

Abstract

Ethnopharmacological relevance: Traditional medicines play an important role in the management of chronically painful and debilitating joint conditions, particularly in the rural Africa. However, their potential use as sources of medicines has not been fully exploited. The present study was carried to find the medicinal plants traditionally used to manage chronic joint pains in Machakos and Makueni counties in Kenya. **Materials and methods:** To obtain this ethnobotanical information, 30 consenting traditional herbal medical practitioners were interviewed exclusively on medicinal plant use in the management of chronic joint pains, in a pre-planned workshop. **Results and discussion:** In this survey, a total of 37 plants belonging to 32 genera and 23 families were cited as being important for treatment of chronic joint pains. The most commonly cited plant species were *Pavetta crassipes* K. Schum, *Strychnos henningsii* Gilg., *Carissa spinarum* L., *Fagaropsis hildebrandtii* (Engl.) Milve-Redh. and *Zanthoxylum chalybeum* Engl. *Acacia mellifera* (Vahl) Benth., *Amaranthus albus* L., *Balanites glabra* Mildbr. & Schltr., *Grewia fallax* K. Schum., *Lactuca capensis*, *Launaea cornuta* (Oliv. & Hiern) O. Jeffrey, *Lippia kituiensis* Vatke, *Pappea capensis* Eckl. & Zeyh. and *Pennisetum glaucum* (L.) R. Br. are documented for the first time as being important in the management of chronic joint pains. **Conclusions:** The findings of this study show that a variety of medicinal plants are used in the management of chronic joint pains and the main mode of administration is oral. **Keywords:** Ethnobotanical survey; Medicinal plants; Chronic joint pains; Rheumatoid arthritis; Akamba; Machakos-Kenya