

AWARENESS AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS OTC DRUGS IN GENERAL POPULATION: A QUESTIONNAIRE BASED STUDY

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INTRODUCTION: Over-The-Counter drugs (OTC) or Non-prescription drugs are the drugs like vitamins, antacids, paracetamol which are sold over the counter, by the chemist/ pharmacist without prescription of registered medical practitioner.^[1] In India, though OTC has no legal recognition, all the drugs that are not included in the list of 'prescription drugs' are considered as OTC drugs. There has been an alarming increase in self-medication with these OTC medicines available in pharmacies and in retail outlets. Although OTC drugs are of proved efficacy and safety, their improper use due to lack of knowledge regarding their side effects and interactions could have serious implications in general population.^[2] In parallel, more products have been deregulated for purchase without a prescription.^[3] The deregulation process has been supported by the fact that patients wish to have a greater role in their treatment choices. Thus, increasing availability of non-prescription medicines may encourage patients to believe that there is a drug for every ailment. Furthermore, the use of such products may delay/mask the diagnosis of serious illness,^[4] with increased risks of interactions, adverse reactions,^[4] misuse/abuse of such products. Hence this study was conducted to evaluate the prevalence of OTC drug usage among the general population.

KEYWORDS: OTC Drugs, General population, Self Medication.

METHODOLOGY: Participants of this study were people who attended health education fare at SIMS & RC during the month of February. Due consideration was given to ethical issues in designing the study. The objective of the study was explained, confidentiality ensured and their written consent taken. A semi structured questionnaire consisting of questions regarding socio-demographic, OTC drugs usage was issued to the participants. The researcher and assistants provided assistance in filling the questionnaire. Only duly filled forms were collected and analyzed for statistical significance using SPSS 16 version.

RESULTS: The total number of participants enrolled in this study was 91. Out of this, 29 were males and 62 were females. Nearly half of the participants (48 participants out of 91) were from rural background and the rest 43 were from urban background. 26 participants were below the age of 18.

OTC drugs usage was evident in 91 participants.

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Drugs	n (%)
Analgesics	54(59%)
Antipyretics	36(39.6%)
Antibiotics	28(30.8%)
Others	8(8.8%)

Table 1

n = number, %= percentage

Most commonly used OTC medications were Analgesics 54(59%), Antipyretics 36(39.6%) and Antibiotics 28(30.8%).

Description	n (%)
Self	44 (48.4)
Relatives	29 (31.9)
Advertisements	12 (13.2)
Friends	9 (9.9)
Pharmacists	7(7.7)

Table 2: Factors which influenced usage of OTC drugs

n = number, %= percentage

Self-medication stands out with 44(48.4%). Few participants were influenced by multiple factors.

Description	n (%)
Belief	32(35.2)
Less expenditure	14(15.4)
Suggested by others	05(5.5)
Time saving	29(31.9)
Easy to get	20(22)
Clinic/ hospital far away	6(6.6)

Table 3: Reasons for using OTC drugs

32(35.9%) participants used OTC drugs by their self-belief. 29(31.9%) participants thought it was time saving, 20 (22%) participants felt that they could get the OTC drugs easily rather than going to the doctor. Other reasons for using OTC drugs were less expenditure 14 (15.4%), Clinic/ hospital far away 6(6.6%) and suggestion by others 5(5.5%).

Regarding awareness of OTC drugs 28(30.8%) thought that OTC drugs were more effective than prescribed drugs. 64(70.3%) read the information of the medicine bought by

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

themselves. 60(65.9%) were aware of untoward consequences of taking the medication on their own, 58(63.7%) were of the opinion that OTC should be banned in India.

DISCUSSION: The objective of the study was to assess OTC drug usage in general population. The findings from this study highlight the striking prevalence of OTC drugs usage. The usage of OTC drugs is influenced by several factors like socio- demographic, life style, and easy access of drugs and environmental. Many drugs which were available as prescription only drugs have become OTC drug in pharmacies and even available in general retail outlets which is of great concern as it leads to irrational use of medicine.^[2]

OTC drugs usage was more among female population unlike a study conducted in Kerala.⁽⁶⁾ Analgesics, antipyretics and antibiotics were the most commonly used OTC drugs which were similar to a study in the western world.^(7,8) Self-medication was the most important contributing factor for OTC drug usage. Belief in cure and expenditure were other factors which influenced OTC drug usage. These findings are similar to a study in other tertiary care hospital.⁽⁹⁾ Majority of respondents felt that OTC drug usage should be banned even though they used OTC drugs. This reflects that majority of the population are aware of the consequence of OTC drug usage, which is comparable to a study on consumer's perceptions about the risk of and access to non-prescription medication.⁽¹⁰⁾

28% of the population worldwide use OTC drug usage.⁽¹¹⁾ The population is unaware of adverse effects like antibiotic resistance due to regular use of antibiotics and renal failure due to analgesics.^[2] Some drugs may be legally classified as over-the-counter but may only be dispensed by a pharmacist after an assessment of the patient's need or the provision of patient education. Developing country like India need to pass regulations detailing the establishments where drugs could be sold and as to who should be authorized to dispense them.

Stringent rules and regulations have to be passed to control OTC drug usage in a developing country like India. Media is one of the major communicating medium and hence it would be ideal to make the general population aware of the consequences of the OTC drug usage through advertisements in television, radio, and news-paper. Doctors and pharmacists also play a major role in preventing the OTC drugs usage. Balance should be checked regularly between safety and freedom in using OTC drugs. Thus, regular monitoring of the OTC drug usage would further minimize the irrational use of drugs

CONCLUSION: This study reveals OTC drug usage in a small percentage of general population and doesn't reflect the behavior of the entire population. Hence further studies needs to be carried out on larger population. Education programs regarding OTC drug usage is needed. Pharmacist need to be more proactive in inappropriate OTC drug usage.

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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