

A Survey of the Awareness and Practices of Antibiotic use Among College Undergraduates and Graduates in Latakia

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Abstract: Antibiotic resistance has become a global health crisis, posing a significant threat to our ability to treat bacterial infections. Over the years, the overuse and misuse of antibiotics in both humans and animals have contributed to the development of antibiotic-resistant bacteria. This leads to longer and more complicated treatment courses, increased healthcare costs, and in some cases untreatable infections. In this study, a survey was conducted on antibiotic use among college undergraduates and graduates in Latakia. The age of 42.2% of participants was 20-25 years. More than half of the participants were male (55.9%). Most responses were from college undergraduates 51%, either of final-year students or graduates. Most of them had used antibiotics with prescriptions. The highest rate of antibiotic use was for sore throat treatment (47.1%). Most participants completed the antibiotic courses and their symptoms improved (70.6%). Black and red pills remained effective for most patients (67.6%). 68.6% of the participants would consult a doctor if symptoms did not improve after taking antibiotics. 62.7% of the participants didn't give antibiotics to a family member when they were sick. 52.9% of the participants reserve antibiotics for use when necessary. Half of the participants would take the leftover antibiotics in case of respiratory diseases. The results didn't show a good level of knowledge about antibiotic use among college undergraduates and graduates in Latakia. This study encourages the improvement of the public knowledge and their attitudes towards the appropriate use of antibiotics.

Keywords: Survey, Antibiotics, Resistance, Awareness, Practice.

I. INTRODUCTION

The rise of antibiotic resistance poses a grave global threat to public health. In recent years, we have witnessed a dramatic surge in the number of antibiotic-resistant bacteria, making it increasingly difficult for healthcare professionals to effectively treat bacterial infections [1]-[7][35]. This problem is not confined to a specific country or region; it is a worldwide concern that demands immediate attention [8]-[13][36]. According to the World Health Organization, antibiotic resistance was the direct cause of 1.27 million

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Retrieval Number: 100.1/ijapsr.C403904030424 DOI:<u>10.54105/ijapsr.C4039.04030424</u> Journal Website: <u>www.ijapsr.latticescipub.com</u> deaths worldwide in 2019 [14].

The consequences of antibiotic resistance are far-reaching and alarming. This not only prolongs the illness and increases the risk of complications, but it also leads to higher healthcare costs. In some unfortunate cases, we are faced with infections that are resistant to all available antibiotics, leaving individuals without effective treatment options [12]-[24][37]. For example, carbapenems are antibiotics used to treat infections caused by bacteria that are resistant to many antibiotics. Unfortunately, E coli, Klebsiella pneumoniae, and Enterobacter cloacae have shown high resistance to carbapenems in recent years [25], [26]. An alarming example of drug-resistant bacteria is Staphylococcus aureus which is resistant to methicillin. S. aureus is considered the leading bacteria causing deaths due to antibiotic resistance in 34 countries [27], [28]. The rapid spread of antibiotic resistance is largely attributed to the misuse and overuse of antibiotics. While these drugs have undoubtedly saved countless lives, their inappropriate use, such as taking antibiotics to treat viral infections or not completing the full course of treatment, contributes to the development of resistance. Additionally, the widespread use of antibiotics in agricultural practices, particularly in animal husbandry, further increases this problem.

Developing strategies to address antibiotic resistance is crucial in combating this global health crisis. One of the key areas that needs attention is education. It is imperative to raise awareness among health professionals, patients, and the general public about the appropriate use of antibiotics. This includes educating them on the importance of completing the full course of antibiotics, not sharing antibiotics with others, and not pressuring healthcare providers to prescribe antibiotics for viral infections. Various studies and various organizations conducted surveys to evaluate the knowledge, awareness, and practices of the public of antibiotic use [29]-[33]. Overall, these surveys showed a poor understanding of appropriate antibiotic use. A study performed by Davis et al. demonstrated that although 89% of patients correctly believed that antibiotics were effective in treating bacterial infections from bacteria, 53% incorrectly believed that antibiotics were effective in treating viral infections [8]. In this study, a questionnaire on antibiotic use was conducted to demonstrate knowledge, awareness, and practices related to antibiotic use among college undergraduates and graduates in Latakia.



II. **METHODS**

The study was conducted from September 2023 to February 2024 using an online survey on Google Forms. The study participants were students and graduates of Latakia universities and institutes. The online questionnaire was distributed via social networks (Facebook and WhatsApp). A total of 200 complete responses were collected.

The questionnaire was divided into three sections: demographics, practices, and knowledge of participants related to antibiotic use.

Participant data in the questionnaire were based on age, and educational level: institute students, and college undergraduates. or graduated and place of residence: rural or urban. Regarding age, participants were divided into four groups: >20 years old, 20-25 years old, 26-30 years old, and >30 years old. Participants were asked whether they were attending or graduating from medical or non-medical faculty and their study year: preparatory, first year, second year, third year, fourth year, or fifth year.

The second part of the questionnaire related to the practices of participants about antibiotic use. We asked if the participants used antibiotics self-treatment or only under a doctor's prescription. The participant was to precise the reasons for antibiotic use: cough, cold, flu, sore throat, or only for prevention, the doctor diagnoses the illness and prescribes the antibiotic. We asked how the participant took the antibiotics: finishing the treatment course and the symptoms disappeared, finishing the treatment course and the symptoms stayed, not finishing the treatment course and the symptoms disappeared. Another question was asked to the participants about amoxicillin capsules, known to patients in Syria as the red and black pill. The answer to this question was yes, I benefit when I take it with a short period of illness, or no, I benefit when I take it with a long period of illness. The participants were also asked about what they would do if their symptoms did not improve after taking the antibiotic: see a doctor, see a pharmacist, browse the Internet, take advice from family and relatives, or not ask anyone. Other questions included: if someone in the family of the participant gets sick, does he usually give them antibiotics? Does he usually keep a stock of antibiotics at home for emergency use? and does he use the remaining antibiotics for respiratory diseases?

Participants' knowledge about antibiotics was assessed through a set of questions with options: yes, no, or I don't know. The questions included: for any of the following diseases are antibiotics effective? do antibiotics kill bacteria? can antibiotics be used to treat viral diseases? do antibiotics treat all infectious diseases? can excessive use of antibiotics cause antibiotic resistance? can taking antibiotics cause allergic reactions? will the effectiveness of the antibiotic decrease if it is stopped before the treatment course is finished? The participants were asked if they would take antibiotics to get better more quickly when they got colds. The participant expects his doctor to prescribe antibiotics if he has symptoms of the common cold.

III. RESULTS

A.Demographic Data of Participants

Table-I: Summary	of Demographic	Data of Participants
	in the Survey	

Demographic Data		
Characteristics	Percentages % (Number)	
1. Gender		
Female	44.10%	
Male	55.90%	
2. Age (Years)		
>20	7.80%	
21-25	42.20%	
26-30	32.40%	
>30	17.60%	
3.	Residence	
City	77.50%	
Village	22.50%	
4	. Study	
College Undergraduates	51%	
Institute Student	5.90%	
Graduate	28.50%	
Higher Education Student	8.80%	
Higher Education	5.000/	
Graduate	5.90%	
5.	Academic Year	
Preparatory	6.90%	
First	11.80%	
Second	0%	
Third	8.80%	
Fourth	14.70%	
Fifth	12.70%	
Graduate	36.30%	
6. College		
Medical	28.40%	
Non-Medical	12.70%	

A total of 102 responses were collected in the study. Demographic characteristics of study participants are summarized in Table-I. Most participants were between 20 and 25 years old, representing 42.2%. The number of participants, based on gender, was 55.9% males and 44.1% females. Most of the participants live in the city 77.5%.

When asked about academic level, most of the answers were from college undergraduates 51%, which is the group that interests us, so the questionnaire was directed to them to highlight the problem of antibiotic resistance and how to reduce it. Most of the answers are either for final-year students or graduates, most of whom are medical college students (so it is assumed that they know about the problem of antibiotic resistance and are also trying to reduce it in their surroundings at least).

B.Practices Data of Participants

Table-II: Summary of Practice Data of Participants in the Survey

Percentages %	
1. Antibiotic usage	
Self-Treatment	
Under Doctor Prescription	
2. Reasons for Antibiotic usage	
Cold	45.70%



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Cough	20%	
Flu	14.30%	
Sore Throat	51.40%	
Only for Prevention	0%	
The Doctor Diagnoses the Illness and	200/	
Prescribes the Antibiotic	50%	
Other Reasons:		
Tonsillitis	1.40%	
Sinusitis	1.40%	
3. How the Participants Took	the Antibiotics	
Finishing the Treatment Course and the	81 40%	
Symptoms Disappeared	81.4070	
Finishing the Treatment Course and the	5 70%	
Symptoms Stayed	5.7070	
Not Finishing the Treatment Course and	14.30%	
the Symptoms Disappeared	~	
4. Usage of Participants of Amoxicilli	n Capsules, known in	
Syria as the Red and Black Pill		
Yes, I benefit when I Take it with a Short	31.40%	
Period of Illness		
No, I benefit when I Take it with a Long	68.60%	
	P1 4 T	
5. What would they do if their Sympt	oms did not improve	
	71.400/	
See a doctor	/1.40%	
See a pharmacist	38.60%	
Browse the Internet	4.30%	
Take Advice from Family and Relatives	2.90%	
Do not ask Anyone	4.30%	
6. If Someone in the Family of the F	Participant Gets Sick,	
does the Participant usually give them A	antibiotics?	
Yes	70%	
No	22.90%	
I Don't Know	7.10%	
7. Does the Participant usually Keen	a Stock of Antibiotics	
at Home for Emergency use?		
Voc	4004	
I CS No	40% 58 60%	
L don't Know	1 /0%	
8 Does the Participant use the Dom	1.4070	
o. Does the Participant use the Kemaining Antibiotics for Despiratory Discoses?		
Yes	50%	
No	31.40%	
I don't Know	18 60%	

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The answers showed that most participants take antibiotics without a prescription (Table-II). Sore throat accounts for the highest incidence of antibiotic use (51.4%), followed by cold (45.7%). Most participants took the full dose of antibiotics and their symptoms improved (81.4%).

When asked about an antibiotic commonly used in Syria and known under black and red pills: black and red pills were effective for most patients (68.6%), but with a long period of illness. Regarding the question about what the participant would do if his symptoms did not improve after taking antibiotics: most of the participants would go to the doctor then (71.4%).

Most participants gave antibiotics to one of their family when he became ill (70%). Most participants do not keep antibiotics to use when necessary (58.6%). If there are antibiotics remaining, half participants would take them in case of respiratory diseases (50%).

C.Knowledge Data of Participants

72.5% of participants answered that antibiotic are effective for the treatment of fever, pain, and inflammation as shown in Fig. 1. 44.1% responded that antibiotic are effective for the treatment of respiratory diseases, while only 37.3% and 15.7% answered that antibiotics are effective for the treatment of fever urinary tract infections and skin diseases



Fig. 1. Responses to the Question: tor any of the Following Diseases are Antibiotics Effective?

A set of questions (with options: yes, no, or I don't know) was used to evaluate participants' knowledge about antibiotics (Table-III). Majority of participants correctly answered that 'antibiotics kill bacteria' (67.6%), excessive use of antibiotics could cause antibiotic resistance (71.6%), taking antibiotics could cause allergic reactions (74.5%), antibiotics cannot be used to treat viral diseases (52.9%), the effectiveness of the antibiotic will decrease if it is stopped before the treatment course is finished (65.7%). Only 33.3% of participants expect to get better more quickly when they get colds if they take antibiotics. Finally, 34.3% of participants expect their doctor to prescribe antibiotics if he has symptoms of the common cold.

Table-III: Summary of Knowledge Data of Participants in the Survey

Percentages %		
1. Do Antibiotics Kill Bacteria?		
Yes	67.60%	
No	17.60%	
I don't know	14.70%	
2. Could Antibiotics be used to Treat Viral Diseases?		
Yes	29.40%	
No	52.90%	
I don't know	17.60%	
3. Do Antibi	otics Treat all Infectious Diseases?	
Yes	29.40%	
No	41.20%	
I don't know	29.40%	
4. Excessive use of Antibiotics Causes Antibiotic		
	Resistance?	
Yes	71.60%	
No	7.80%	
I don't know	20.60%	
5. Can Taking	Antibiotics Cause Allergic Reactions?	
Yes	74.50%	
No	7.80%	
I don't know	17.60%	
6. Will the Effecti	veness of the Antibiotic Decreases if it is	
Stopped before	the Treatment Course is Finished?	
Yes	65.70%	
No	10.80%	
I don't know	23.50%	
7. Will the Participants Take Antibiotics to Get Better More		
Quickly when they Get Colds?		
Yes	33.30%	
No	56.90%	
I don't know	9.80%	



8. Does the Participant Expect his doctor to Prescribe Antibiotics if he has Symptoms of the Common Cold?	
Yes	34.30%
No	48%
I don't know	17.60%

IV. DISCUSSION

This study aimed to evaluate the practices and knowledge of antibiotic use among college undergraduates and graduates in Latakia.

The results showed that most participants used antibiotics without a prescription. Sore throat and the common cold are the most commonly reported conditions. These results agree with other results obtained in other surveys [25]-[34]. For example, a survey on knowledge, attitudes, and practices towards antibiotic use was conducted among prospective antibiotic prescribers in Serbia [31]. Results demonstrated that the most common reason for self-treatment with antibiotics reported by all student groups was sore throat. Fortunately, most participants complete the antibiotic treatment courses. Black and red pills (amoxicillin widely used among Syrians. As a result, bacteria can develop resistance to amoxicillin. Feedback shows that this antibiotic is still effective.

Participants not only took antibiotics without a prescription but also gave them to their families. In addition, they also use the remaining antibiotics to treat respiratory diseases. Most participants did not reserve antibiotics for use when needed. Furthermore, the results of the present study are encouraging due to the good level of knowledge about antibiotics.

V. CONCLUSION

The results showed that college undergraduates and graduates don't have a good level of knowledge about antibiotic use almost most of them have taken antibiotics without a prescription. Fortunately, they complete the antibiotic treatment courses. The results of our study are encouraging to improve the general public's knowledge and to enhance their attitudes toward the appropriate use of antibiotics.

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Authors Contributions	All authors have equal participation in this article.

DECLARATION STATEMENT

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