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People Perception on Buying Over-the-counter Medicine: A Study in Nepal

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Abstract:

By practice, OTC medicine is very popular because it can be purchased without prescription of Doctors and it can be available in every retailer pharmacies. The main objective of this study was to explore the people perception on buying the OTC medicine in Nepalese context. The study was based on the descriptive study. Cross-section study was done among the 400 respondents. The result showed that more than 50% people perceived that buying behaviour of OTC medicine was not good but they agreed that it saved the time and money of patient. Perceptually, people agreed that very busy and uneducated person bought the OTC medicine. Around only 15% People believed in the medicine advertised through the different online and print media. Comparatively higher number of people believed on the advertisement of OTC done by health person than the artists. In general, people perception was significantly positive towards the buying behaviour of OTC medicine because it saved the time and money of people. It also supported to aware the people on the medicine available in the retail pharmacies. People perception was different than the general practices of buying the OTC medicine because every people have experience of purchasing the OTC medicine for their own or family health problem. So, it is important to study on the practice of buying OTC medicine.

Keywords: *Over-the-counter (OTC) medicines, Pharmacy, Perception, Self-medication*

1. Introduction

Medicines are considered as one of the most essential commodity for human life. However, when it comes for consumer knowledge, many people lack it. In case of prescription only medicines, the doctors keep information about that particular medicine and then prescribe for patients. Generally, the consumers do not visit to the doctors for their common ailments. Thus, consumers seek medicines from the nearby pharmacy and these medicines which do not require medical prescriptions are called Over-The-Counter (OTC) medicines (M Maharjan, 2011, p. 19). OTC medicines are legally allowed to be sold by pharmacies without the prescription of registered medical practitioner (Organization of Pharmaceuticals Producers of India, 2011, p. 1). OTC medicines are safe and effective for use without a doctor's prescription (USFDA, 2016). Over-the-counter (OTC) medicines are an important component of primary health care (Tsuyuki, Landry, Lalonde, & Taylor, 2012, p. 116). In many countries these OTC medicines are available for self-medication and are also available in supermarkets and other outlets. People in Canada can purchase OTC medicines from pharmacies or non-pharmacy outlets such as convenience stores (Lo, 2006, p. ii). Self-medication is the treatment of common health problems with medicines especially designed and labeled for use without medical supervision and approved as safe and effective for such use (The World Self-Medication Industry, p. 5). Self-medication with OTC medicines covers a wide range of diseases, appropriate self-medication can cure diseases, saving time and money which would be spent on visiting doctors and even it can sometimes save the patient's life in acute conditions (Mc Elnay, Hughes, & GF, 2001). In the Nepalese context, the practice of self-medication with OTC medicine is found common. A study conducted by Manipal College of Medical Sciences reported that self-medication and non-doctor prescribing are common in Pokhara valley of Nepal (Shankar, Partha, & Shenoy, 2002, p. 1). There are various factors affecting the purchasing behavior of consumers. Low economic status, lack of easy access on health services and expensive medical consultation are prominent factors for use of OTC medicines.

People purchase the OTC medicines either saying the name of medicine or by explaining their health problem to the nearby medicines retailer called pharmacy. They believe that the medicines sellers are also health persons thus can get the appropriate medicines which help/cure their health problem with low cost. Appropriate self-medication is beneficent for governments, health authorities and patients (Sarahroodi, 2012, p. 58). Globally with an increasing aging population, concern towards preventive self-medication is increasing. In United States, 87% of physicians believe OTC medicines are an important part of overall health care system (Consumer Healthcare Products Association, 2010). With this understanding OTC segment is projected to have a higher growth rate than prescription medicines (kanthe, 2010, p. 231). Similarly, in Japan to reduce the cost of healthcare system, the government has also been promoting self-medication among consumers (Pake, et al., 2011, p. 16). Over-The-Counter medicines are to be taken without any medical advice and thus information on the label regarding drug indications, dosage, direction for use, contraindications, warnings, concomitant use with other medicines etc. are extremely important. Offering OTC drugs without educating the customers of effective use would be detrimental. A research conducted in China about customers' preference of OTC medicines reports "customers were more concerned about medical factors of OTC Chinese medicines than business factors. Among the medical factors, the most

important was drug safety, followed by efficacy, contraindications, indications, and side effects. Among the business factors, the most important were brand and price” (Ge, He, & Hu, 2014).

Besides the benefit of OTC medicine, there may be some demerits of using the OTC medicines also. Sometimes, because of misuse or prolonged use can be harmful to the health and same has been reported in many studies. A previous study reflects that increasing availability of non-prescription medicines may encourage patients to believe that there is a drug treatment for every ailment. Furthermore, the use of such products may delay/mask the diagnosis of serious illness, with increased risks of interactions and adverse reactions and of self-treatment being undertaken when medical aid should have been sought. There is also the potential for misuse and abuse of such products. Similarly, self-medication with OTC may increase the risks such as misdiagnosis, use of excessive drug dosage, prolonged duration of use, drug interactions and polypharmacy (Mc Elnay, Hughes, & GF, 2001). Many people felt that misuse/abuse of OTC drug is not as big a problem as other types of drug abuse, systematic research on the topic is scarce and there has been very little research on the views and perceptions of the public regarding OTC medicines generally and the potential for misuse and abuse (Just take a pill). Considering the merits and demerits and other factors of OTC medicine, the study is going to explore the people perception towards the buying of OTC medicine.

2. Method

The study was based on the descriptive design. Cross sectional data was used to analyze the people perception on buying behaviour of OTC medicine. The customers of OTC medicines were the target respondents of this study. Study was conducted in five development regions of Nepal among the 400 respondents. Researcher visited the various retail pharmacies to contact the respondents. Basically, study visited those retail pharmacies which were located near to the hospital. Systematic random sampling technique was adopted to select the respondents. Perceptual data was collected by using the structured questionnaires prepared in Five point Likert’s scale. Cross-tabulation was done to present the data on the basis of regional distribution of respondents.

3. Result & Discussion

Region wise, in total 18.5% respondents were participated from the Eastern Region followed by 54% from the Central region, 11% from the Western region, 12.2% from the Mid-western region and 4.3% from the Far-western region. The data showed that out of 400, 57.2% were from the Bahun & Chhetri community followed by 32% from the Janjati, 3.8% were from the Dalit, 3.2% were from the Muslim and 3.8% were from the Madhesi. In total 73.5% were male followed by only 26.2% female and 0.2% were third gender participated in the study.

3.1. Good way to buy Medicines by Telling Health Problems to the Pharmacies

The data presented below showed the perception of respondents that whether the buying behaviour of OTC medicine from pharmacies by telling health problems is good or not. In response of this question, in total 10.2% strongly agree followed by 33% agree that buying the OTC medicine was good practice. 22.5% had neutral response and 25% responded disagree and 8.8% responded strongly disagree.

Region	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		NS	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Eastern	6	8.1	17	23.0	26	35.1	20	27.0	4	5.4	1	1.4
Central	17	7.9	61	28.2	51	23.6	69	31.9	18	8.3	-	-
Western	7	15.9	18	40.9	9	20.5	6	13.6	3	6.8	1	2.3
Mid-western	6	12.2	30	61.2	4	8.2	4	8.2	5	10.2	-	-
Far-western	5	29.4	6	35.3	-	-	1	5.9	5	29.4	-	-
Total	41	10.2	132	33.0	90	22.5	100	25.0	35	8.8	2	0.5

Table 1: Good way to buy medicines by telling health problems to the pharmacies)

Source: Field survey, 2015

A previous study stated that in recent years, a wider access to the OTC medicines has helped educate people to the practice of self-care. There is an increasing demand by consumers for reliable information about personal healthcare. People are overwhelmingly satisfied with the non-prescription medicines they use – to the point where many believe that OTC medicines can be as effective for the relevant condition as prescription medicines (The World Self-Medication Industry, 2007).

3.2. Buying Medicines from Pharmacies Can Save Time.

People also think that purchasing medicines from the pharmacies can save the time and in case of emergency, it can also save the life of patients.

Region	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		NS	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Eastern	8	10.8	45	60.8	8	10.8	11	14.9	1	1.4	1	1.4
Central	34	15.7	107	49.5	24	11.1	37	17.1	12	5.6	2	0.9
Western	8	18.2	27	61.4	4	9.1	3	6.8	2	4.5	-	-
Mid-western	10	20.4	28	57.1	3	6.1	5	10.2	3	6.1	-	-
Far-western	-	-	5	29.4	4	23.5	1	5.9	7	41.2	-	-
Total	60	15.0	212	53.0	43	10.8	57	14.2	25	6.2	3	0.8

Table 2: Save time

Source: Field survey, 2015

The data presented in the table no. 2 showed that in total 15% strongly agreed followed by 53% agreed that the purchasing the OTC medicine could save the time of people. Region wise data showed that more than 71% people of eastern region agreed on purchasing the OTC medicine to save the time followed by 65% people of central region, around 80% of western region, 77.5% of mid-western region and 29.4% of far-western region people agreed that if people purchase the OTC medicine then it could save the time of visiting the health centre. It was found from the far-western region that around 48% people disagreed on the statement that purchasing the OTC medicine could save time.

The previous study also stated the benefit of OTC medicine from the social and economic perspective. The respondents perceived several advantages of self-medication. The most important advantages were saving time (56.63%), being economical (17.69%) and providing quick relief (12.58%) (KAYALVIZHI & SENAPATHI, p. 41).

3.3. Very Busy Person Buys OTC Medicine

Today's world is the world of competition. People are busy from the very morning to late night in their profession. People want to develop the expertise in their work and want to win the world. In such competition, people want to save their time because time is one of the important factors to build the quality of life. Very busy person wants their work within the short time. Considering this fact, the study put the statement that very busy person buys OTC medicine to collect the degree of agreement of people.

Region	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		NS	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Eastern	13	17.6	38	51.4	10	13.5	8	10.8	4	5.4	1	1.4
Central	34	15.7	92	42.6	33	15.3	47	21.8	8	3.7	2	0.9
Western	5	11.4	11	25.0	14	31.8	11	25.0	3	6.8	-	-
Mid-western	6	12.2	16	32.7	9	18.4	14	28.6	4	8.2	-	-
Far-western	-	-	7	41.2	-	-	6	35.3	4	23.5	-	-
Total	58	14.5	164	41.0	66	16.5	86	21.5	23	5.8	3	0.8

Table 3: Very Busy person Buys OTC medicine

Source: Field survey, 2015

The data presented in the table no. 3 showed that in total 14.5% people strongly agreed followed by 41% agreed that very busy person buys the OTC medicine. OTC medicine can be purchased from any retailers without prescription of doctor so if patient is aware on the name of medicine then they feel comfortable to purchase the medicine which save their time and money both.

3.4. Poor persons Buys OTC medicine

People perception was collected on the different general statement which perception were mostly associated with the purchasing the OTC medicine. If people purchase the OTC medicine, then s/he has not to pay the fees of consultation and of testing; directly they can purchase only by paying the actual price of medicine. From this view point also, it become the low cost in comparison to visit in the services. People may think that OTC medicine is accessible for poor people so the study also asked the question on it.

Region	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		NS	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Eastern	30	40.5	32	43.2	8	10.8	1	1.4	3	4.1	-	-
Central	92	42.6	85	39.4	15	6.9	18	8.3	4	1.9	2	0.9
Western	9	20.5	10	22.7	6	13.6	17	38.6	2	4.5	-	-
Mid-western	12	24.5	20	40.8	6	12.2	7	14.3	3	6.1	1	2.0
Far-western	5	29.4	5	29.4	-	-	5	29.4	2	11.8	-	-
Total	148	37.0	152	38.0	35	8.8	48	12.0	14	3.5	3	0.8

Table 4: Poor persons Buys OTC medicine

Source: Field survey, 2015

The data presented in the table no. 4 showed that in total 37% strongly agreed followed by 38% agreed that poor person buys the OTC medicine. In total, 75% believed that practicing of purchasing medicine was popular among the poor people. It showed that the concept of practicing of OTC medicine was associated with the economic status of people also.

3.5. Uneducated Person buy OTC Medicine

In the series of discussion with the respondents to collect their opinion on practicing of OTC medicine, the study also asked that 'uneducated person buy OTC medicine'. In the response of this statement also more than 64% people agreed that uneducated person purchased the OTC medicine. Against this response, 25.7% disagreed on the same also.

Region	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		NS	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Eastern	24	32.4	29	39.2	5	6.8	13	17.6	3	4.1	-	-
Central	63	29.2	88	40.7	18	8.3	39	18.1	7	3.2	1	0.5
Western	8	18.2	7	15.9	6	13.6	21	47.7	2	4.5	-	-
Mid-western	10	20.4	17	34.7	8	16.3	10	20.4	4	8.2	-	-
Far-western	5	29.4	8	47.1	-	-	2	11.8	2	11.8	-	-
Total	110	27.5	149	37.2	37	9.2	85	21.2	18	4.5	1	0.2

Table 5: Uneducated Buy OTC medicine

Source: Field survey, 2015

3.6. Products Advertised through Television and Print Media Are Good to Buy from Pharmacy

Television and print media are the best ways of wider dissemination of message in short time. Regularly advertised products can create brand image and reliability among the users. So, the study asked the respondents about their perception on advertised OTC products through Television and print media

Region	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		NS	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Eastern	2	2.7	4	5.4	12	16.2	42	56.8	14	18.9	-	-
Central	9	4.2	27	12.5	26	12.0	115	53.2	37	17.1	2	0.9
Western	1	2.3	5	11.4	18	40.9	13	29.5	7	15.9	-	-
Mid-western	2	4.1	7	14.3	10	20.4	22	44.9	7	14.3	1	2.0
Far-western	1	5.9	4	23.5	2	11.8	5	29.4	5	29.4	-	-
Total	15	3.8	47	11.8	68	17.0	197	49.2	70	17.5	3	0.8

Table 6: Products advertised through television and print media are good to buy from pharmacy

Source: Field survey, 2015

The data presented in the table no. 6 showed that in total 3.8% strongly agreed followed by 11.8% agreed that media added medicine was taken as the good for direct purchase from medical shop. Similarly, 49.2% disagreed followed by 17.5% strongly disagreed that media added medicine could not be so believable and good for health.

Advertising can be used to change the behaviour of the reader/ viewer toward the product or service, to influence public opinion, to gain political support, to advance a particular idea or to bring about some other effect as desired by the advertisers (Bakhshi, Quadri, Sidhu, & Sandhu, 2010).

3.7. Artists Referrals Medicines Are Good for Direct Purchase from Pharmacy

It is also observed in Television, newspapers and hoardings board that popular actors are used to advertise the different types of goods and products. General understanding is that if popular actors advertise any products that may be liked by many people; it is a kind of marketing strategies also.

Region	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		NS	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Eastern	1	1.4	3	4.1	14	18.9	30	40.5	26	35.1	-	-
Central	3	1.4	20	9.3	28	13.0	110	50.9	55	25.5	-	-
Western	2	4.5	5	11.4	12	27.3	16	36.4	9	20.5	-	-
Mid-western	2	4.1	7	14.3	7	14.3	23	46.9	10	20.4	-	-
Far-western	-	-	3	17.6	-	-	8	47.1	5	29.4	1	5.9
Total	8	2.0	38	9.5	61	15.2	187	46.8	105	26.2	1	0.2

Table 7: Artists Referrals medicines are good for direct purchase from pharmacy

Source: Field survey, 2015

The data presented in the Table no. 7 showed that only 2% strongly agreed and 9.5% agree that artists' referred medicine could be good for direct purchase from the pharmacy. In total 73% respondents were not ready to agree that the medicine advertised by artists would be good. They said that it was the profession of artists that they act in advertisement of any kind of medicines, not necessarily the advertisement is responsible to ensure the quality and effectiveness of medicine. Medicines should be as effective as their purpose.

3.8. Medicine Advertised by Health Professionals is good for Direct Purchase from Pharmacy

Health professionals are more aware about the quality and effectiveness of medicine. They are authorized person to prescribe the medicine also so the study asked the customers of OTC medicine regarding their perceptions on the quality and effectiveness of medicine advertised by the health professionals.

Region	Strongly Agree		Agree		neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		NS	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Eastern	6	8.1	26	35.1	14	18.9	22	29.7	5	6.8	1	1.4
Central	19	8.8	54	25.0	38	17.6	82	38.0	23	10.6	-	-
Western	5	11.4	20	45.5	11	25.0	7	15.9	1	2.3	-	-
Mid-western	4	8.2	19	38.8	7	14.3	12	24.5	6	12.2	1	2.0
Far-western	-	-	1	5.9	2	11.8	8	47.1	6	35.3	-	-
Total	34	8.5	120	30.0	72	18.0	131	32.8	41	10.2	2	0.5

Table 8: Health Professionals medicine is good for direct purchase from pharmacy

Source: Field survey, 2015

The data presented in the table no. 8 showed that only 8.5% followed by 30% strongly agree and agree on the goodness of medicine advertised by health professionals respectively. It was found from the analysis of above data that customers were not ready to accept any medicine which was advertised in media, advertised by the artists or any health professionals.

3.9. Your Agreement on purchasing the OTC medicine

In order to know the perceptions of people on the purchasing the OTC medicine; respondents were asked about their agreement on purchasing the OTC medicine. The data presented in Table No. 9 showed that in total 3.8% strongly agreed followed by 24.5% agreed the purchasing the OTC medicine. In total 31.8% gave response on neutral; neither agree nor disagree. Similarly, 25.5% respondents disagree followed by 14.5% response strongly disagree on purchasing the OTC medicine. According to respondents; direct purchasing of OTC medicine by saying the health problem or name of medicine is not so good.

Region	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Eastern	3	4.1	17	23.0	33	44.6	18	24.3	3	4.1
Central	10	4.6	37	17.1	63	29.2	65	30.1	41	19.0
Western	1	2.3	15	34.1	20	45.5	6	13.6	2	4.5
Mid-western	1	2.0	23	46.9	9	18.4	11	22.4	5	10.2
Far-western	-	-	6	35.3	2	11.8	2	11.8	7	41.2
Total	15	3.8	98	24.5	127	31.8	102	25.5	58	14.5

Table 9: Respondents' agreement on purchasing the OTC medicine

Source: Field survey, 2015

Perception of people is always varied with the practice; perception is just the opinion but practice is seen in action. In general, we can observe that many people are visiting the medical shop to purchase the OTC medicine. Patient trust to the retailer also because retailers of pharmacies are also from the health background so patient asks the medicine by asking their health problem.

4. Conclusion

Perceptual analysis of data found that people perception was significantly positive towards the buying behaviour of OTC medicine. People thought that buying the OTC medicine could save their time and money. People did not believe on the medicines advertised through the different online and print media by modelling the artists or health personal. Comparatively, people believe on the health person than the artist regarding the advertisement of OTC medicines. People thought that very busy and uneducated persons bought the OTC medicine. The study found the significantly different between the general practice of buying behaviour of people and their perception towards the buying behaviour. People perceived that buying the OTC medicine without consulting the Doctor was not so good. Less than 30% people agreed to purchase the OTC medicine but in practice, every people have experience of purchasing the OTC medicine. There was gap between the perception and real practices. So, this study recommends needing of study on the practices of purchasing the OTC medicine.

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