



Self-Medication Practices and Awareness among Mothers of 3–5 Year Old Children in Matara Municipality Area

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Self-medication is globally practiced, and its prevalence is rising among mothers administering drugs to their young children. Though self-medication is convenient, it carries important risks of inappropriate medication, adverse drug reactions, and accidental overdose, especially in vulnerable pediatric populations. This study aimed to assess self-medication practices and awareness among mothers of 3–5-year-old children in the Matara Municipality area, Sri Lanka. A descriptive, cross-sectional study was conducted enrolling five randomly selected preschools in the Matara Municipality area. Data were collected from a total of 313 mothers through an interviewer-administered questionnaire that assessed socio-demographic characteristics, recent use of self-medication, history of illnesses, and awareness, attitudes, and practices of self-medication. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 25.0 with descriptive statistics and chi-square test to identify associations among selected variables. The prevalence of self-medication among mothers was 89.5%. Paracetamol (84%) and antihistamines were the common self-medications mothers used for their children; the antihistamines were Piriton (52.1%) and Cetirizine (35.1%). Most participants (67.1%) reported the internet as their main source of information. Most children had suffered from common cold (65.2%), cough (44.1%), and fever (39.9%) in the last 30 days. Only 15% of mothers showed high awareness about the risks of self-medication, and 72.8% had a moderate level of awareness. Self-medication awareness was significantly associated with maternal education ($p < 0.001$), occupation ($p \leq 0.001$), and family income ($p < 0.001$). In addition, socio-demographic factors were shown to affect attitudes and practices as well. This study further identified knowledge gaps in the areas of drug overdosing and adverse effects. Self-medication is a very common practice among a high majority of mothers in the Matara Municipality area, and there is a significant lack of awareness about the risks of medication and their proper use. Educational interventions for mothers are urgently needed.

Keywords: Self-medication, Mothers, Preschool children, Awareness, Pediatric medication safety