

Self-Medication among Undergraduates: A Case Study of University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Chukwuone, C. A., Onuoha, K. M. & Maxwell, L. C.

Department of Home Economics/Hospitality Management Education,
University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Corresponding author: kindness200@gmail.com

Abstract

This study investigated the prevalence of self-medication among undergraduates of University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN). Specifically, it determined common ailments that predispose undergraduates of UNN to self-medication; consequences of self-medication practices among the undergraduates and measures that could be adopted to curb self-medication among undergraduates. The study adopted a survey research design. It was conducted at University of Nigeria, Nsukka Campus. Questionnaire was used to collect data. Data were analysed using mean. Findings reveal eight common ailments that predispose undergraduate's involvement in self-medication. These include; headache (4.30), malaria (4.30), sexually transmitted infections (3.57), common cold and flu (4.27), heart burns (3.50), nausea (3.22), and stomach ache (4.20), among others. Fifteen Measures that could be adopted to curb self-medication practices were also identified. The measures include among others, medical centre staff members should be humane and caring when attending to sick students (4.42), Pharmacists should not dispense drugs to students without prescription from qualified medical personnel (4.37); and University medical Centre should be in close proximity to students' residential areas (4.35). Based on the findings, five recommendations were made include that: university administrations should ensure that cost of healthcare services for students is reduced; undergraduates should be constantly educated by relevant bodies through workshops, seminars on the danger of self-medication.

Keywords: Ailment, Abuse, Self-medication, Undergraduates, Students, Health, Drug, Care, Diseases.

Introduction

Medication involves the act of consuming medicines or drugs for prevention and treatment of diseases. Correct medication is observed by reporting any disease to the physician at the hospital or clinic who appropriately diagnoses the ailment and prescribes the right medicine to alleviate the condition (Farmakinwa, 2018). Self-medication involves the use of drug with curative intent but without medical advice from a qualified medical

practitioner. It is also seen as the act of obtaining and consuming drugs without the advice of a medical practitioner either for diagnosis, prescription or treatment of disease and illness. Self-medication also implies the use of non-prescription and prescription medicines by one's own initiative to treat self-recognized symptoms and conditions (Arikpo & Enyi-Idoh, 2013). Laurice(2018) posits that prescription drugs refer to drugs that can only be obtained by means of a

physician's prescription. Non prescription drugs are drugs that are safe and effective for use by the general public without advice from a health professional. It has been observed generally that most people will rather prefer to buy over-the-counter drugs from any pharmacy closest to them than to go to the hospital in order to consult a doctor for proper diagnosis of symptoms and prescription (Brennam, 2019). Self-medication practices cut across culture, gender, health or any other socio-demographic or socio-medical state. Self-medication has been reported to be on the rise globally with high prevalence among the young adults. The young adults make up the population of the undergraduates that are being discussed in this study (Sholabi, Ajamu, & Adisa, 2021).

The prevalence of self-medication among youths especially undergraduates has been attributed to various factors including ease of access of medication at home (Arikpo & Enyi-Idoh, 2013). Sources of drug knowledge among youths include family members especially mothers, peer groups and the illegal market. Consequently, people experiencing milder symptoms do not consult medical practitioners because they prefer to consult a pharmacist or chemist attendants for advice and medication (Laurice, 2018). Some studies (Segall 2015; Sholabi et al., 2021) have reported alarming rates of self-medication in student population and that self-medication is being practiced by majority of the students. According to Mehta and Sharma(2015), common drugs abused by students are paracetamol and antimalaria drugs. It is very common to see students buying these drugs and taking them once they have symptoms like headache or increased body

temperature. These can be attributed to a number of factors such as busy schedule of students, nonchalant attitude of health care personnel, lack of funds, mildness of disease, dissatisfaction with health-care services among others (Segall, 2015). These young adults are more vulnerable in the practice of self-medication due to their low perception of risk associated with the use of drugs, knowledge of drugs, easy access to Internet, wider media coverage on related health issues, ready access to drugs, level of education, and social status. Friends or even strangers are always ready to advice on which medication to take, this can be so dangerous. Most of the time the undergraduates have limited economic support, find self-medication more appropriate rather than undergoing costly consultations in the hospitals. These factors contribute to the high level of self-medication practices in Nigeria in general and University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

In University of Nigeria, Nsukka, there are many unregistered patent medicine stores from which people purchase drugs. Many of such people who purchase such drugs are undergraduate students. They sell drugs and orthodox pharmaceutical products on a retail basis simply for profit without minding the consequences on the patient's health (Durowade et. al., 2022)., Orayi et. al. (2021) posited that many students especially undergraduates tend to misuse medicine for self-medication. This seems to be the case in UNN and the undergraduates, who are young students pursuing their first degree in a university have always been the users of medicines without prescription by health personnel.

Self-medication has detrimental consequences on health of

undergraduates. According to Torres and Papini,(2016), self-medication increases the possibility of drug abuse and drug dependency. It also masks the signs and symptoms of underlying diseases, hence complicating the problem, creating drug resistance, and delaying diagnosis. It is therefore necessary to study the self-medication practices among the undergraduate students of UNN, with a view to evolving ways of curbing such practices.

The findings of this study will be beneficial to undergraduates, health personnel, families, Home economics program, and the society as a whole. The undergraduates, through the findings of this study will be aware of the health risks associated with self-medication and these will make them to refrain from the practice thereby promoting their health on campus. Ruiz (2010) noted that there are many potential risks in self-medication and the findings of this study could help students avert such risk. Health personnel could also use the findings of the study as bases for developing drug use education for the undergraduates.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of this study was to investigate issues relating to self-medication among undergraduates in University of Nigeria Nsukka (UNN).Specifically, the study determined:

1. common ailments that predispose undergraduates of UNN to self-medication.
2. measures that could be adopted to curb self-medication among undergraduates of UNN.

Methodology

Design of the Study: This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Thus, **Area of the Study:** This study was carried out in University of Nigeria, Nsukka Campus in Enugu State. UNN has a medical centre that is designed to cater for the health challenges of the students. However, many students procure drugs from pharmacies and medicine stores that operate very close to the campus. Hence, many undergraduates engage in self-medication because they fail to follow the procedures of obtaining medical care from the university medical centre.

Population of the Study: The population of the study consisted of approximately 28,000 undergraduates of University of Nigeria, Nsukka campus. This population comprised of 12,601 male and 15,324 female undergraduates from the 10 faculties located at the campus (Academic Planning Unit, University of Nigeria Nsukka, 18th June, 2022). They are male and female youths who are predominantly females. (See appendix 1). They are students pursuing various degree programs at UNN so they are very busy with academic activities with little or no time for proper visit to medical centre except for very severe medical problem.

Sample for the Study: The sample for the study comprised of 280 female and male students randomly drawn from the 10 faculties of UNN. This sample size was arrived at using multi-stage sampling technique. Firstly, the entire population of students were divided into clusters based on their faculties. At the second stage, purposive sampling was used to sample only students domiciled in the hostels within the campus. Finally, snow-ball sampling was used to select 28 students from each of the each from the 10 faculties based on accessibility and

willingness of the undergraduates to participate in the study.

Instrument for Data Collection: The instrument for data collection was questionnaire. It was developed through extensive literature review based on specific purposes of the study. The instrument was face validated by three experts. The questionnaire had two sections A and B. Section A dealt with personal data of respondents while section B had two sections in line with the specific objectives of the study. The questionnaire adopted the five-point Likert rating scale of Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Undecided (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1). To establish reliability of the instrument 20 copies of the instrument were administered to undergraduates in Ebonyi State

University, Abakaliki. The responses were analysed using the Cronbach alpha reliability method which yielded a reliability co-efficient of .88.

Data Collection Method: Two hundred and eighty (280) copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the respondents by hand. Two research assistants were involved in the study. All the 280 were retrieved. This showed 100 percent return rate.

Data Analysis techniques: Data were analysed using mean and standard deviation. Any item with a mean of 3.50 and above was regarded as “agreed” while mean values below 3.50 were regarded as “disagreed”.

Findings

Table 1: Mean Responses of Common Ailments that Predispose Undergraduates of UNN to Self-Medication

S/No	Common ailments that predispose undergraduates of UNN to self-medication	Mean	SD	Remarks
1	Headache	4.30	0.46	Agree
2	Malaria	4.30	0.34	Agree
3	Sexually transmitted infections.	3.57	0.84	Agree
4	Common cold and flu.	4.27	0.45	Agree
5	Heart burns	3.50	0.87	Agree
6	Nausea.	3.22	0.74	Agree
7	Constipation	4.27	0.45	Agree
8	Stomach ache.	4.20	0.82	Agree
9	Ulcer.	4.02	0.15	Agree
10	Chronic diseases associated with organs e.g., kidneys, liver.	3.37	0.54	Disagree
11	Typhoid fever	3.65	0.76	Agree
12	Menstrual/monthly period abdominal pains.	4.25	0.43	Agree
13	Diabetes	4.10	0.64	Agree
14	Hypertension.	1.75	0.98	Agree

= Mean Responses of Undergraduates, **SD** = Standard Deviation of the responses, N = 280

Table 1 shows that items range from 1.75 to 4.30. Items numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13 and 14 have their mean score

above 3.50. This shows that the respondents have agreed on these items listed are the common ailments that make

undergraduates to indulge in self-medication and disagreed on one item; item10 which has a mean score below 3.50 indicating that the item were not accepted by the respondents as ailments

that can predispose undergraduates to engage in self-medication. The standard deviation ranges from 0.15 to 0.98. This shows that the respondents were close to one another in their responses.

Table 2: Mean Responses of the Measures that could be adopted by Stakeholders to Curb Self-medication among Undergraduates of University of Nigeria Nsukka.

S/N	Measures that could be adopted to curb self-medication among undergraduates	\bar{x}	SD	Remarks
1	Proper health education should be given to undergraduates by health practitioners.	4.26	0.46	Agree
2	Sick students should go to the UNN Medical Centre (MC) for diagnosis, drug prescription and treatment.	3.56	0.56	Agree
3	Quality drugs should always be available to the UNNMC for fast relief of ailments.	3.55	0.55	Agree
4	Students should buy drugs whenever they get sick.	3.15	1.00	Disagree
5	Staff members of UNNMC should be humane and caring when attending to sick students.	4.42	0.50	Agree
6	Unregistered medicine stores and pharmacies in and around UNN should be shut down to reduce easy access for self-medication	4.42	0.50	Agree
7	Pharmacists should not dispense drugs to students without prescription from qualified medical personnel.	4.37	0.49	Agree
8	Students should be educated by health personnel on negative effects of indulgence in self-medication	3.56	0.56	Agree
9	University medical centre should be in close proximity to students' residential areas.	4.35	0.48	Agree
10	Student Affairs Department should organize awareness programmes to educate students on drug use and dangers of self-medication.	4.02	0.15	Agree
11	School medical personnel should conduct awareness programmes to enlighten students on the dangers of drug misuse.	3.67	0.76	Agree
12	School administration should subsidize cost of drugs bills for students	4.02	0.15	Agree
13	Activities of unregistered drug vendors should not be allowed in the university.	4.30	0.46	Agree
14	University administration should ban drug vendors in the campuses.	3.50	0.87	Agree
15	Pharmacists in the medical centre should provide drug use education to students so that they can make informed choices about their use of drug	3.57	0.84	Agree
16	Holistic approach should be adopted by all stakeholders to ensure proper awareness, education and strict regulation regarding drug use and availability.	3.65	0.76	Agree

\bar{x} = Mean Responses of Undergraduates, **SD** = Standard Deviation of the response, N= 280

Table 2 shows that the 15 out of the 16 items had mean range from of 3.15 to 4.42. Items numbers 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16 have their mean score above 3.50. This shows that the respondents have agreed on the items listed as measures that if adopted can help to reduce the rate of self-medication among undergraduates while item number 4 has a mean score below 3.50, indicating that they disagreed on the item as not being a measure that can curb self-medication among undergraduates. The standard deviation ranges from 0.15 to 1.00. This shows that the respondents were close to one another in their responses.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal that there are 13 common ailments that predispose undergraduates of University of Nigeria, Nsukka to self-medication. The ailments include: Headache, malaria, sexually transmitted infections, common cold and flu, heart burns, nausea, constipation, stomach ache, ulcer, typhoid fever, menstrual/monthly period abdominal pains, diabetes and hypertension. The findings of are in agreement with the views of Mortazavi et. al. (2017) who insisted that common cold and headache were the most common ailments that predispose undergraduates to self-medication practices. Similarly, Zewdie et. al., (2020) noted that the most common illnesses that predispose individuals to self-medication were headache and malaria, gastro-intestinal infections, respiratory tract infections among others. In a study by Karimy et. al. (2019); fever, fatigue, and anxiety were the most common ailments managed by self-medication. Cold, fever, and cough were the main

reasons of self-medication in another study on 570 university students in Rwanda (Tuyishimire et. al., 2019). Likewise, our results were consistent with the findings of similar studies conducted a decade apart (El Ezz & Ez-Elarab, 2011; Hashemzaei et. al., 2021). These illnesses have made the use of analgesics and antibiotics the leading drugs consumed in self-medication by undergraduates in University of Nigeria Nsukka. Several studies also report that analgesics are the drugs that are most commonly consumed and most times they are abused (Bennadi, 2014; Mehta & Sharma, 2015; L'opez-Cabra et. al., 2016; Sankdia et. al., 2017; Karmacharya et. al., 2018). Abuse of these drugs can expose the consumer to sever health problems. Awad et. al. (2006) and Esan et. al. (2018) posits that those that engage in self-medication are most likely to suffer drug related problems and general resistance to drug use. Based on the findings of the study and the supported literature, it is deduced that the identified items are the common ailments that predispose undergraduates of University of Nigeria, Nsukka to self-medication.

The findings of this study revealed that there are 15 measures to be adopted towards the control of self-medication practices among undergraduates of University of Nigeria Nsukka. The measures include; Health professionals should be giving enough information when prescribing drugs to patients (Balmurugan & Ganesh, 2011; Pushpa et. al., 2012), only quality drugs should always be supplied to the school clinic for fast relief of ailments, School clinical staff members should be humane and caring when attending to sick students (Auta et. al., 2012), Un-registered medicine stores and pharmacies should be shut down to

reduce availability of over-the-counter drugs (Akanmu & Odeyemi, 2018; Esan et. al., 2018), individuals should also take medicine prescription from a medical practitioner and not their peers (Wijesinghe et. al., 2012). University administration should implement legislation to sanction drug vendors in the campuses. The school academic planning should be balanced in order to give ailing students time to see a practitioner, School clinics should be in close proximity to students' residential areas (Sholabi, et. al., 2021).

Previous studies have reported that between 52.2% and 55% of Nigerian population obtained their medicines for self-medication practice from the patent medicine stores (Yusuff & Omarusehe, 2011; Akande-Sholabi et. al., 2021), where they do not have the opportunity of accessing relevant and appropriate counselling services to guide medication usage (Akande-Sholabi et. al., 2019; Akande-Sholabi et. al., 2020). These measures were also in line with the suggestions of Alshogram, (2018). The findings of this study are in line with the directives of World Health Organization (WHO) who insisted that only professional health workers should be prescribing drugs and unregistered medicine outlets should not be allowed to operate all in a bid to curb self-medication practices. It is also similar to the suggestions pointed out by Alshogram, et. al. (2017). It also buttressed the points noted by Durowade, et. al. (2022) that pharmacists should check activities of un-registered drug vendors by all stakeholders. Based on the findings of the study and the supported literature, it is deduced that the identified items are the measures to be adopted towards the control of self-

medication practices among undergraduates of University of Nigeria Nsukka

Conclusion

This study focused on self-medication among undergraduates in University of Nigeria Nsukka. The study found 13 common ailments that predispose undergraduates of University of Nigeria, Nsukka to self-medication. Also found 15 measures that could be adopted by stakeholders towards the control of self-medication practices among the undergraduates. Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that self-medication is prevalent among the undergraduates. There is need for relevant healthcare professionals; the university management to evolve ways of creating awareness among the students on the dangers of self-medication.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made in line with the study:

1. Undergraduates should only take prescription from a medical practitioner in the University Medical Centre and not their peers or medicine stores.
2. University administration should ensure the cost of healthcare services be reduced for students
3. School Medical Centre staff members should be caring when attending to sick students.
4. Undergraduates should be constantly educated by relevant bodies through workshops, seminars on the danger of self-medication
5. Strategies should be put in place to ensure efficient healthcare services, so that receiving healthcare becomes easily accessible and less time

consuming within the university community.

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