

Common selfheal in Bulgaria and Balkans: contribution to the ethnobotanical survey

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Introduction

The common selfheal *Prunella vulgaris* L. (Lamiaceae) is a well-known and widespread plant in Bulgaria, known as “обикновена пришница” [obiknovena prishnitsa] - the common “skin blister”, or by default commonly used for the treatment of blisters. It’s a medicinal, forage and honey plant. The plant is well known to be therapeutic in many parts of the world. In recent years, some publications have summarized data on its traditional use, its phytochemical composition and biological activity mostly for the herb with Asian origin. Selfheal is a plant associated with traditional Chinese medicine and is also a pharmacopoeial herbal drug (Ph. Eur.). There are few published ethnobotanical data on the use of the plant in the Balkans for Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, related mainly to its use as a wound-healing plant, tea for female disorders and against viral infections (Šarić-Kundalić et al., 2010; Jarić et al., 2018; Rexhepi et al., 2013). There is a little more data on different regions of Turkey that are expanding knowledge of the use of the plant and supplementing it with remedy against rheumatism, cardiac disorders, colds, abdominal ache, as a tea for gastric ulcer (Kilic, 2016). For Bulgaria, there is fragmentary knowledge of its use in some of the summary studies (Georgiev, 2013). The purpose of the study is to present the data on the traditional use

of the selfheal as a herbal remedy in Bulgaria and to analyse it in the context of what is known for different regions of the Balkans.

Materials and methods

This study was conducted in the 2015-2019 period and gathered data from main sources that provide information for medicinal plants for the end of 19th and to the middle of the 20th century. The field data was compiled through semi-structured interviews with a field questionnaire organized to seek the following information about plant: local name, plant part(s) used, local mode of preparation. At this stage, the study did not seek the representation of all or certain folk or administrative regions.

Results and discussion

Folk names

Several different names in Bulgaria are indirectly related to the treatment of superficial skin injuries: “посечено биле” [posecheno bile], “хайдущка трева” [haidushka treva], “пришена трева” [prishtena treva]. Until the middle of the 20th century, the common botanical name of the selfheal was “живениче” [zhiveniche] related to life, living or the derivative meaning of it. Other name reflects its use in the treatment of livestock: “гърленик” [gurlenik]. Most of the folk names of the common

selfheal in the Balkan region are also associated with wound healing. During the field studies, the new name of the plant was established as “horse basil” [konski bosilek] - horse basil (SW Bulgaria, Rila). It is similar to the plant name in East Anatolia acifesleĝen (bitter basil) (Kilic, 2016). At the same time, representatives of the genus *Salvia* are known by this name, which is a prerequisite for confusion and overlapping of ethnobotanical data. Names that characterize the plant as spring are also known bahar çiçeĝi (spring flower), bumbur otu (bumblebee herb), erik otu (plum herb), as well as typical locality daĝçayı (mountain tea) (Kilic, 2016).

Used parts

Mostly aboveground parts are collected, in many cases it is emphasized that the plant is harvested during the flowering period. Only inflorescence is rarely used. The use of common selfheal leaves is also rarely reported. Both dried and fresh plant parts are used. This contrasts with the dominant use of dried fruit spike in traditional Chinese medicine.

Preparation and medicinal use

In Bulgarian folk medicine, the most frequently prepared common selfheal formulation was an infusion and direct application of plant without prior preparation. Other applied preparations with decreasing frequency were maceration and decoction. It is taken internally for cough, for coughing up of blood, for stomach pain, for headache, generally as a pain reliever. Besides, in our field studies, new data have shown its increased use as a haemorrhoid agent and a total body strengthening agent. Externally applied as infusion and decoction, as well as freshly crushed pulp leaves, which require superficial wounds, purulent wounds, boils, burn wounds and bites. It can also be used with a honey base, especially in oral care and for treatment of pyorrhoea. Maceration in olive oil is used in the same way, especially for skin rashes and swelling, blue pimple and mastitis, as well as snake bites. It is interesting to use it as an anti-hair loss effect (Göktaş and Gıdık, 2019), which is not mentioned in the rest of the study area. Ethnoveterinary agent - in the treatment of the disease pasteurellosis in pigs is added to the food fresh or as a decoction.

Conclusion

The use of the plant in the study area has a common ethnobotanical profile, which is combined by the use of aboveground parts such as infusions and macerates, for internal and external use mainly in the treatment of superficial wounds, mucous membranes diseases and painkillers. More up-to-date ethnobotanical data are needed to supplement traditional knowledge. The study showed that the plant was undervalued as a source of biologically active compounds and traditional knowledge needed to be scientifically reconstructed and used to design modern herbal medicinal products.

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