

Utilization of *Ola* leaf and handwritten manuscripts for research: a case study of the students at the Faculty of Indigenous Medicine

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In ancient time in Sri Lanka, the *Ola* leaf was one of the primary means of communication for disseminating knowledge, particularly, Indigenous Medical Knowledge (IMK) or Traditional Medical Knowledge (TMK) that is primarily passed down orally from generation to generation. Similarly, *Ola* leaf (OL) or palm leaf and handwritten manuscripts (HM) are other forms of Indigenous knowledge transmission. They provide insights into traditional healing practices, herbal remedies, diagnostic techniques, and treatment methods. Researching these manuscripts helps document and preserve this valuable traditional knowledge, ensuring its continuity and preventing its loss. The Faculty of Indigenous Medicine (FIM) library has a collection of 531 OL and 108 HM (*Khanda Vaidya Grantha*). With a formal approval, students are permitted to use OL and HM. This study aims to find out whether the *Ola* leaf and handwritten manuscripts have been used for students' research at the faculty of Indigenous Medicine. Hence, the study was carried out to find out as to which level those two sources were utilized by students who conduct research at the FIM from 2016 to 2022, excluding 2021 due to the Pandemic. Two methods were used to collect the data. One was to look at students' written requests to utilize the FIM's OL and HM collections for research, and the next strategy was to examine the titles of Level IV students' research projects that were accomplished based on OL and HM. The Level IV students of both Bachelors' programmes - Ayurvedic and Unani Medicine, require students to complete their research projects. Highest recorded requests (n=55) were made to the library in 2016, of which 71% were for HM and 29% were for OL, which was used for research. The number of request letters for 2017 was the same as it was for 2016; among them, 58% of students utilized HM and 42% used OL. The lowest number of requests were received in 2020, 43% for HM and 57% for OL. Based on the research project titles, the highest number of research students (n=154) was in the Academic year 2012/2013, but student usage of 10% for HM and 0% for OL. The lowest research students (94) were in 2011/2012, but the highest research usage of HM was 22%. The highest usage of OL was in 2010/2011 (6%). According to the findings, using conventional information sources for the research was relatively low. To preserve and spread IMK for future generations, the FIM should encourage and mentor their students to do research using HM and OL. In this regard, expanding digitization of HM and OL collection will increase the exploitation of these valuable resources.

Keywords: *Ola leaf, handwritten manuscripts, indigenous medical knowledge, undergraduates*