

Understanding People's Knowledge, Perceptions, and Experiences with Menengic Coffee and Bittim Soap

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to investigate people's knowledge, perceptions, and personal experiences about menengic coffee and bittim soap. Data were collected from 152 participants living in Siirt and Mardin between June 1 and September 15, 2021, through internet-based methods (email, WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, etc.). Among those who use bittim soap or similar products, 16.4% reported daily usage. A significant portion (67.8%) of the participants consumed menengic coffee, with 46.7% acknowledging its health benefits. Regarding bittim soap, 83.6% confirmed its effectiveness for skincare, and 81.8% claimed that it helps hair growth. All respondents noted that menengic coffee effectively reduces blood pressure. Additionally, 67% reported its benefits for stomach issues, 50.5% for regulating blood sugar, 46.6% for skincare, 45.6% for easing respiratory discomfort, 45.6% as a diuretic, and 42.7% as an antiseptic. The findings showed that both products were largely viewed positively in terms of health benefits.

Keywords: Menengic coffee, Bittim soap, Individual experiences, Knowledge, Traditional medicine, Health benefits

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Introduction

Pistacia terebinthus, commonly known as terebinth or menengic, belongs to the Anacardiaceae family. It is a perennial shrub or small tree characterized by aromatic dark green leaves and is native to the Mediterranean region and parts of the Middle East, including countries such as Turkey, Morocco, Portugal, Greece, and Syria [1, 2]. The plant has been used for various purposes, and its fruits, branches, and leaves are often referred to by local names such as menengic, melengic, hackberry, and bittim [3, 4]. The fruits, which ripen from green to a reddish-purple color, are particularly notable for their high fat content, and they are edible, and often consumed as a food source in various regions [5].

Terebinth has been traditionally used in both culinary and medicinal applications. In southern Turkey, for instance, the fruit of the plant has been used for making a special village bread and as an appetizer for thousands of years [6, 7]. The fruit and its oil, as well as the resin of the plant, have long been part of folk medicine for treating a range of ailments, such as respiratory issues, digestive disorders, skin conditions, and wounds [8, 9]. The plant's medicinal properties include being an antiseptic for bronchitis, a diuretic, and an effective treatment for wounds and burns [10, 11].

In recent years, products derived from the terebinth tree, particularly "menengic coffee" and "bittim soap," have gained significant popularity. Menengic coffee, made from the roasted seeds of the terebinth fruit, is particularly renowned for its unique flavor and health benefits. It is a caffeine-free alternative to traditional coffee, known for its purported effects in regulating blood pressure, improving digestion, and promoting skin health [12, 13]. Bittim soap, made from the fruit of the terebinth tree, has also gained attention for its potential benefits for skin and hair. It is believed to possess powerful antimicrobial, antifungal, and antioxidant properties, making it effective for

treating skin conditions like acne, eczema, and psoriasis, as well as promoting hair growth and preventing hair loss [14, 15].

Despite the growing popularity and use of these products, there has been limited scientific research specifically examining their effects on human health. Most studies have been laboratory-based or conducted with animals, leaving a gap in knowledge about how these products impact human users. This study aims to address this gap by exploring the knowledge, attitudes, and experiences of individuals regarding the use of menengic coffee and bittim soap, particularly in the regions of Siirt and Mardin in southern Turkey. Through a survey, the study seeks to understand how these products are perceived by users, the health benefits they believe they offer, and the frequency of their use. By focusing on the experiences of individuals in these areas, where the use of menengic coffee and bittim soap is widespread, this research aims to provide valuable insights into the practical and medicinal significance of these products in daily life.

Materials and Methods

This study employed a cross-sectional design to evaluate individuals' knowledge, attitudes, and experiences with menengic coffee and bittim soap. The participants, aged between 18 and 69, were selected based on specific criteria: they had to be active users of internet-based social media platforms (e.g., WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook) and reside in Siirt or Mardin. A total of 152 participants voluntarily agreed to take part in the research, which was conducted between June 1 and September 15, 2021. Data was gathered through an online survey, designed to collect information about the participants' understanding of menengic coffee and bittim soap, the survey aimed to assess participants' awareness of the health benefits associated with menengic coffee and bittim soap, as well as their personal experiences with these products. It included both closed and open-ended questions, which addressed several key areas. These areas included the frequency of usage of menengic coffee and bittim soap, the participant's knowledge of the health benefits linked to these products, and the sources from which they gathered information (such as family, friends, health professionals, or media). Additionally, the survey explored participants' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of these products in treating various health conditions. Descriptive statistics were applied to analyze the data, offering insights into participants' demographic information as well as their knowledge and perceptions regarding menengic coffee and bittim soap.

Statistical analysis

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions, percentages, and means. This approach allowed for the examination of participants' demographic characteristics, as well as their knowledge and usage patterns related to menengic coffee and bittim soap.

Results and Discussion

The study included 152 participants with an average age of 24.62 ± 8.16 years, and the majority (79.6%) were female. In terms of education, 42.8% held a bachelor's degree or higher, while 40.8% were high school graduates. A significant portion (72.4%) were unemployed, and most participants (68.4%) reported having a middle-income level. Regarding their health, 61.8% considered their health to be good, while 36.2% rated it as moderate (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of participants

N	%
Gender	
Female	121
Male	31
Educational background	
Illiterate	3
Primary school	8
Secondary school	14
High school	62

Undergraduate and higher	65
Employment	
Yes	42
No	110
Income level	
Low	30
Middle	104
High	18
Health status	
Good	94
Moderate	55
Bad	3

All participants confirmed their use of natural or herbal remedies. Of these, 59.2% acknowledged being aware of the health benefits of bittim soap or similar products. A majority, 61.8%, reported learning about these benefits from family, spouses, relatives, and friends. When examining the frequency of bittim soap usage, it was found that 16.4% of participants used it daily (**Table 2**).

Table 2. Usage details of bittim soap

N	%
Do you use bittim soap?	
Yes	55
No	97
Knowledge of health benefits	
Yes	90
No	62
Source of information	
Family/Friends	94
Radio/TV	15
Healthcare professionals	6
Other	8
Frequency of use (for users)	
Every day	9
Once a week	11
Every 15 days	3
Rarely	32

A total of 67.8% of the participants reported drinking menengic coffee, and 46.7% indicated that they were aware of its health benefits. Among those who knew about its benefits, 50.7% mentioned that they learned this information from family, spouses, relatives, or friends. When examining the frequency of consumption, it was found that 69.9% of the participants consumed menengic coffee infrequently, while 18.4% drank it once a week (**Table 3**).

Table 3. Usage details of menengic coffee

N	%
Do you drink menengic coffee?	
Yes	103
No	49
Knowledge of health benefits	

Yes	71
No	81
Source of information	
Family/Friends	77
Radio/TV	14
Healthcare professionals	6
Other	6
Frequency of use (for users)	
Every day	4
Once a week	19
Every 15 days	8
Rarely	72

Participants who used bittim soap were asked to share their personal experiences regarding its effectiveness. A majority, 83.6%, found it beneficial for skincare, while 81.8% claimed it helped with hair growth (**Table 4**). Those who regularly consumed menengic coffee were also asked about its benefits. Every participant reported that the coffee was effective in lowering blood pressure. Additionally, 67% felt it was useful for alleviating stomach issues, 50.5% saw it as a blood glucose regulator, 46.6% noticed improvements in their skin, 45.6% found it helpful for easing respiratory problems, 45.6% experienced its diuretic effects, and 42.7% noted its antiseptic properties (**Table 4**).

Table 4. Effectiveness of menengic coffee and bittim soap for various uses

Menengic coffee (n = 103)	Bittim soap (n = 55)
Effective	Non-effective
Skincare	48 (46.6%)
Hair growth	24 (23.3%)
Respiratory distress	47 (45.6%)
Stomach problems	69 (67.0%)
Blood pressure	103 (100%)
Antiseptic	44 (42.7%)
Diuretic	47 (45.6%)
Periodontal diseases	28 (27.2%)
Blood glucose regulation	52 (50.5%)

Pistacia terebinthus, also known as terebinth, has been utilized in traditional medicine to address various health issues, including gastrointestinal, liver, urinary, and respiratory tract disorders, as well as periodontal diseases. This is due to the plant's tonic, aphrodisiac, diuretic, antiseptic, and antihypertensive properties [2, 8, 9, 16-18]. Furthermore, numerous scientific studies highlight the plant's diverse pharmacological benefits, such as antioxidant, antimicrobial, antiviral, anticholinesterase, anti-inflammatory, antidiabetic, antitumor, and gastrointestinal effects [1, 2, 16, 19, 20].

Regarding the use of bittim soap or other products derived from it, it was found that 16.4% of individuals used these products daily. In contrast, the frequency of menengic coffee consumption revealed that 69.9% of participants consumed it infrequently, while 18.4% drank it once a week.

When users of bittim soap were asked about its effects, 83.6% mentioned its effectiveness for skincare, while 81.8% indicated its benefits for promoting hair growth. As for menengic coffee drinkers, all respondents reported its effectiveness in lowering blood pressure. Additionally, 67% believed it was beneficial for stomach issues, 50.5% as a blood glucose regulator, 46.6% for skincare, 45.6% for alleviating respiratory distress, 45.6% as a diuretic, and 42.7% as an antiseptic.

Menengic coffee's popularity has been rising in many countries, particularly in Turkey, due to its numerous health benefits, such as its antiseptic properties, digestive support, and ability to help with anemia [13]. One study confirmed that the *Pistacia terebinthus* plant has potent bioactive and antimicrobial effects, along with essential

fatty acids and oils [21]. Another study showed its potential in lowering cholesterol levels [22], while research on mice demonstrated its antidiabetic properties by mitigating the harmful effects on serum enzyme levels and lipid oxidation, thanks to its antioxidant properties [23]. While laboratory and animal studies have shown promising results, there is a lack of human studies on this plant's effects. The current findings corroborate previous studies. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, data collection for this study was conducted through online platforms, such as email, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook. A limitation of this approach is that individuals without access to the internet or social media were not included in the study. To address this limitation, future studies should involve larger sample sizes and consider experimental research to better understand the effects of *Pistacia terebinthus*.

Conclusion

Based on participants' experiences, both menengic coffee and bittim soap were found to be effective for various health benefits. Bittim soap was particularly effective for skincare (83.6%) and promoting hair growth (81.8%), while menengic coffee was unanimously recognized for its blood pressure-lowering properties. Additionally, it was reported to offer benefits for digestive health, blood sugar regulation, skin health, and as an antiseptic and diuretic.

This study provides valuable insights into the widespread use and perception of these products in southern Turkey, particularly in Siirt and Mardin. Given the growing interest in natural and herbal remedies, the findings suggest that menengic coffee and bittim soap hold substantial economic and cultural significance in these regions.

Future research should focus on conducting controlled studies to scientifically validate the health benefits reported by users of these products. Further exploration into their pharmacological properties will help establish the efficacy of these products for a wider audience.

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