

Original article

Analgesic Self-Medication among Medical Students in Omar Al-Mukhtar University

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ABSTRACT

Analgesic self-medication is a fairly common behavior around the world, it is affected by many factors, such as; family, society, drug availability, self-care orientation, level of medical education, and illness awareness. The excessive as well as inappropriate consumption of analgesic gives rise to many problems such as peptic ulcer and nephropathy. This issue is more worsen in developing countries or places where the analgesic can be purchased without prescription such as in Libya. This research was performed to evaluate the possible reasons, prevalence, awareness as well as knowledge about consumption of analgesics without a prescription between the medical students in faculty of medicine, Omar Al-Mukhtar University. This is study was carried out during the period from 7/2/2022 to 15/3/2022 in Omar Al-Mukhtar University, Al-Bayda city in Libya targeting 340 medical student who received electronic and handed questionnaires. Our study showed that 66.17% of participants were female and 33.53% were male. The prevalence of students use analgesics without prescription was (70.62%) and 53.41% of the students knew that self-medication with analgesics may affect their health negatively, (3.26%) of them had side effects and (57.27%) of them have been checked the expiry date before using analgesic. The main source of analgesics was a recommendation of a pharmacist (38.49%). The most analgesic used for self-medication was Acetaminophen (41.08%) followed by Ketoprofen (19.92%). The common causes for consuming analgesic without prescription were Headache (24.90%) followed by Dysmenorrhea (18.26%) and toothache (12.45%). 47.22% of the students was previous experience of using a particular analgesic. The study revealed that the prevalence of using analgesic between medical students is relatively inflated. It is mandatory to educate health sciences students about misusing and risks of self-administration as well as further researches are needed to investigate the prevalence of consumption of analgesics without a prescription between university undergraduates.

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INTRODUCTION

Self-medication with analgesics is well-defined as choice and consumption of medications including herbal and traditional drinking products by people, to deal with self-diagnosed symptoms and diseases, or the intermittent or persisted use of remedy prescribed via a medical doctor for persistent or routine illnesses and symptoms [1,2].

Analgesics, usually known as pain killers, are ingredients which work in several ways to treat lots of pain experienced in the body. In general, weak opioids such as codeine, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as aspirin and ibuprofen, and paracetamol are the most over the counter (OTC) analgesics that are generally used by individuals [3]. The major groups of analgesics are opioids and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). The first are non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs reduce inflammation (swelling) through inhibition of cyclo-oxygenase enzyme at the site of pain like Aspirin, while the second are opioid analgesics (also known as narcotics) which are naturally or synthetically substances that relieve pain by altering the brain's perception [4]. Many are similar to morphine, while some are newer such as codeine and fentanyl. Despite the fact that non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs are generally safe, they can cause various complications if they consumed in large doses for many times; they can cause internal organs damage, diarrhea, constipation, heart problems, hypersensitivity, upset stomach, ringing in the ears, or even deafness, bleeding, heartburn and peptic ulcer [5]. The common prevalent symptoms and diseases for which self-administration was used were headache, fever, respiratory diseases as well as GIT diseases. In many investigations, headache as well as fever were identified as the common cause which result in consumption of analgesics without a prescription [6]. Inappropriate use of analgesics for long time leads to chronic renal impairment. The clinically well-defined entity of classic analgesic nephropathy is a slowly progressive illness caused by administration of two antipyretic analgesics paired with codeine and/or caffeine, both of them create a psychological reliance. It is distinguished by renal papillary necrosis as well as chronic interstitial nephritis [7,8]. Recently, many analytical studies have discovered that heavy consumption of analgesics such as; diclofenac sodium, ibuprofen as well as aspirin are connected with development of chronic renal impairment [9,10].

World Health Organization (2000) addressed that analgesics self-medication is commonly seen between the medical undergraduates worldwide [11]. There are many indications to use analgesics including, headache, flu, cold, muscle pain, joint pain, pain related to menstruation, toothache, and abdominal pain. Analgesics can be available in pharmacies, domestic remedy cabinet, in addition can be obtained from friends, family, neighbors or even classmates [12,13,14,15]. Among the risks of self-remedy, we may also quote misdiagnosis, protecting of acute health situation and resulting failure to obtain clinical assistance on time, possible food-drug and drug-drug interactions, wrong way of administration, insufficient doses, bacterial resistance, hazard of dependence or misuse, storage flawed prerequisites and incorrect choice of therapy [16,17,18,19].

Analgesic self-medication is a fairly common behavior around the world [20], It is affected by different factors, including, family, society, drug availability, advertisement exposure [21], illness awareness, self-care orientation and medical level of education. [22], governments and health authorities must assurance that self-medication is managed correctly, only safe medicines must be available over the counter (OTC), and individuals have to be educated with enough information regarding drug consumption, contraindications as well as disadvantages and advantages of any self-consumption of medicines [23].

However, according to WHO criteria, the correct self-consumption can help prevention and management of diseases that do not need a seek from a doctor, as well as relieve the growing demand on medical services for minor symptoms, especially when services are inadequate [24], The majority of students believed that medical knowledge is required for self-administering medicine, which is consistently approved by earlier studies [25]. The previous Study was performed to determine the impression of teaching pharmacological medicine on knowledge, attitude and practice on self-medication among medical undergraduates, and it was approved that administration of analgesics without a prescription is prevalent between medical students, with the majority limiting their use to mild conditions treated with over-the-counter medications. With the passage of time and the progress of knowledge, the pattern of self-medication practice evolves [26].

This study aimed to evaluate the possible reasons, prevalence, awareness as well as knowledge about consumption of analgesics without a prescription between the medical students in faculty of medicine, Omar Al-Mukhtar University.

METHODS

Study design

A cross-sectional survey involving electronic and self-administered questionnaires was carried out on medical undergraduates from various faculties (medicine, pharmacy, dentistry, and medical technology) of Omar Al-Mukhtar University, Al-Bayda, Libya during February and March 2022.

Data collection

The total number of questionnaires is 340 copies which distributed randomly to undergraduates of medical faculties. A semi structured questionnaire was implemented to pick up the information. The questionnaire contains two sections: the

first was sociodemographic characteristics (include: Name, Age, Gender, Collage) and the second part was questions about the self-medication practice (include: frequency, reason for consuming analgesics without a prescription, source, types of analgesics, awareness and knowledge about safety with self- medication practice).

Statistical analysis

Microsoft EXCEL program (2010) was used to tabulate data and to calculate frequencies and percentages.

RESULTS

The majority of respondents were females 66.17% (n=223) whereas 33.53% (n=113) were males (Table 1). In our study, 70.62% of students reported that they sometimes using painkillers without a prescription while 29.08% claimed that they never used analgesic without a prescription.

Table 1. Distribution of participants according to the gender

Demographics	No	%
Gender		
Male	113	33.53
Female	223	66.17
Age		
18-20	18	5.34
21-24	253	75.07
25-27	51	15.13
28-30	12	3.56
College		
Medicine	160	47.48
Dentistry	69	20.47
Pharmacy	45	13.35
Medical Technology	62	26.16
Use of analgesics among medical students		
Yes	238	70.62
No	98	29.08

The most common source of self- consumption with analgesic was a pharmacist (38.49%), followed by home pharmacy (38.07%), family member (14.22%) and from friends (8.78%), as shown in figure 1.

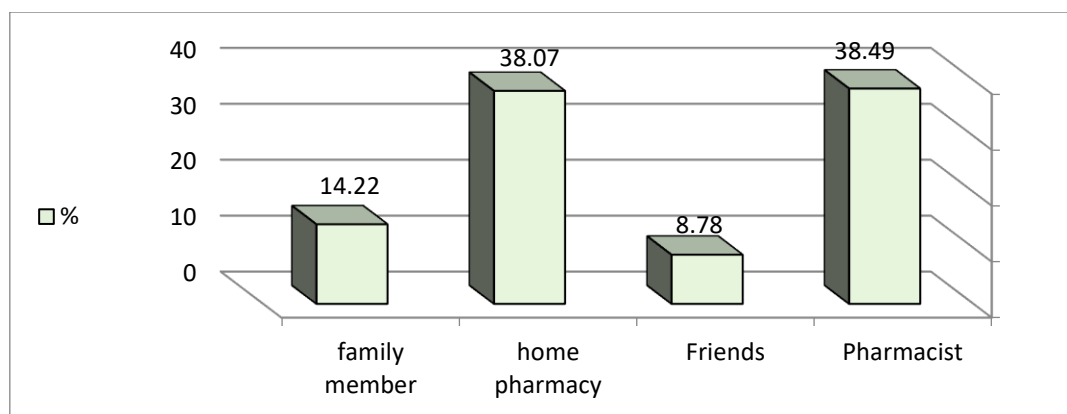
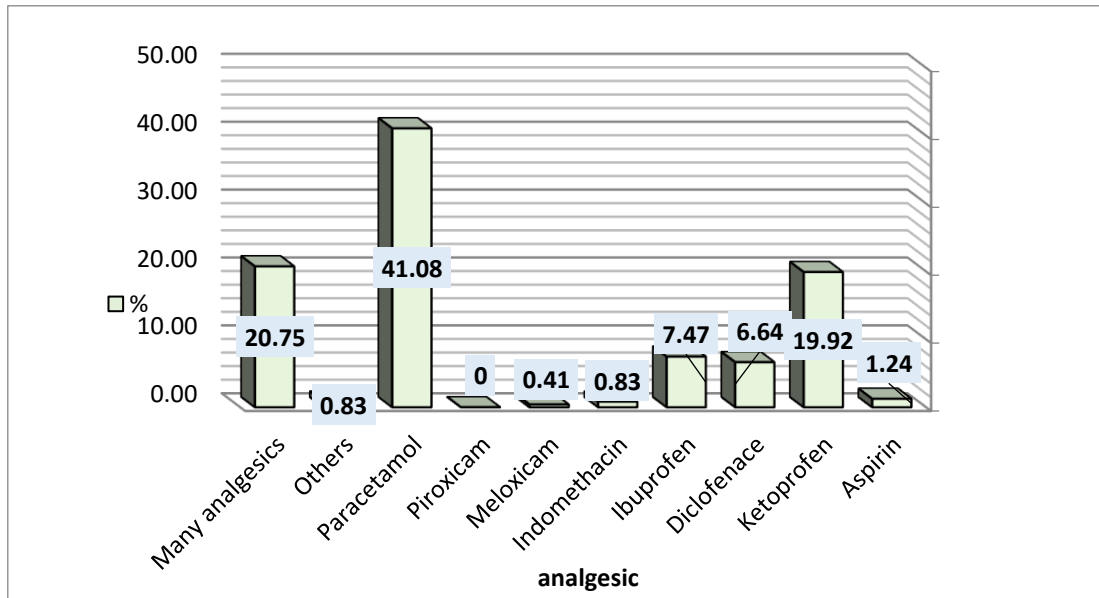


Figure 1. Percentages of students regarding the source of analgesics.

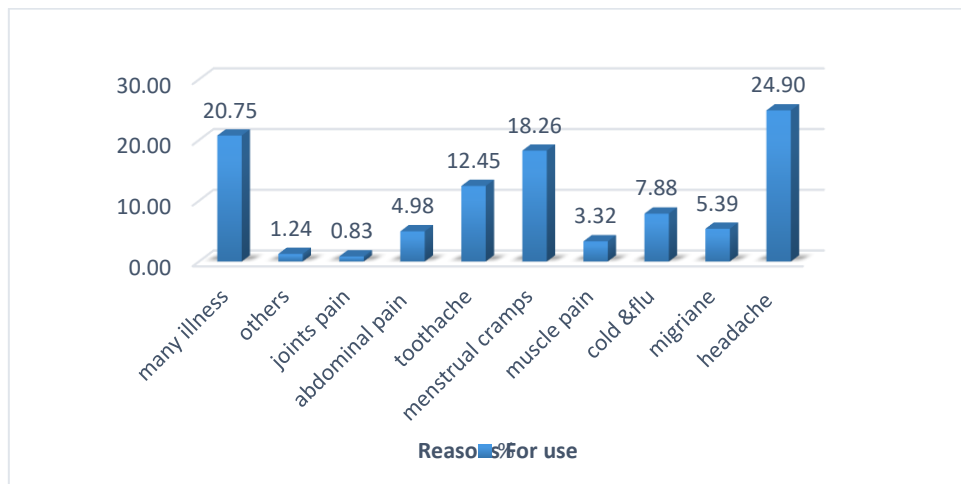
The finding of this survey showed that the vital reasons of self-consumption with analgesic were the previous experience of use a particular analgesic (47.22%) while the cost of visiting a doctor was (0.84%). The analgesics most usually used for self-medication were Acetaminophen (41.08%) followed by Ketoprofen (19.92%) while Aspirin, Meloxicam and Indomethacin were rarely self-used among the students. The percentage of use of each analgesic is illustrated in Fig. 2.

Figure 2. Percentages of most commonly used analgesics



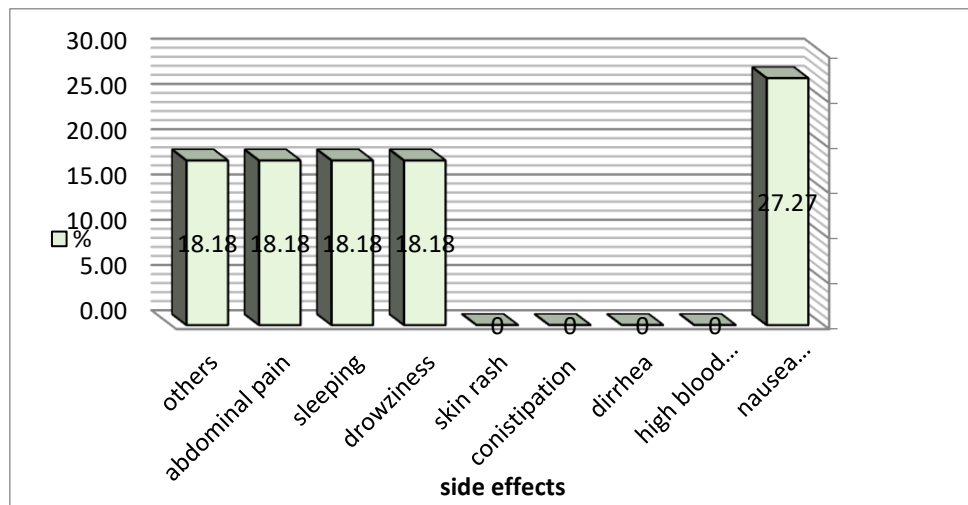
The most common sign for consuming analgesics without a prescription was headache (24.90%) then followed by menstrual cramps (18.26%) toothache was responsible for (12.45%) and majority of students (63.18%) were taken the analgesic when needed (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Percentages of students according to the reasons of analgesics use



It was interesting that more than half (53.41%) of students knew that analgesics cause side effects and fortunately (96.74%) of them did not feel any side effects after taking analgesic and only (3.26%) of them had side effects which were (27.27%) nausea and vomiting, while (18.18%) for drowsiness, abdominal pain and sleeping Fig.4 Most of the students (57.27%) have checked the expiry date before using the analgesics which were (99.58%) administered orally. More than half of students (73.53%) stored remaining dose at home. (52.94%) of student said that they consult the doctor if they did not feel well after self-medicate themselves.

Figure 4. The common side effects of analgesics



DISCUSSION

Self-medication is a habit where people use analgesics to cure self-diagnosed disease or symptoms without visiting a doctor [27]. Many researches demonstrate that self-consumption, especially with analgesics, is internationally widespread and is affected via many determining factors [28,29]. self-consumption has been recorded frequently between undergraduate students and is influenced by education degree and experience especially, among medical and pharmacy students as a result of their knowledge about diseases as well as treatments [30].

This recent study investigated that self-medication of analgesics between medical, pharmacy, dentistry and medical technology students at Omar Al-Mukhtar University, Al-Bayda, Libya. Applying a survey questionnaire. The aim was to investigate the prevalence of consuming non- prescribed OTC analgesics among medical students and evaluate their self-consumption approaches. The obtained data demonstrates that prevalence of analgesic consumption without a prescription between educated students was dramatically high (70.62%), compared to other countries as 73.2% in Saudi Arabia, 75% in Pakistan ,88% in Croatia, 94% in Hong Kong ,45% in Turkey [14,31,32,33,12]. The reasons for using analgesic without prescription is understandable as there many over-the- counter analgesic drugs used to relief mild-to-moderate pain while analgesic self-medication can help cure minor symptoms that need no appointment with clinicians and, in particular, relieve burden on health services in developing countries [34]. In contrary, the use of analgesic self-medication also has lots of harmful consequences, including: drug-drug interaction, misdiagnosis of disease, incorrect dosage, drug dependency and drug abuse [35,36,37,38,39,40,41,42]. The recent research noticed that females 66.17% showed a stronger inclination toward self-consumption than males (33.53%), because many females may use analgesic to relief menstrual pain which is apparently in agreement with many researches [1,32,43,44,45].

Moreover, the current research was carried out in different ages and the distribution of age was as following 18 - 20 years 5.34%, 21-24years 75.07%, 25-27years 15.13% and 28-30years 3.56%. Specifically, we found that most undergraduates whom are using analgesics their age between 21 and 24 years 75.07% which is consistent with the results of studies done by *Al Essa et al. (2019)* and *Ibrahim et al. (2015)* which reported that, the most students whom were using analgesic aged between 20-25years. The reason for this finding could be because the older students have more medical knowledge than younger students about medicine selection for minor illness [1,46].

In addition, the major source of analgesics was pharmacist (38.49%), followed by home pharmacy (38.07%), then family member (14.23%), and from friends (8.78%), fortunately, the major source was recommended by pharmacist who at least advice the patient how to use analgesic correctly.

In this research, the most of survey respondents were from medical (47.48%), followed by medical technology (26.16%), dentistry (20.47%), then pharmacy (13.35%). similar results were found by *Alam et al. (2015)* [47].

The majority of the students in the current research cleared that they used analgesics for minor illness like; headache, menstrual pain and toothache 24.90%,18.26% ,12.45% respectively regarding to the same outcomes were discovered by *Mumtaz et al and James et al* [48,12].

According to the study results, the most prevalent analgesics were Acetaminophen (41.08%) and Ketoprofen (19.92%). This result is in agreement with researches carried out by *Al Essa et al and Zardosht et al* [1,49]. In comparison with a study conducted by *Barea et al*, which found that Aspirin is more used than Paracetamol to manage headache [50].

Furthermore, our finding indicated that 53.41% of students were aware about side effects of painkillers, while about

45.99% were not educated about adverse effects, and 96.74% of them did not feel any side effects after taking analgesic, while only 3.26% suffered from various complications. These outcomes were in agreement with other finding conducted by *Badiger et al and Zafar et al* [51,13].

Finally, most of the students (57.27%) have checked the expiry date before using the analgesics which were 99.58% administered orally. More than half of students (73.53%) stored remaining dose at home. 52.95% of student said that they consult the doctor if they did not feel well after self-medicate themselves.

CONCLUSION

In summary, consumption of analgesics without a prescription is highly common between the students of health sciences in Omar Al-Mukhtar University, and we believe that it could represent medical students in general in Libya. Headache, menstrual cramps and toothaches were the most common pain experienced by most of the students who consumed Acetaminophen and Ketoprofen without a prescription. The attitudes of students toward self-medication are diverse, and some of these need attentions. However, we suggest that students have to be aware about misusing and side effects of self-medication and more standardized researches are needed to investigate the incidence and widespread of self-consumption among medical students in various cities in Libya and multimedia programs may be helpful in educating the entire community about the dangerous effects of self-medication.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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استخدام المسكنات بدون وصفة طبية بين طلاب الكليات الطبية في جامعة عمر المختار- البيضاء، ليبيا

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المستخلص

التطبيق الذاتي بالمسكنات هو سلوك شائع إلى حد ما حول العالم، فهو يتأثر بالعديد من العوامل، مثل؛ الأسرة والمجتمع وتوافر الأدوية وتوجيه الرعاية الذاتية ومستوى التعليم الطبي والوعي بالمرض. الاستهلاك المفرط وغير المناسب للمسكنات يؤدي إلى العديد من المشاكل مثل القرحة الهضمية واعتلال الكلية. تزداد هذه المشكلة سوءاً في البلدان النامية أو الأماكن التي يمكن شراء المسكن فيها بدون وصفة طبية كما هو الحال في ليبيا. تم إجراء هذا البحث لتقييم الأسباب المحتملة ومدى انتشار الوعي والمعرفة حول استهلاك المسكنات بدون وصفة طبية بين طلاب الكليات الطبية جامعة عمر المختار. أجريت هذه الدراسة خلال الفترة من 2022/2/7 إلى 2022/3/15 في جامعة عمر المختار بمدينة البيضاء في ليبيا زواستهدفت 340 طالب طب ممن تلقوا استبيانات إلكترونية و ورقية. أظهرت دراستنا أن 66.17% من المشاركين كانوا من الإناث و 33.53% من الذكور. بلغت نسبة انتشار استخدام الطلاب للمسكنات دون وصفة طبية (70.62%) و 53.41% من الطلاب يعرفون أن التداوي الذاتي بالمسكنات قد يؤثر على صحتهم سلباً و (3.26%) منهم لديهم آثار جانبية و (57.27%) كانوا يتأكدون من تاريخ انتهاء الصلاحية قبل استخدام المسكن. المصدر الرئيسي للمسكنات كان توصية الصيدلي (38.49%) وكان المسكن الأكثر استخداماً في التداوي الذاتي هو الأسييتامينوفين (41.08%) يليه الكيتوبروفين (19.92%). الأسباب الشائعة لتناول المسكنات دون وصفة طبية هي الصداع (24.90%) يليه عسر الطمث (18.26%)، وألم الأسنان (12.45%). 47.22% من الطلاب لديهم خبرة سابقة في استخدام مسكن معين. كشفت الدراسة أن معدل انتشار استخدام المسكنات بين طلاب الطب مرتفع نسبياً ومن الضروري تثقيف طلاب العلوم الصحية حول سوء الاستخدام ومخاطر الإدارة الذاتية، كما يلزم إجراء المزيد من الأبحاث للتحقيق في مدى انتشار استهلاك المسكنات دون وصفة طبية بين طلاب الجامعات.

الكلمات الدالة: التطبيق الذاتي، المسكنات، الطلاب، المرض.