



Mothers' knowledge attitude and perception on side effects of medicines given for children- A qualitative study

Maneesha Prasad¹, Lalith Senarathna^{1,2}, Samath Dharmaratne^{3,4,5}, Lakmini De Silva¹, Andrew Dawson^{1,6}

¹South Asian Clinical Toxicology Research Collaboration, Sri Lanka,

²Health Promotion Department, Faculty of Applied Sciences, Rajarata University, Sri Lanka, ³Department of Community Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, University of Peradeniya,

⁴Sri Lanka and Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluations,

⁵University of Washington, USA

⁶Royal Prince Alfred Clinical School, University of Sydney, Australia

Objective: This study aimed to assess mothers' knowledge, attitude and perception on side effects of medicines given for children in southern province Sri Lanka.

Method: Study participants were mothers who have children between age one to five years. This group was purposively selected from participants of a larger cross sectional survey on implications of self-medication practices among Sinhala speaking mothers of preschool children in Godakanda, Uluvitike MOH areas in Galle district, Sri Lanka. Focus groups discussions (FGDs) were used to explore mothers' knowledge and perception on safety and side effects of medicines used for children. Thematic analysis was used to analyze data.

Results: Twenty seven mothers between age of 27 to 42 years participated for three FGDs. This group consisted of working and non-working mothers. Mothers stated that they mainly seek information on dose and expiry date and less attention is paid to frequency, indication, over dose, and side effects. They use their experience, family elders and peers as main sources of information including side effects on medications. Healthcare professionals were less frequently approached. Product information leaflets (PILs) were rarely used as those are in English with small letters. Both non-prescription and prescription-only medicines including chlorpheniramine, salbutamol and paracetamol were used as examples to discuss about the knowledge and responses to side effects. Mothers identified "sleep long time than average, constipation, trembling, itchy, red rashes and cough" as side effects related to these drugs. Their responses included; stopping drug therapy when child felt better but before completion of prescribed duration, stopping drugs and returning to physician and if side effects persist they go to a new physician. Mothers' past experiences with side effects of pharmaceuticals has led to a negative attitude on those medicines and developed favorable attitudes on traditional medicines. Mothers stated that they try self-medication with traditional medicines or home remedies at the first sign of illness due to perceived idea of "western medicines are toxic to child's body".



Conclusion: Knowledge about side effects was considerably low among Sinhala speaking mothers in the study area. Misconception about pharmaceuticals leads to noncompliance with drug therapy and delaying treatment. Information about potential side effects of medications for children should be clearly provided at the point of prescribing and dispensing. PILs should be designed to increase readability by providing essential information on medicines in local and lay person language.