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Hard drug in self-medication practices: A qualitative study

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Abstract

Background: Self-medication is an act of self-medication without medical consultation, the practice of self-medication in the people of West Nusa Tenggara reaches 66.62% and the community in Bima City is indicated to be 60.44%. This practice risks causing serious side effects and drug resistance.

Purpose: To explore why the practice of hard drug self-medication is high in the community of Bima City.

Method: Employing a descriptive qualitative approach with an emphasis on exploratory research. Conducted in Bima City starting in August 2024, it involved a total sampling method, selecting 10 participants who served as key informants from the National Agency of Drug and Food Control. Data collection was carried out through triangulation, integrating multiple sources, methods, and theories to enhance result validity. In-depth interviews were used as the primary data collection technique, and the data were analyzed using thematic analysis to extract key insights and interpret the underlying meaning of the findings.

Results: Self-medication practices, such as buying antibiotics without a prescription, risk causing drug resistance and side effects. Monitoring drug distribution, especially online purchases, is a challenge for the Health Office and National Agency of Drug and Food Control. People choose practical and cost-effective ways, while pharmacists face pressure in selling drugs without a prescription. Collaboration and education are needed to ensure safe and rational drug use.

Conclusion: The high cost of medicine and queues at health facilities encourage self-medication, exacerbated by poor Social Security Administration services. 24-hour pharmacies and online purchasing make it easier to access drugs without a prescription, with weak distribution oversight. Lack of accurate information and distrust of formal health services increase the risk of side effects and drug abuse.

Keywords: Hard Drugs; Health Policy; Pharmaceutical Regulation; Self-Medication.

INTRODUCTION

Self-medication with hard drugs without a doctor's prescription poses serious risks, including side effects, drug resistance, dangerous interactions, overdose, and dependence. This practice can also mask disease symptoms, leading to misdiagnosis and improper treatment (Dyawara, & Yulianti, 2022). Authorities like National Agency of Drug and Food Control and health workers play a crucial role in regulating drug distribution, educating the public, and monitoring pharmacies and online drug sales to

ensure safe medication use. Pharmacists also have a key role in providing accurate information to prevent drug misuse. Many individuals are familiar with drug brands but are unaware of their active ingredients, which raises the likelihood of medication errors. (Fadilla, & Gayatri, 2022).

In Indonesia, drug supervision is managed by provincial and district/city health offices to ensure safe and rational drug use. Pharmaceutical services have transitioned from a product-focused approach to a

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patient-centered model, highlighting pharmacists' role in enhancing public health (Wijaya & Yulianti, 2023). Self-medication is influenced by factors such as easy access, high medical costs, and confidence in self-treatment, which can lead to risks including side effects, drug resistance, and serious health complications (Alwhaibi et al., 2023). To prevent misuse, particularly of addictive substances like opioids and antibiotics, strict regulations are necessary. Public education campaigns play a key role in raising awareness of the dangers associated with improper self-medication (Hadi & Destiwati, 2024).

In the province of West Nusa Tenggara, more than 90% of pharmacies distribute antibiotics without a prescription, ranking the province sixth nationwide for this practice. Approximately 66.62% of West Nusa Tenggara residents and 60.44% of Bima City residents engage in self-medication, often using prescription drugs without medical consultation. This behavior heightens the risks of drug misuse, adverse effects, and antimicrobial resistance (Mandala, Inandha, & Hanifah, 2022). The improper use of strong medications can result in severe side effects, resistance, organ damage, and dangerous drug interactions. Strengthened supervision and public education are crucial for increasing awareness and promoting the responsible use of medications. Further research is needed to explore the underlying causes

of this issue within society (Sachdev, Anjankar, & Agrawal, 2022).

RESEARCH METHOD

Employing a descriptive qualitative approach with an exploratory focus. Conducted in Bima City in August 2024, it utilized total sampling to select 10 participants, with key informants sourced from the National Agency of Drug and Food Control.

Data collection was carried out through triangulation, integrating multiple data sources, methods, and theories to enhance the validity of the findings. In-depth interviews served as the primary data collection method, incorporating open-ended questions to explore potential measures such as educating the public on the dangers of self-medication, improving access to affordable healthcare, enforcing stricter regulations on the sale of prescription drugs, and promoting awareness through mass and social media. The negative consequences of self-medication identified in the study include adverse health effects, antibiotic resistance, drug dependence, and misdiagnosis.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to extract key insights and understand the fundamental meaning of the information gathered. This research received ethical approval from the Qamarul Huda Badaruddin University Health Research Ethics Commission under approval number 206/EC/FKES-UNIQHBA/YPPQH/VIII/2024.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Table 1. Informant Research (N=10)

Informant Code	Department
MAR	National Agency of Drug and Food Control
NUA	Health Office
HW	Pharmacists
ROW	Community
MJ	Community
SA	Community
MGR	Community
MN	Community
MS	Community
MRP	Community

Table 1 presents data from 10 informants, including one representative from the health office, one from the National Agency of Drug and Food Control, one pharmacist, and seven community members.

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Table 2. The Results of In-depth Interview

Structured Interview	Outcome	Data review	Conclusion
Health Office, as the implementer of pharmaceutical regulations, regarding the self-medication of hard drugs.	The Health Office is tasked with overseeing the regulation of the distribution, dispensing, and prescription of drugs, especially hard drugs, to ensure their rational use and prevent drug abuse. Supervision is carried out through recording, periodic reporting, and coordination with medical personnel and health facilities. Pharmacies and pharmacists are encouraged to tighten supervision of the circulation of hard drugs to prevent negative impacts on the community. In addition, purchasing drugs without a prescription from a doctor is not allowed, but self-medication practices and online drug purchases are difficult to control, becoming a challenge in drug supervision in the digital era.	Observation	The roles of the Health Office in monitoring hard drugs, efforts to prevent drug abuse, as well as the challenges faced in controlling self-medication and online drug purchases.
National Agency of Drug and Food Control's roles and duties in monitoring products distributed in the community	The Health Office conducts guidance and supervision of pharmacies, including regular monitoring, recording, and reporting. Several cases of abuse of authority have been found, and coaching continues. However, supervision of online drug purchases is difficult to control. As a prevention effort, education to the public about the dangers of self-medication continues to be promoted.	Observation	The Health Office's efforts in supervising pharmacies, challenges in controlling online drug purchases, and the importance of educating the public to prevent risk self-medication.
Responsibilities and contributions of pharmacists in supervising and monitoring the safety of self-medication practices	Pharmacies often confront requests from the public to purchase medicine without a prescription, despite pharmacists' education about the importance of prescriptions. People usually argue that they don't have the money to see a doctor. As a result, almost all pharmacies are forced to serve non-prescription medicine purchases because if they are too strict, they are worried that they will lose customers and sales.	Observation	Describes the dilemma pharmacies face in terms of managing regulatory compliance and societal pressures.
Why they self-medicate	People choose to buy medicine without a doctor's prescription because the cost of seeing a doctor, health center, or hospital is considered expensive, the process	Observation	Illustrates the reasons why people choose self-medication, namely because of cost, time, and

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Structured Interview	Outcome	Data review	Conclusion
	is long, the queue is long, and the service is not friendly, especially when using Social Security Administration. People also tend to buy medicine based on previous experience, such as buying antibiotics that have been given when they have a toothache, because it is considered faster and more practical than having to see a doctor again.		practicality, as well as the ineffectiveness of formal health services.
Uncontrolled self-medication can lead to drug resistance, serious side effects and dangerous drug interactions.	People tend to choose self-medication based on previous experience. For example, when they have been treated with a patent medicine for wound infection, they immediately buy a similar medicine at the pharmacy when they experience the same symptoms in the future without going to the doctor. Similarly, when treatment from a doctor is ineffective (such as a cough that does not go away), but the medicine given by the pharmacist works, this makes them prefer to go directly to the pharmacy when they are sick rather than consulting a doctor.	Observation	That personal experience with previous medication influences people's decision to self-medicate and rely on pharmacies as a practical solution.
The experience of recovering after buying medicine at a pharmacy makes a person believe more in self-medication than in consulting a doctor.	Buying medicine directly at a pharmacy or online is considered more practical and cost-effective. In addition, people also utilize drug advertisements on platforms such as TikTok and digital health consultation services (e.g. Halodoc) to obtain drug information and recommendations, which are considered more efficient and time-saving.	Observation	There is a general tendency for people to choose practical and modern ways of getting medicine, including utilizing technology and digital services.
How to educate the public to be smarter in looking for health information and using drugs rationally?	People tend to prefer recommendations from pharmacists when they need medicine because they consider them to be more effective, cheaper and more practical than prescriptions from doctors. They feel that pharmacists provide more attention, clear information, and are friendly, unlike the sometimes unsatisfactory experience when interacting with doctors. In addition, pharmacists also help to select medicines that are suitable for the disease, including patent medicines, without the need to pay a doctor's consultation fee.	Observation	People's preference for pharmacist services as they are considered more accessible, informative and economical.

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Table 2 summarizes the results of structured interviews on the practice of self-medication and the role of various parties in monitoring the use of drugs, especially hard drugs. The Health Office is tasked with overseeing the distribution, sale and prescription of drugs to prevent misuse, but faces challenges in controlling self-medication and online drug purchases in the digital era. National Agency of Drug and Food Control also supervises pharmacies, but struggles to monitor online drug purchases and faces cases of abuse of authority. Pharmacists, although responsible for overseeing the safety of self-medication, often face pressure from the public who want to buy medicine without a prescription because the cost of seeing a doctor is considered expensive and the process is complicated. People tend to self-medicate based on previous experience, such as buying antibiotics they were given when they had a toothache, even though this can lead to drug resistance, serious side effects and dangerous interactions. Purchasing medicines at pharmacies or online is considered more practical and cost-effective, while people also utilize medicine advertisements on digital platforms and online health consultation services. Educating the public about the dangers of self-medication and the importance of rational drug use continues to be promoted, with pharmacists perceived to be more friendly and informative than doctors. Overall, collaborative efforts between the government, health workers, and the community are needed to address these challenges and ensure safe and rational use of medicines.

DISCUSSION

The practice of self-medication frequently violates regulations, particularly regarding the purchase of prescription drugs without a doctor's authorization. These violations stem from a lack of public education, easy access to medications, and efforts to avoid medical expenses. Beyond limited knowledge, the widespread availability of medications in pharmacies and the black market enables individuals to obtain drugs without prescriptions, increasing the risk of improper use. In the case of analgesics, understanding proper dosage and indications is essential to prevent side effects such as liver and kidney damage or drug dependence. Therefore, public education on the safe and rational use of medications is crucial (Albusalih, Naqvi, Ahmad, & Ahmad, 2017).

The consequences of improper self-medication are severe, particularly in contributing to antibiotic resistance, which poses a global health threat due to the misuse of antibiotics. Taking antibiotics without a prescription or at incorrect dosages allows bacteria to develop resistance, making infections harder to treat. Additionally, adverse effects such as allergic reactions, gastrointestinal issues, and organ damage may occur. A lack of medication awareness can also mask symptoms of serious illnesses, delaying diagnosis and treatment (Lu, Yang, Chen, Li, Zheng, Kong, & Zhang, 2023). Addressing this issue requires effective educational programs on responsible drug use, stricter oversight of prescription drug sales, and greater promotion of over-the-counter medications with clear information on dosage, indications, and potential side effects. These measures are essential to protecting public health from the dangers of self-medication (Melia, English, & Naughton, 2024).

One of the main drivers of self-medication is easy access to drugs, including prescription medications, which are often available at pharmacies or online without medical supervision. This accessibility encourages individuals to self-treat mild symptoms, despite the risks of misuse, adverse effects, and drug resistance (Priscila & Mauro, 2020). Additionally, high medical costs push people to opt for self-medication as a more affordable alternative. Human behavior is influenced by experience, social interactions, and environmental factors, making education on the dangers of self-medication essential. Taking drugs without proper medical consultation can have serious consequences, increasing the likelihood of misuse. To mitigate these risks, stricter regulations and greater public awareness of responsible medication use are necessary (Muharni, Aryani, & Widiawati, 2022).

Convenience and time constraints are key reasons people choose self-medication over waiting at healthcare facilities. Many view self-medication as a practical solution for minor ailments. Education and health literacy play a crucial role in this practice, as individuals with a solid understanding of medications and illnesses tend to self-medicate more safely. However, a lack of knowledge can lead to medication errors with significant health risks. Enhancing public health literacy is therefore necessary to minimize inappropriate self-medication (Muflih, Bashir, Khader, & Karasneh, 2022).

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Drug advertisements, particularly on television and digital platforms, have a significant influence on self-medication habits. These ads often highlight the benefits of medications without adequately explaining potential side effects and risks, encouraging people to purchase and use them without consulting a healthcare professional. Advertisements that emphasize quick and effective relief further reinforce trust in self-medication (Ismail & Kinchin, 2023). Additional factors such as family influence, peer recommendations, drug availability, risk perception, and internet access also contribute to this issue. While social media and online platforms provide easy access to drug-related information, not all sources are reliable, increasing the likelihood of improper medication use. As a preventive measure, stricter regulations on drug advertising are necessary to curb the negative impact of self-medication (Fauzi, Puspitasari, & Turisia, 2022).

Many individuals resort to self-medication for common ailments such as the flu, cough, or headaches, believing these conditions do not require medical intervention. The accessibility of over-the-counter medications in pharmacies supports this behavior, though improper use can still pose health risks (Waqar, Riaz, Munir, Abid, Tayyab, Razaq, & Yousaf, 2023). Additionally, Indonesians often rely on traditional or herbal remedies such as ginger, turmeric, and temulawak due to cultural beliefs and ancestral practices. While these remedies are generally considered safer, incorrect usage or dosage can still pose health risks. Therefore, proper education on the safe use of traditional medicine is essential (Karyati, Widiati, Karmini, & Sari, 2023).

Self-medication is often based on personal experience or recommendations from family and friends. In remote areas with limited healthcare access, it becomes the primary alternative, despite the risks associated with unsupervised medication use (Lifshitz, Arrieta, Burgos, Campillo, Celis, Llata, & Sotelo, 2020). Social and cultural changes, combined with the widespread availability of health information through the internet and social media, have further contributed to the rise of self-medication. However, without adequate knowledge, this trend increases the risk of irrational drug use and harmful side effects (Ilmi, Suprihatin, & Probosiwi, 2021). To combat this issue, healthcare professionals must play a more active role in educating the public, including pregnant

women during antenatal care. Additionally, strict regulation of drug sales by health authorities such as the EFDA is crucial to safeguarding public health (Ghodkhande, Choudhari, Gaidhane, & Ghodkhande, 2023).

A strong understanding of diseases and medications significantly influences self-medication practices in Indonesia. Individuals with adequate knowledge are more likely to self-medicate safely and effectively, whereas a lack of understanding can result in medication errors and worsen health conditions. Awareness of disease symptoms and causes plays a crucial role in medication choices. For instance, a good understanding of gastritis enables individuals to select the appropriate treatment, whereas insufficient knowledge may lead to incorrect drug use, potentially causing serious consequences (El-Kafrawy, Abbas, Oelkurg, Tahooun, Ezzat, Zumla, & Azhar, 2023). Research also indicates that students with greater knowledge tend to use medications more rationally, particularly in selecting anti-inflammatory drugs. Therefore, increasing public education and awareness about responsible self-medication is essential (Belachew, Hall, Erku, & Selvey, 2021).

In Indonesia, the use of herbal medicines as a form of self-medication is influenced by public perception of their benefits and risks. Many people rely on herbal remedies for common ailments such as coughs and flu; however, misconceptions about their effectiveness and safety can impact treatment outcomes. Expanding education on the rational use of both conventional and herbal medicines is crucial. Initiatives like the Smart Community Movement for Using Medicines (SCMUM) aim to enhance public understanding of safe self-medication practices. Additionally, drug advertisements in the media influence self-medication choices, but misleading information can lead to inappropriate drug use (Aryani, Aryani, & Muharni, 2023). Limited knowledge about side effects and drug interactions often results in irrational drug use, which can worsen health conditions. The unsupervised use of prescription drugs, particularly antibiotics, increases the risk of bacterial resistance, making infections harder to treat and posing a significant public health threat, especially in low- and middle-income countries (Qu, Wang, Liu, Mau, Liu, Zhong, & Gao, 2023).

Pharmacists play a vital role in educating the public on safe self-medication by providing guidance

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on proper drug selection and usage. However, many people do not receive adequate information due to limited consultation time when purchasing medications. Self-medication in Indonesia is a complex issue shaped by social, economic, and cultural factors. More than 66% of individuals self-medicate for convenience and cost-saving reasons. Easy access to drug information through the media and pharmacies further encourages this practice. However, insufficient knowledge can lead to incorrect medication choices and an increased risk of improper drug use. Those with a solid understanding of medications tend to be more cautious, whereas individuals with limited knowledge are more susceptible to side effects and other health risks (Lerango, Alagaw, Tunje, Andarge, Duko, Tilahune, & Lerango, 2023).

Research suggests that self-medication is influenced by personal experience and familiarity with specific drugs. Prior experiences with similar illnesses often encourage individuals to self-medicate, though this can be risky without sufficient knowledge. According to the Health Belief Model (HBM), people are more likely to take health-related actions when they perceive the benefits to outweigh the risks. Positive past experiences with certain medications reinforce self-medication habits, as many see it as a more practical and efficient alternative to medical consultation. In Indonesia, self-medication is commonly used for minor ailments such as flu, cough, fever, headache, and indigestion (Awada, Diab, Khachman, Zeidan, Slim, Zein, & Rachidi, 2020). Frequently used medications include analgesics, antipyretics, antibiotics (despite the risk of resistance), and digestive aids. Alongside modern pharmaceuticals, Indonesians also use herbal remedies like ginger and turmeric. However, challenges such as inadequate knowledge of safe drug use, easy access to non-prescription drugs, and misleading advertisements contribute to improper self-medication. To address these issues, improving health literacy and enforcing stricter regulations on drug sales, particularly antibiotics, are essential for preventing irrational medication use and protecting public health (Ephrem, Thomas, Sreekuty, Moosa, & Ali, 2022).

Although pharmacists play a key role in self-medication education, time constraints and resource limitations often prevent comprehensive counseling.

Additionally, the oversight of over-the-counter drug sales in Indonesia is weak, particularly regarding the sale of antibiotics without prescriptions due to inadequate law enforcement. To improve public awareness, initiatives like the Drug Aware Family Movement provide education on responsible drug use through seminars, counseling, and media campaigns. Enhancing pharmacists' skills in drug communication and counseling can also help minimize the risks associated with self-medication. Strengthening regulations and enforcing stricter laws on over-the-counter drug sales, particularly for antibiotics, is necessary. Furthermore, increasing public access to accurate information through social media, health applications, and awareness campaigns can help reshape public perceptions and promote safer self-medication practices (Efendi, Rusdi, Rustini, Kamal, Surya, Putri, & Afriyani, 2021).

CONCLUSION

The expensive cost of medication and long waiting times at healthcare facilities drive people to self-medicate, further worsened by inadequate Social Security Administration services. The availability of 24-hour pharmacies and online drug purchases allows easy access to medications without a prescription, with minimal regulatory oversight. Additionally, misinformation and skepticism toward formal healthcare services heighten the risk of side effects and drug misuse.

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