

Prevalence of self-medication among health sciences students at the Autonomous University of Tamaulipas, Campus Sur

Prevalencia de automedicación en estudiantes de ciencias de la salud de la Universidad Autónoma
de Tamaulipas, Campus Sur

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Abstract

Self-medication constitutes a common practice among university students in the health sciences and tends to intensify during academic examination periods. Factors such as stress, sleep deprivation, accessibility to medications, and the confidence derived from pharmacological knowledge contribute to its prevalence. Although this behavior is often perceived as a form of self-care, it entails clinical, ethical, and social risks, particularly when carried out without professional supervision, making it a relevant issue within the university setting. The objective of this study was to identify the prevalence of self-medication among health sciences students at the Autonomous University of Tamaulipas, Campus Sur, as well as to analyze the frequency of medication use, the conditions motivating this practice, and its distribution according to age, gender, and academic semester. A basic, epidemiological, cross-sectional, and descriptive study was conducted using a survey design applied to a probabilistic sample of 86 students randomly selected by semester from an approximate population of 800 students. The instrument consisted of a validated digital questionnaire ($\alpha = 0.886$), distributed through QR codes and institutional platforms. Data analysis was performed using descriptive statistics with SPSS software. The results revealed a high prevalence of self-medication, particularly among women, in the 21–24-year age group, and among students in clinical semesters. Analgesics and antihistamines were the most frequently used drugs; however, unsupervised use of antibiotics, anxiolytics, and supplements was also identified. The main reason for self-medication was disease management, followed by academic performance and emotional state, highlighting the need for preventive strategies aimed at promoting responsible medication use in the university environment.

Keywords: self-medication; health sciences students; prevalence; medication use; university health

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Resumen

La automedicación constituye una práctica frecuente entre los estudiantes universitarios de ciencias de la salud y tiende a intensificarse durante los periodos de evaluación académica. Factores como el estrés, la privación del sueño, la accesibilidad a medicamentos y la confianza derivada del conocimiento farmacológico favorecen su prevalencia. Aunque esta conducta suele percibirse como una forma de autocuidado, implica riesgos clínicos, éticos y sociales, particularmente cuando se realiza sin supervisión profesional, lo que la convierte en un problema relevante dentro del ámbito universitario. El objetivo del estudio fue identificar la prevalencia de automedicación en estudiantes de ciencias de la salud de la Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas, Campus Sur, así como analizar la frecuencia de uso de medicamentos, las condiciones que motivan esta práctica y su distribución según edad, género y semestre académico. Se llevó a cabo un estudio básico, epidemiológico, transversal y descriptivo, mediante un diseño de encuesta aplicada a una muestra probabilística de 86 estudiantes seleccionados aleatoriamente por semestre, a partir de una población aproximada de 800 alumnos. El instrumento consistió en un cuestionario digital validado ($\alpha = 0.886$), distribuido a través de códigos QR y plataformas institucionales. El análisis se realizó mediante estadística descriptiva con el software SPSS. Los resultados evidenciaron una alta prevalencia de automedicación, especialmente en mujeres, en el grupo de edad de 21 a 24 años y en semestres clínicos. Los analgésicos y antihistamínicos fueron los fármacos más utilizados, aunque también se identificó el uso no supervisado de antibióticos, ansiolíticos y suplementos. El principal motivo de automedicación fue el manejo de enfermedades, seguido del rendimiento académico y el estado emocional, lo que subraya la necesidad de estrategias preventivas dirigidas a promover el uso responsable de medicamentos en el entorno universitario.

Palabras clave: automedicación; estudiantes de ciencias de la salud; prevalencia; uso de medicamentos; salud universitaria



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INTRODUCTION

Self-medication is a frequent practice among university students in health sciences, particularly during periods of academic evaluation. Factors such as stress, sleep deprivation, accessibility to medications, and confidence derived from pharmacological knowledge contribute to its prevalence. Although often perceived as a form of self-care, this behavior entails clinical, ethical, and social risks, making its study relevant for the development of preventive strategies within university environments.

OBJECTIVE

General Objective

To identify the prevalence of self-medication among health sciences students at the Autonomous University of Tamaulipas, South Campus.

Specific Objectives

- To identify the frequency of the most commonly used medications.
- To determine the frequency of self-medication according to semester, age, and gender.
- To identify the main conditions that motivate self-medication.

METHODOLOGY

Study design: Basic epidemiological study, cross-sectional and descriptive

Population and sample: The study population consisted of approximately 800 health sciences students from the Faculty of Medicine "Dr. Alberto Romo Caballero" at the Autonomous University of Tamaulipas (South Campus). A probabilistic sample of 86 students was randomly selected by semester

Instrument: A digital questionnaire created in Microsoft Forms, validated with Cronbach's alpha = 0.886, was distributed through QR codes placed throughout the faculty and via official WhatsApp groups. Electronic informed consent was obtained before participation

Data analysis: Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics in SPSS version 27. Data normality was assessed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test ($p = 0.001$)

Inclusion criteria: Active students enrolled in health sciences programs who voluntarily agreed to participate

Exclusion criteria: Students who did not provide informed consent or who were not enrolled in health sciences programs.

RESULTS



CONCLUSIONS

Self-medication is a common practice among health sciences students, especially in advanced academic stages. While analgesics and antihistamines were the most frequently used medications, the unsupervised use of antibiotics and psychotropic drugs raises concerns. The higher prevalence among women and students aged 21-24 years, as well as its association with academic pressure, highlights the need for preventive educational interventions and responsible medication-use strategies within university settings.

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