

Prevalence of and Factors Associated with Painkiller Self-Medication among Students Undergoing Higher Education in Western Province, Sri Lanka

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Self-medication (SM) is an emerging practice commonly used for pain management among higher education students. However, unreliable self-medication may lead to severe complications. Therefore, this study aims to assess the prevalence and factors associated with painkiller self-medication practices. A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted with a recall period of 3 months among students in recognized universities and higher education institutes in Western Province, Sri Lanka. The study was conducted among 338 participants using a convenience sampling technique via a pre-tested online questionnaire after obtaining ethical approval (KIU/ERC/21/85) from KIU. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson's chi-square using SPSS software version 25. Among 338 participants, majority were females (n=234, 69.2%), aged between 22 to 25 years (n=283, 83.7%), residing in the Western Province (n=263, 77.8%), unemployed (n=239, 70.7%) and did not drink or smoke (n=288, 85.2%). The prevalence of SM in this study was 77.2% (n=261) of those; many recalled that they had mostly self-medicated during the last month (n=86, 33%) for three main reasons; adequate knowledge about medication or minor symptoms (22.2%), convenience (20.9%) and the nearness to healthcare workers (13.4%). Major ailments for SM were headache (22.1%), cough or runny nose (15.2%), and fever (14.3%). Pharmacies (62.3%) were the primary source for obtaining painkillers for SM. This study revealed that self-medication is a highly prevalent practice among students in higher education, and there is a significant association between SM practices and the study (p=0.000). The opinion on SM is significantly associated with the year of study (p=0.008); similarly, there is a significant association between physical activity and the knowledge of the correct dosage and frequency of taking painkillers (p=0.004). Further research into effective tools and regulations for drug surveillance and awareness of responsible SM practices are recommended to ensure safe SM behaviour.

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