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SELF-MEDICATION IN A DEFINED COMMUNITY IN SRI LANKA

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To find out the extent and practice of self-medication in a defined community and compare the results with a control group. (Medical students)

A randomly selected 144 subjects aged > 18 years in the MOH area Hindagala and 100 first year medical students (95/96) formed the study subjects. Data was collected using a pre-printed questionnaire from August to December 1997 and the results analysed statistically. 112 completed questionnaires received from the community.

The prevalence of self-medication in the community (77.68% n=87/112) was lower than that in the student population ($p < 0.001$). In the community, self-medication was associated with literacy and there was a tendency to self-medicate both 'over-the-counter' and 'prescription only' drugs; 60.9% (n=53) self-medicated 1 to 5 times frequency in the previous 6 months. "Good past experience" was the main reason for their self-medication. 89.65% (n=78) in the community expressed satisfaction with their self-medication. None in either population stated any untoward effects of their self-medication.

This study reveals that a significant percentage of subjects in the community indulge in self-medication practice. Furthermore it was associated with literacy, the educated being practicing more ($P < 0.05$). The self-medication of 'prescription only drugs' in the community as in the student population is a cause for concern. According to this study self-medication appears to have been practiced without untoward effects that merit mention.