

## The usage of over the counter (OTC) medicines and traditional medicines (TMs) for common ailments in selected urban and rural areas in Sri Lanka

Risfa M.S<sup>1</sup>, Perera J.A.C<sup>1</sup>, Perera P.P.R<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>B. Pharmacy Unit, Faculty of Medical Sciences, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Gangodawila, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka. <sup>2</sup>Department of Biochemistry, Faculty of Medical Sciences, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Gangodawila, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka.

\*Corresponding author e-mail: [rasika@sip.ac.lk](mailto:rasika@sip.ac.lk)

### Abstract

Population-based studies regarding attitudes, knowledge, beliefs and practices of the use of non-prescription medicines and traditional medicines among the general public are rare in Sri Lanka. Public knowledge and understanding influence the pattern of self-medication. It will also provide further insight for the development and evaluation of health education and disease prevention strategies. Thus this study was conducted to investigate the usage of over the counter (OTC) medicines and traditional medicines (TM) for common ailments in a selected urban and rural area in Sri Lanka.

This descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted during June and July 2013 at Geli-Oya Muruthagahamula division (rural) and Bahirawakanda (urban) Gramaniladhari areas in Kandy District, Central Province, Sri Lanka. Volunteers (n=400) between 18 - 65 years of age were selected by a random sampling method. An interviewer administered questionnaire was used to collect data from voluntary participants via a face to face interview. Written consent was obtained from participants before

interviewing. Healthcare providers were excluded to avoid biased information.

Among the 400 participants (200 from each division) 82% had the opinion that self-medication is enough to cure common ailments. Almost half of our respondents (58%) were likely to practice both OTC drugs and TMs but TMs were preferred by many of the people in both areas (61.25%). Younger adults (72%) were using self-medication more than the elderly people (27.25%). Out of the respondents OTC drugs were preferred more by women and TMs were preferred by men. Accessibility of health care didn't have an impact on the choice of self-medication. Paracetamol (97.50%) and the herbal preparation Samahan® (56.75%) were the most frequently used OTC drugs and TMs respectively. There was a significant association ( $p < 0.001$ ) between the use of self-medication and the area of study. The gender, age and family incomes showed significant associations with self-medication pattern (OTC drugs and TMs). The ease of handling and administration of OTC drugs is the more frequent reason to choose OTC drugs and main factor influencing the public's preference of TMs over the OTC

drugs is the absence of serious side effects in TMs.

The usage of self-medication is widespread among people in both urban and rural areas and self-medication has significant association with the two selected areas. The major factor leading to the use of self-care behavior is patient satisfaction with the self-medication system. The accessibility of health care services is not a factor that influences the choice of self-medication.

**Keywords:** Over the counter medicines, self medication, traditional medicines

## **Introduction**

People all over the world suffer from common health problems. They legally have access to drugs by two mechanisms: access with a prescription provided by a licensed medical practitioner or access without a prescription, by self-medication<sup>1</sup>. For number of years there has been an increasing interest in a positive re-assessment of the role of self-medication in health care<sup>2</sup>. Self-care researchers demonstrate that the majority of care in illness involves self-treatment, not professional care; a self-medication has been shown to be a common first sort in illness<sup>3</sup>.

Self-care is defined as “what people do by themselves to keep their health, prevent and treat illness” by World Health Organization (WHO)<sup>4</sup>. In other words self-medication refers to use of non-prescription medicines, usually over-the-counter (OTC) drugs, to treat certain ‘minor’ ailments themselves

without consulting a medical practitioner and without any medical supervision<sup>5</sup>.

The time or cost required visiting a doctor to receive a prescription or refill often encourages patients to go for self-medication<sup>6</sup>. It is also influenced by patient satisfaction with the healthcare provider, cost of the drugs, educational level, socioeconomic factors, age and gender. The increase in self-care is due to a number of factors such as socioeconomic factors, life style, ready access to drugs, the increased potential to manage certain illness through self-care, public health and environmental factors, greater availability of medicinal products and demographic and epidemiological factors<sup>7</sup>.

Self-medication also has advantages for healthcare systems as it facilitates better use of clinical skills of pharmacists, increases access to medication and may contribute to reducing prescribed drug costs associated with publicly funded health programs<sup>8</sup>. However, increasing availability of non-prescription medicines may encourage patients to believe that there is a drug treatment for every ailment. This may end up in serious adverse reactions.

Self-medication can be obtained either by using non-prescription (Over The Counter) medications in western or traditional medication or using home remedies.

The World Health Organization (WHO 2002) defines traditional medicine (TM), in part, as a medicine system that includes medication therapies like herbal medicines as well as non-medication therapies like acupuncture<sup>9</sup>.