

Self-Medication Behaviour in Indian Patients: A Quantitative Study

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Abstract

In India, patients frequently buy and take pharmaceuticals without a prescription or medical supervision, which is known as self-medication. Due to the potential for harmful health effects such as drug resistance and toxicity, this behaviour has grown to be a source of concern. The lack of access to healthcare, the high cost of medical care, and the cultural conviction that traditional remedies work among Indian patients are only a few of the factors that contribute to self-medication. According to studies, those with lower incomes and educational levels are more likely to self-medicate. Due to the extensive availability of unregulated pharmaceuticals and the simplicity with which over-the-counter medications may be obtained in India, self-medication is becoming more and more common. To address this problem, there is a need for greater knowledge of the dangers of self-medication and the significance of getting medical help. To encourage responsible medication use and make sure that patients have access to safe and effective treatment alternatives, healthcare professionals, lawmakers, and the pharmaceutical industry can all play a significant role.

Keywords: Self-Medication, Self-Medication Behaviour (SMB), Healthcare, Medication, Pharmaceuticals.

Introduction

Self-medication refers to the practice of individuals using medicines without the advice or prescription of a healthcare professional. It is a common practice in many parts of the world, including India, where people often rely on self-medication for treating common ailments such as headaches, fever, and coughs.

Self-medication behaviour in India has been on the rise over the past few years, with many people choosing to self-medicate rather than seek medical advice from a qualified healthcare professional. Numerous variables, such as the ease with which over-the-counter medications

can be obtained, the high expense of healthcare services, and the difficulty accessing medical facilities in many areas of the nation, have contributed to this behaviour.

One major factor is the cultural belief that it is important to be self-reliant and take care of oneself. In many parts of India, seeking medical help is seen as a sign of weakness, and people may be reluctant to visit a doctor unless they are seriously ill. This cultural norm may contribute to the high rates of self-medication, as people may feel that they can manage their own health without seeking professional help. Another contributing factor is the lack of regulation and enforcement of drug laws in India. While many medicines are available only by prescription in other countries, in India it is common to find prescription drugs available over the counter without any regulation. This makes it easy for people to obtain and misuse medicines, leading to potential health risks.

The high cost of healthcare in India is also a major factor driving self-medication behaviour. Many people cannot afford to pay for medical consultations or diagnostic tests, and as a result, they may turn to self-medication as a cheaper alternative. This is particularly true for people living in rural areas, where access to medical facilities is limited and the cost of healthcare is often prohibitively high.

Furthermore, the easy availability of medicines online has contributed to the problem of self-medication in India. Online pharmacies and e-commerce websites offer a wide range of medicines, often at discounted prices, without requiring a prescription. This has made it easier for people to obtain medicines without seeking professional advice, leading to the potential misuse of drugs and the development of drug resistance.

While self-medication may seem like a convenient and cost-effective way to treat common ailments, it can have serious consequences if not done properly. Inappropriate use of medicines can lead to adverse drug reactions, drug interactions, and other health problems. Additionally, self-medication can lead to delayed diagnosis and treatment of more serious underlying health conditions.

In India, the prevalence of self-medication behaviour is particularly high among certain groups, such as college students and young adults. These groups often rely on self-medication to treat stress-related conditions such as anxiety and depression, as well as to enhance cognitive performance.

Given the potential risks associated with self-medication behaviour, it is important for healthcare professionals and policymakers to understand the factors driving this behaviour and develop strategies to promote responsible use of medicines. This may include improving access to affordable healthcare services, strengthening regulatory frameworks to prevent the over-the-counter sale of prescription medicines, and promoting public awareness about the risks of self-medication.

In conclusion, self-medication behaviour in India is a complex issue with multiple factors contributing to its prevalence. While it may seem like a convenient solution to common health problems, it can have serious consequences if not done properly. Addressing this issue will require a comprehensive approach that involves healthcare professionals, policymakers, and the public at large.

Literature Review

Self-medication is a popular method of seeking health across the globe, particularly in India. Self-medication is most frequently done for convenience, cost savings, and time savings. Analgesics, antibiotics, and vitamins are the three types of pharmaceuticals that Indians take the most frequently for self-medication. However, due to reports of antibiotic resistance and negative effects, self-medication with antibiotics has been discovered to be a developing concern in India.

An investigation conducted in 2010 revealed that 52.7% of Indians use self-medication. (Kumar et al., 2010). According to the study, the majority of students who self-medicate use over-the-counter drugs, whether they are studying medicine or not. Convenience and the ability to save time and money were the key motivations for self-medication. The survey also discovered that students lacked knowledge about how to utilize drugs safely and the dangers of self-medication.

Self-medication, however, has a number of drawbacks, such as unfavourable drug reactions, drug interactions, and antibiotic resistance. According to a 2014 study, skin rashes and gastrointestinal symptoms were the most frequent adverse medication reactions reported by participants who self-medicated (45% of them). (Yadav et al., 2014).

Furthermore, a serious public health problem is the high rate of antibiotic self-medication in India. According to a 2016 study, 62% of individuals who self-medicated with antibiotics did

not seek medical advice before taking the drug, and 65% did not finish the full course of treatment. (Agrawal et al., 2016). Self-medication was more prevalent among urban inhabitants and people with greater levels of education, according to a 2011 study. (Gupta et al., 2011).

Self-medication, nevertheless, can potentially have unfavourable outcomes including wrong dosage or drug interactions. Over 50% of patients who self-medicated in a 2013 study reported suffering negative medication effects. (Bhagavathula et al., 2013). According to a survey from 2012, almost 52% of Indians self-medicate, with women, older folks, and people with lower levels of education being more likely to do so. (Balamurugan & Ganesh, 2012).

Self-medication was more prevalent among young adults, those with higher education levels, and those with better incomes, according to a 2013 study. (Zafar et al., 2013). Self-medication is further encouraged by the non-prescription availability of over-the-counter drugs. According to a 2016 study, over 60% of antibiotics are sold in India without a prescription, which raises the risk of antibiotic resistance. (Kotwani et al., 2016).

Self-medication is a widespread practice in India, where it is attributed to several variables including easy access to medications, a lack of healthcare literacy, and expensive healthcare expenditures. 67 percent of people in urban regions and 56 percent of people in rural areas self-medicate, according to a 2014 study. (Aqeel et al., 2014). More than 80% of those polled in a rural area of North India, according to a 2015 study, engaged in self-medication. (Kalaiselvan et al., 2015).

However, self-medication includes disadvantages such as dosage errors, drug resistance, and adverse drug reactions. According to the survey, self-medication is widespread in the area, with more than 60% of respondents indicating having used it. Self-medication was most frequently done for practical and financial reasons. However, the study also discovered that self-medication was linked to a lack of access to healthcare services, as well as a lack of awareness about proper medicine use and its negative effects. The study emphasizes the necessity of expanding healthcare access and raising awareness of safe medication practices in rural North Indian locations. (Gupta et al., 2016).

In India, self-medication with antibiotics raises serious public health issues since it fuels the growth of antimicrobial resistance. According to a 2017 study, 72% of individuals who used antibiotics for self-medication did not finish the entire course, and 56% bought them without a prescription. (Sharma et al., 2017).

Adverse drug reactions, prescription errors, and drug combinations are just a few of the negative effects of self-medication. According to a 2016 study, most patients who self-medicated in a tertiary care facility in North India reported having negative drug reactions, with roughly 13.8% of those reactions being severe. (Nagpal et al., 2016).

Antibiotic self-medication, which leads to the emergence of antibiotic resistance, is a significant public health concern in India. Most participants in a 2017 study who used antibiotics for self-medication did not finish the entire course, and many of them bought antibiotics without a prescription. (Kaur et al., 2017).

Although there are many factors that contribute to self-medication behavior, accessibility, affordability, and convenience are the most frequently mentioned ones. Patients in rural areas, in particular, frequently rely on self-medication to manage minor illnesses since they have less access to healthcare facilities. Like this, patients in cities may self-medicate to save time and money because going to the doctor can be expensive and time-consuming.

The most used medications for self-medication in India are analgesics (such as paracetamol and ibuprofen), antibiotics, and vitamins. However, the overuse of antibiotics for self-medication is a growing concern in India, as it can lead to the development of antibiotic resistance. Studies have reported high levels of antibiotic resistance in India, which may be partly attributed to the inappropriate use of antibiotics through self-medication.

To address the issue of self-medication in India, several interventions have been proposed. These include education and awareness campaigns to promote responsible self-medication practices, regulation of over-the-counter medications, and increasing access to healthcare facilities in rural areas. Healthcare professionals also play a crucial role in educating patients about the risks associated with self-medication and encouraging patients to seek professional medical advice before taking any medication.

According to studies, India needs to promote appropriate self-medication practices through education and awareness initiatives. In addition, healthcare practitioners need to be proactive in informing patients about the dangers of self-medication and the value of consulting a doctor before taking any medications. To avoid improper prescription, use and the emergence of drug resistance, proper regulation and oversight of over-the-counter medicines are also required.

In conclusion, self-medication is a widespread practice in India and is becoming more frequent as over-the-counter drugs become more accessible. The procedure does, however, have certain drawbacks, such as the potential for negative effects and antibiotic resistance. Therefore, to encourage safe and efficient pharmaceutical usage, sufficient education and awareness among the public are required.

Objective: To find the factors driving self-medication behaviour in India patients

Methodology: This study is descriptive in nature in which the data were obtained from the 195 respondents consisting of patients and pharmacists. A checklist question was used to analyse and interpret the data. In a checklist question respondents choose “Yes” or “No” for all the questions.

Data Analysis and Interpretations:

Table 1 The Factors Driving Self-Medication Behaviour in India Patients

SL No.	The Factors Driving Self-Medication Behaviour in India Patients	Yes	% Yes	No	% No	Total
1	Cultural belief that it is important to be self-reliant and take care of oneself	183	93.85	12	6.15	195
2	Lack of regulation and enforcement of drug laws in India	176	90.26	19	9.74	195
3	High cost of healthcare in India	173	88.72	22	11.28	195
4	Easy availability of medicines online has contributed to the problem of self-medication	164	84.10	31	15.90	195
5	To treat stress-related conditions such as anxiety and depression	149	76.41	46	23.59	195
6	Lacked knowledge about how to utilize drugs safely and the dangers of self-medication	147	75.38	48	24.62	195

7	Having a chronic medical condition and residing in a rural region were both significantly linked to self-medication	136	69.74	59	30.26	195
8	Self-medicate to save time and money because going to the doctor can be expensive and time-consuming	159	81.54	36	18.46	195

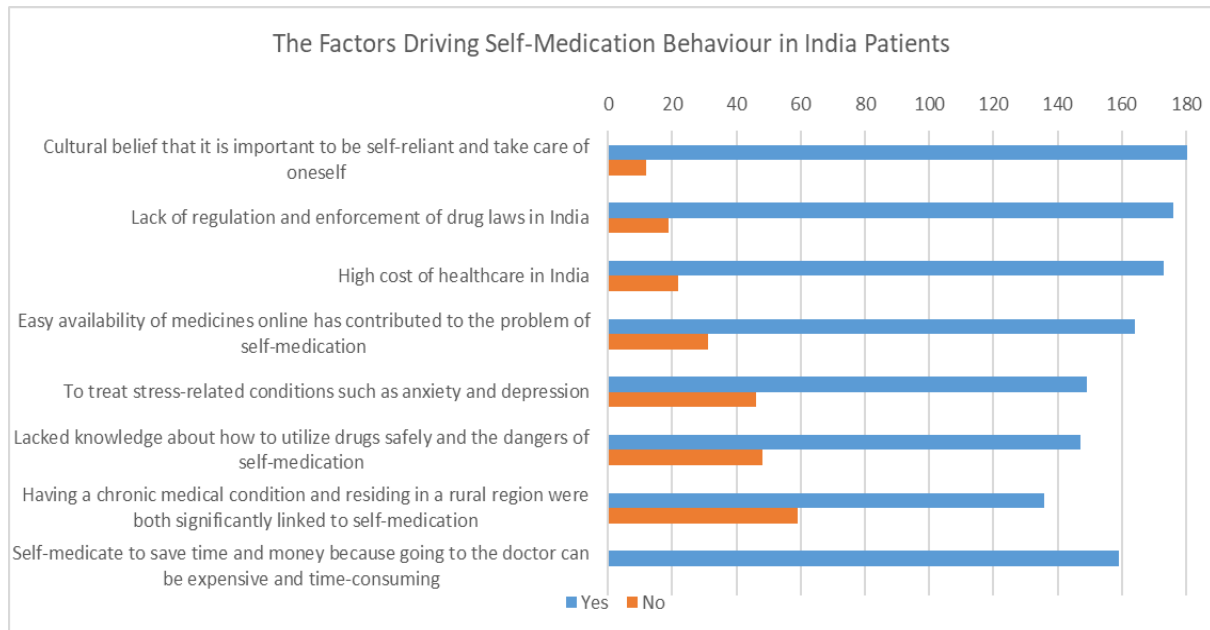


Figure 1 The Factors Driving Self-Medication Behaviour in India Patients

Table and Figure 1 show the factors driving self-medication behaviour in India patients. It was found that around 93.8% respondents accept that cultural belief that it is important to be self-reliant and take care of oneself, lack of regulation and enforcement of drug laws in India (90.2%), high cost of healthcare in India (88.7%), easy availability of medicines online has contributed to the problem of self-medication (84.1%), self-medicate to save time and money because going to the doctor can be expensive and time-consuming (81.5%), to treat stress-related conditions such as anxiety and depression (76.4%), lacked knowledge about how to utilize drugs safely and the dangers of self-medication (75.3%) and having a chronic medical condition and residing in a rural region were both significantly linked to self-medication (69.7%).

Conclusion

Finally, it should be noted that self-medication is a habit that is common in India, particularly for minor ailments, and that it is linked to a number of unfavorable outcomes, including unfavorable drug reactions, drug interactions, and antibiotic resistance. more education levels, more income, living in a rural region, and having a chronic medical condition are all characteristics that influence self-medication behavior. It is necessary to encourage safe and effective medicine usage, lower the risk of antibiotic resistance, and enhance access to healthcare in rural regions to address this issue. Healthcare practitioners should also play a crucial part in educating patients about proper counsel and advise and in preventing self-medication habits. Overall, good self-medication practices management can raise the standard of medical care and advance India's public health.

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