alternative therapies in the pediatric population within the field of nursing, as recorded in the National Thesis Database of the Council of Higher Education between 2012 and 2024. Another limitation of the study is that only the abstracts of the theses were reviewed, as the full texts were not accessible. This may have restricted the depth and comprehensiveness of the data analysis.

**Conflict of Interests:** The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

**Financial Support:** No financial support was received for this research.

## Ethical Considerations

As this study is a retrospective literature review based on publicly available postgraduate nursing theses, it does not involve direct interaction with humans or animals. Therefore, ethics committee approval was not required.

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