



Original Research Article

Volume 15 Issue 04

April 2026

## AWARENESS AND PERCEPTION OF “AYUSH” AMONG DENTISTS IN NORTH MAHARASHTRA REGION: A QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

**\*Dr Harish Jadhav<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Arun Dodamani<sup>2</sup>, Dr. Sharvari Tadas<sup>3</sup>,  
Dr Saloni Wankhede<sup>3</sup>, Dr Ankita Gadekar<sup>3</sup>, Dr Tejas Ishi<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Professor, <sup>2</sup>Head of Department and Professor, <sup>3</sup>Postgraduate student, <sup>4</sup>Graduate student

**Department of Public Health Dentistry, ACPM Dental College**

**\*Corresponding Author’s Email ID: [drharishjadhav2003@gmail.com](mailto:drharishjadhav2003@gmail.com)**

### Abstract

#### Background

The AYUSH systems of medicine—comprising Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy—offer holistic, natural, and complementary approaches to health. Despite their increasing global relevance, the integration of AYUSH in dental practice remains limited due to insufficient awareness, evidence, and acceptance among dentists.

#### Aim

To evaluate the awareness and perceptions of AYUSH systems of medicine among dentists in the North Maharashtra region of India.

#### Methods

A cross-sectional study was conducted involving 169 dentists from Dhule city, selected through convenience sampling. A validated 17-item questionnaire assessed participants' awareness, perceptions of AYUSH therapies, and attitudes toward their integration in dentistry.

## Results

Among participants, 61.3% were BDS graduates, and 37.5% were MDS holders. General awareness of AYUSH was 66.7%, with Ayurveda being the most recognized (37.5%), followed by Homeopathy (19.6%). Only 41.7% were aware of AYUSH treatments for oral diseases. The majority (60.7%) recommended Ayurvedic oral products, but fewer endorsed Homeopathy (18.5%) or Yoga (9.5%). Perceptions of effectiveness were mixed, with 43.5% rating AYUSH treatments as somewhat effective, particularly for pain (36.9%) and oral ulcers (47%). Natural remedies were valued for minimizing side effects (52.4%), but only 5.4% considered AYUSH cost-effective. Limited support was observed for interdisciplinary collaboration (39.3%), citing concerns over training and safety.

## Conclusions

The study reveals moderate awareness and mixed perceptions of AYUSH among dentists in North Maharashtra, with Ayurveda being the most recognized. While natural remedies are appreciated, limited confidence and training hinder broader integration into dental practice.

## Keywords

AYUSH, Ayurveda, Complementary Medicine, Dentistry, Integrative Healthcare, Oral Health, Perception Study.

## Introduction

The AYUSH systems of medicine—comprising Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy—have been integral to India's health practices for centuries and are gaining renewed interest globally. Rooted in holistic principles, these traditional systems offer preventive, promotive, and therapeutic approaches to health that often differ from allopathic medicine.[1] The potential of AYUSH therapies is particularly relevant in today's context, where there is a rising demand for natural and complementary treatments. In oral healthcare, AYUSH practices are being explored for their effectiveness in managing conditions such as periodontal disease, dental pain, and mucosal lesions. AYUSH include herbal applications, therapeutic diets, stress reduction techniques, and preventive practices, which can serve as adjuncts to conventional dental care.[2]

Despite this promising potential, the integration of AYUSH into mainstream dental practice faces several challenges. Understanding dentists' perspectives on AYUSH is crucial, as they

play a key role in shaping patient attitudes toward diverse treatment options.[3] Their openness to recommending AYUSH methods may significantly influence patients' acceptance and use of these therapies for oral health. It incorporates herbs, animals, and minerals-based medicines and also use spiritual therapies, manual techniques and exercises, either used alone or in combination for the maintenance of wellbeing, diagnosis, treatment and prevention of diseases. Additionally, dentists' views on AYUSH can impact its future research and application in preventive and therapeutic oral health care.[4]

Currently, numerous challenges exist, including resistance in oral microflora, drug tolerance, opportunistic infections, and adverse effects of conventional treatments. To address these issues, dentists need a better understanding of the effectiveness of various traditional medicines and over-the-counter products. Since this area is largely unexplored in dentistry, there is a growing need to integrate professional dental treatment methods with complementary and alternative medical systems. This integration can offer patients the best of both systems, providing complementary therapies and alternative treatment options.[5]

The government has also permitted the inclusion of basic dental procedures, such as tooth extractions and root canals, in the Ayurveda curriculum under AYUSH guidelines. The government has integrated traditional medicine into dental care, allowing Ayurveda practitioners to perform specific dental treatments after adequate training, promoting interdisciplinary collaboration in healthcare.[6] The aim of the study is to evaluate the awareness, knowledge, and perception of "AYUSH" (Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy) systems of medicine among dentists.

## **Material and Methodology**

**Study Design:** This study is cross sectional study.

**Study Population:** The study was conducted in the North Maharashtra region of India, specifically involving 169 dentists from Dhule city by using convenience sampling method to select participants.

**Ethical Considerations:** Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from the institutional ethics committee before commencing the research (EC/NEW/INST/2022/2959/138).

**Questionnaire:** Seventeen questions were designed to assess dentists' knowledge of AYUSH systems, perceptions of their effectiveness, practices in recommending these therapies, and attitudes toward their integration into dentistry.

**Validity of Questionnaire:** The validity of the questionnaire, measured by I-CVI, S-CVI, and UA, was found to be **0.96**, **0.95**, and **0.94**, respectively.[13]

**Collection of Data:** The printed questionnaires were distributed to the dentists in Dhule city. Participants were required to respond to all questions. The data collected from the questionnaires were subsequently transferred to an Excel sheet.

**Statistical Analysis:** Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS Software, version 2020.

## Result

The study of 169 dentists shows that 74% are male and 26% are female. Most are aged 31-40 (42%), followed by 41-50 (28%), and up to 30 years (21%). A majority (61.3%) are BDS graduates, and 37.5% are MDS. Regarding medicine in AYUSH, ayurveda is the most recognized (37.5%), followed by Homeopathy (19.6%) and Yoga (10.7%), while Unani awareness is low (8.3%), and Siddha remains mostly unknown. Among all the dentist 66.7% of dentists are familiar with the general concept of AYUSH, but lack knowledge about the specific treatments it includes. Furthermore, only 41.7% are aware of AYUSH treatments for oral diseases.

**Table 1 Effective AYUSH treatment for Oral conditions**

Oral conditions	Effective	Not effective
PAIN	36.9	63.1
Oral ulcers	47	53
Precancerous condition	7.7	92.3
Inflammation	20.8	79.2
Post-surgical maintenance	8.3	91.7
Other	7.1	92.9

Table 1 shows 36.9% believe AYUSH medicine can help to manage pain, 47% see potential for treating oral ulcers. Only 9.5% of dentists believe AYUSH treatment alone is sufficient for managing dental pain, while 47% think it's inadequate, and 43% are not sure about the AYUSH treatment.

**Table 2 AYUSH treatment advised for patients**

AYUSH treatment advised for patients	Given	Not given
Ayurvedic Oral Prophylactic mouthwash and toothpaste	60.7	39.3
Homeopathic medicines	18.5	81.5
Yoga practices for oral health	9.5	90.5
Siddha treatments	00	100
Unani medicines	18.5	81.5
Other	7.1	92.9

Table 2 shows 60.7% of dentists recommend Ayurvedic mouthwash and toothpaste, 18.5% recommend homeopathic medicine, 9.5% advise yoga for oral health, 0% recommend Siddha, 18.5% suggest Unani, and 7.1% advise other treatments.

**Table 3 AYUSH treatment effective to dental patients**

AYUSH treatment effective to dental patients	Percent
Very positively	4.2
Somewhat positively	43.5
Neutral	37.5
Somewhat negatively	3.0
Very negatively	1.2
Not applicable (haven't used AYUSH)	10.7

Table 3 shows that 4.2% of dentists find AYUSH treatment very effective, 43.5% of dentists consider AYUSH treatments somewhat effective, likely due to their focus on natural remedies and holistic approaches that may complement conventional care 43.5% consider it somewhat effective, 37.5% are neutral, 3% see it as negatively effective, 1.2% view it as very negative, and 10.7% haven't used AYUSH treatment for dental patients. 60.7% of dentists view AYUSH as a synergistic therapy to enhance conventional treatments, 26.8% see it as an alternative, and 12.5% suggest other uses.

**Table 4 Benefits of AYUSH treatment**

Benefits of AYUSH treatment	Percent
Expanding access to Oral health care	26.8
Use of natural remedies to minimize side effects	52.4
Cost effective treatments	5.4
NONE	15.5

Table 4 shows 26.8% of dentists believe AYUSH expands access to oral care, 52.4% value its use of natural remedies to reduce side effects, 5.4% see it as cost-effective, and 15.5% find it not beneficial. Additionally, 34.5% think integrating AYUSH could improve patient outcomes, 20.2% disagree, and 45.2% are uncertain.

39.3% of dentists support interdisciplinary collaboration with AYUSH practitioners, 23.2% oppose it, and 37.5% are not sure about it. While 46.4% are aware of dental procedures under new AYUSH guidelines, 53.6% are not aware. Only 8.3% know root canals are permitted, 27.4% know about tooth extractions, 32.7% are aware of both, and 31.5% don't know.

Regarding allowing AYUSH practitioners for dental procedures, 13.7% say yes due to adequate training, 28% agree but only under a licensed dentist's supervision, 42.9% say no due to lack of specialized training, and 15.5% believe it should be limited to dentistry degree holders. For managing dental emergencies, 10.7% think AYUSH practitioners can, 45.2% think they cannot, and 44% are not sure about it.

## Discussion

The present study has resonated with broader research on healthcare professionals' awareness, attitudes, and practices regarding AYUSH in oral and general healthcare, highlighting a complex blend of cautious acceptance and significant knowledge gaps. Across studies, there has been evidence of satisfactory awareness of AYUSH, yet a limited understanding of specific therapies and their applications, particularly in dental practice. A study by Nandini et al. (2020) revealed that while approximately 72% of healthcare professionals have been familiar with Ayurveda, fewer than 30% had exposure to Siddha, a trend mirrored in this study, where 37.5% of dentists have recognized Ayurveda but none reported familiarity with Siddha. The limited recognition of certain AYUSH modalities may be attributable to factors such as regional variations in AYUSH availability and the more established presence of Ayurveda and Homeopathy in medical education and public health initiatives.

The perceptions of dentists regarding AYUSH treatment effectiveness indicates cautious optimism, particularly for treating minor conditions. For instance, 36.9% of dentists have believed AYUSH treatments could help to manage pain, and 47% have thought they may be effective for treating oral ulcers. Traditional herbs and home remedies like clove, turmeric, guava leaves, neem, saltwater rinses, garlic, peppermint, and aloe vera are widely used for dental pain and inflammation. Their natural analgesic, anti-inflammatory, and antimicrobial properties make them effective for oral care. Clove oil, rich in eugenol, provides proven anesthetic and pain-relieving effects and is routinely used in dentistry for toothache management. Studies show that curcumin from turmeric also reduces oral inflammation and microbial load, supporting its use in gingival and postoperative pain control<sup>8</sup>. However, only a small fraction (7.7%) viewed AYUSH as beneficial for managing more complex oral health conditions like precancerous lesions. This has reflected a broader hesitancy seen in studies such as Somani et al. (2016), where healthcare providers expressed confidence in AYUSH for minor ailments but have hesitated to endorse it for serious medical conditions due to a lack of substantial clinical evidence. Dentists have prioritized evidence-based treatments and therefore have been reluctant to endorse AYUSH fully until there is more conclusive research supporting its use.

The study has highlighted a prevailing view of AYUSH as a complementary, rather than alternative, approach to conventional medicine. A significant majority of dentists (60.7%) have preferred to consider AYUSH as a supportive therapy, aligning with findings from Pengpid et al. (2021), where 68% of practitioners have expressed similar views. The inclination to use AYUSH adjunctively has stemmed from its holistic focus on natural remedies, which few dentist believed could complement conventional treatments by reducing side effects and providing additional patient support. However, despite this openness, the actual use of AYUSH therapies has remained limited to more familiar applications, as seen in this study while 60.7% of dentists recommend Ayurvedic oral products, only 18.5% suggest Homeopathy and 9.5% recommend Yoga for oral health. This selective endorsement has been consistent with Ojha A et al. (2020), who have reported that healthcare providers often restrict their use of AYUSH to supplements and topical treatments, reflecting an underlying preference for conventional therapies due to concerns over the reliability and consistency of AYUSH products.

The study also emphasized on the perceived benefits and limitations of AYUSH in dental practice. 52.4% participants valued AYUSH's natural remedies for their potential to minimize side effects, yet only 5.4% considered it as cost-effective. Studies by Javed D et al. (2024) and Ojha A et al. (2020) have reported similar findings, with practitioners appreciating AYUSH's holistic and natural approach but having questioned its accessibility and affordability due to inconsistent quality standards and limited regulation. This dual perception has suggested that while AYUSH may have provided certain therapeutic advantages, practical barriers have continued to prevent its widespread adoption.

Interdisciplinary collaboration between dentists and AYUSH practitioners remains limited. Only 39.3% of dentists in this study have supported such collaboration, reflecting a similar reluctance that has been observed in Verma et al. (2024), where healthcare providers expressed concerns about AYUSH practitioners' training and specialization for performing complex procedures. Dentistry has been specialized branch and not a general one, so the dental practitioner has felt that AYUSH practitioners lack the specialized training needed to handle specific dental interventions safely. This has highlighted the importance of standardized training, clear regulatory guidelines, and well-defined scopes of practice to build trust between AYUSH and conventional practitioners.

AYUSH has had significant potential in dentistry; however, it has been essential to ensure safe and effective care. To achieve this, a trained dentist has needed to be present during dental treatments performed by AYUSH practitioners. Alternatively, specialized training programs can be designed to equip AYUSH practitioners with the necessary skills and knowledge to perform dental treatments, recognizing that dentistry has been a specialized field requiring expertise beyond general practice.

### **Conclusion**

The study reveals moderate awareness and mixed perceptions of AYUSH among dentists in North Maharashtra, with Ayurveda being the most recognized. Although natural remedies are viewed positively, a lack of formal training and evidence-based knowledge limits their confidence in using AYUSH in dental care.

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