

Sociodemographic Characteristics of Over-the-counter Medicine Users in Latvia

Ieva Salmane-Kulikovska¹, Signe Dobelniece²

¹ Rīga Stradiņš University, Latvia

² Rīga Stradiņš University, Department of Sociology and Psychology, Latvia

Introduction. A variety of over-the-counter (OTC) medicines is available to the population of Latvia, and the market of these medicines is constantly increasing. Worldwide studies show that the use of OTC medicines is affected by a number of sociodemographic factors. Some studies, examining the use of medicines by consumers, have been performed in Latvia. However, the association between sociodemographic determinants and the use of OTC medicines has not been yet examined within nationally representative sample. According to the recommendations of the World Health Organization (WHO), regionally-specific information about medicines use is essential for determining key issues that can afterwards be addressed by health policies, targeted at rational use of medicines.

Aim. This study aims at disclosing important sociodemographic factors that contribute to the use of OTC medicines.

Material and methods. The study uses the data obtained in the quantitative survey in July, 2012. The nationally representative sample, 18–74 years of age, was selected from the general population of Latvia. The sociodemographic variables, included in the current analysis, were gender, age, nationality, residence, occupation, family status, education, income per one household member, number of persons and number of children in the household. Statistical analysis includes Pearson Chi-square statistics and binary logistic regression analysis.

Results and conclusions. The analysis revealed certain tendencies similar to the situation elsewhere, as well as distinctive features, characteristic in the local circumstances. The portrait of a typical OTC medicines user in Latvia can be described as “a woman, belonging to the elderly age-group, retired, divorced or widow, living in Rīga or Rīga district”. Such characteristics deserve particular attention, as the elderly age is conventionally associated with the worsening of health status, thus increasing risk of polypharmacy and adverse drug reactions, especially for those people who are less aware of potential risks. Users of OTC medicines in Latvia are subjected to extensive amount of advertising information, emphasizing the benefits of these medicines, therefore enhancement of a capacity of critical thinking among the public is essential. Use of OTC medicines is often the product of self-medication; therefore pharmacists have a professional responsibility for ensuring safe and appropriate sale of all non-prescription medicines.