

## **Use of Alternative Medicine among Older Adults: An Exploratory Study**

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### **Abstract**

The study provides a descriptive analysis of users and non-users of alternative medicine and examines the factors affecting the likelihood of alternative medicine use. Six types of alternative medicine examined in this study include acupuncture, chiropractic, massage therapy, breathing exercise, use of herbs, and meditation. The primary source of data for this analysis is an alternative medicine module included in the 2000 Health and Retirement Survey (HRS). The sample consists of 848 respondents ages 50 and over. Nearly 70 percent of the respondents use at least one alternative medicine. Approximately 44 percent of the respondents reported using curative alternative medicine and about 58 percent reported use of alternative medicines classified as curative/ preventive. Logistic regression was used to identify the predictors of alternative medicine use. In general, respondents belonging to the Black racial group, widowed respondents, and those with more ADLs are more likely to use alternative medicine compared to the respective reference groups. There are differences between the predictors of use of curative medicine and preventive/curative medicine. For example, compared to Blacks, Whites were more likely to use curative medicine. However, the preventive/curative model showed that Whites were less likely than Blacks to use preventive/curative medicine. Differences also exist in the predictors of use of specific types of alternative medicine analyzed in this study. Recommendations for improving the exploration of utilization of alternative health care and educating the more frequent users of alternative medicine about the use of these medicines are provided. Implications of the increasing presence of alternative health care in the U.S. health care system are drawn.

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