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Research Article

**KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDE AND PRACTICE OF ONLINE
PHARMACY AMONGST RETAIL PHARMACISTS OF SALEM
DISTRICT, TAMILNADU****A.A. Mohamed Yasir Arafath*¹, B. Tharun², V. Udhayakumar², P. Ulaganathan²,
M. Thirumalaivasan²**¹Associate Professor, Department of Pharmacy Practice, Vinayaka Mission's College of Pharmacy, Yercaud main road, Kondappanaickenpatty, Salem, Tamilnadu, India.²B.Pharm Students, Vinayaka mission's college of Pharmacy, Yercaud main road, Kondappanaickenpatty, Salem, Tamilnadu, India.**Article Received:** August 2021**Accepted:** August 2021**Published:** September 2021**Abstract:**

The objective of the study is to assess the knowledge, attitude and practice of online pharmacies amongst retail pharmacists of Salem district, Tamil Nadu. Online is a new channel and trend of purchase and distribution of goods in the present digital era. An online pharmacy can be a company that sells pharmaceutical preparations, including prescription drugs and over the counter drugs through online ordering on the internet and subsequent delivery. The number of online pharmacies cannot be exactly estimated however, based on a search, around 3000 online pharmacies were found, and half of them were based in USA and 19% in UK and the rest in other countries like India, Canada, etc. The present study attempted to assess the knowledge, attitude and practice of online pharmacy amongst retail pharmacists of Salem district, Tamil Nadu.

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INTRODUCTION:

Online is a new channel of distribution of goods in the present digital era. People are buying almost everything from grocery to gadgets on web stores and it is time that the pharmaceutical products catch up to the trend. Delivery of medicines and related products at the door steps is online pharmacy. An online pharmacy can be said to be a company that sells pharmaceutical preparations, including prescription only medicines and over the Counter medicines through online ordering on the internet and subsequent delivery. The number of online pharmacies cannot be exactly estimated however, based on a search, around 3000 online pharmacies were found, and half of them were based in USA and 19% in UK and the rest in other countries like India, Canada, etc.

Most of the western countries are caringly using this online media for purchasing of medicines. In India, the growth of online pharmacy is significantly escalating. Through India online pharmacies will have to work harder to convince people about the originality and other aspects of medicines they sell. An online pharmacy in India can be a successful venture if it can lure its local audience by keeping branded medicines by offering good discounts, by opening safe and comfortable payment methods sell other healthcare including personal care products so that customer will get all in one roof and deliver the service even in the remotest places.

There are some advantages of online pharmacy like privacy, low prices of medicines, easy and convenience, broad selection of generic brands, easy access to additional medical information etc., On the other side some drawbacks exists the hidden fees added to drug prices, failure to protect personal and financial information. There are also a few unregistered pharmacies prevalent and is hard to discover by customer its registration and renewal status.

Online pharmacy looks like a promising trend today; however the business is confronted by regulatory issues. It's becoming clearer that the growth of online pharmacy business depends on how much they will manage to fit themselves in the legal framework. However, online pharmacy is at its nascent stage in India, but like other categories it has the potential to be a very large segment in the near future. Factors

driving the demand for online pharmacy in India include, rising number of people with unmet medical needs due to large population and increasing penetration of internet in both urban and rural India.

With the rapidly changing consumer behaviour in india, there is a huge demand for accessing a wide range of products/services at the click of a button, and at competitive prices. Currently there is a lot of misunderstanding about online pharmacies vis-à-vis traditional brick and mortar pharmacies¹⁻⁶.

METHODOLOGY:

An Observational study was conducted in 100 Retail Pharmacies of Salem district, Tamilnadu. The data was collected from retail Pharmacists through self-administered questionnaire method. Sampling procedure used for the study was non probability sampling by convenience method. Responses were collected from pharmacies situated in Salem district. Questionnaire was prepared and pilot study was carried out among a few pharmacists in Salem. Necessary changes were made and final questions were drafted and used for the survey⁷.

Questionnaire of the study

1. Do you aware about the concept of online pharmacy
2. Can you name some online pharmacy stores operating
3. Do you have interest to practice online pharmacy in existing business
4. What type of services like to offer
5. Do you that online pharmacies are competition to conventional pharmacies
6. Advantages of online pharmacy
7. Drawbacks of online pharmacy
8. Is there any Guidelines for e-commerce players in the pharmaceutical sector
9. Do you say that there is a need of new regulatory framework
10. Do you know any authorities governing online pharmacy
11. Do you feel that online pharmacy may replace conventional pharmacies in future

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

Results are tabulated and the inferences given based on the responses. Each sub topic mentioned under represents the question posed to respondents.

Q-1: AWARENESS ABOUT THE CONCEPT OF ONLINE PHARMACY**Table 1: Awareness about the Concept of Online Pharmacy**

RESPONSE	% OF RESPONDENTS
Yes	100
No	0

From the above data it is obtained that all the respondents of the survey were aware about online pharmacy system.

Q-2: NAME SOME ONLINE PHARMACY STORES OPERATING**Table 2: Name Some Online Pharmacy Stores Operating**

RESPONSE	% OF RESPONDENTS
Single name	55
Two names	27
Three names	18
More than 3 names	00

From above data it was noted 55% of respondents know single site (name) of online pharmacy store, 27% of respondents were aware of two sites (names) of online pharmacies and 18% of respondents known three sites (names).

Q-3: INTEREST TO PRACTICE ONLINE PHARMACY IN EXISTING BUSINESS**Table 3: Interest to Practice Online Pharmacy in Existing Business**

RESPONSE	% OF RESPONDENTS
Yes	43
No	57

Survey indicated that 57% of respondents were not interested to practice online pharmacy and they were happy with existing retail pharmacy. Further, the respondents were asked the reasons of their disinterest to open an online pharmacy. Some of the common reasons were like, not interested practice this new concept, don't have enough man power to carry out distribution work, don't have proper infrastructure to store medicines in large quantity. Some of the other reasons include lack of proper knowledge about starting online pharmacy, it's a risky business and it will affect existing business, lack of ethical practices and absence of proper guidelines and rules pertaining to online pharmacy.

Q-4: IF INTERESTED, TYPE OF SERVICES LIKES TO OFFER IN FUTURE.**Table 4: Type of Services Like to Offer**

RESPONSE	% OF RESPONDENTS
Mail order	18
Telephonic	41
What's App	37
Others	04

The above data reveals that 41% of respondents are interested in telephonic vending, 37% of respondents were keen to offer through what's App service and 18% of respondents were interested to give service through mail system.

Q-5: EXISTING ONLINE PHARMACIES ARE GIVING UNHEALTHY COMPETITION TO CONVENTIONAL PHARMACIES**Table 5: Competition to Conventional Pharmacies**

RESPONSE	% OF RESPONDENTS
Strongly agree	21
Agree	29
Neutral	16
Disagree	29
Strongly disagree	05

It was observed that 50% of respondents feel that there is a growing trend of unhealthy competition due to online pharmacies. 34% of respondents were not agreeing on the concept and 16% of respondents were neutral on the same. The reason for unhealthy competition may be due to absence of clear guidelines governing online pharmacy.

Q-6: ADVANTAGES OF ONLINE PHARMACY**Table 6: Advantages of Online Pharmacy**

RESPONSE	% OF RESPONDENTS
Increased convenience	26
Greater selection of generic / brand drug	14
Discount for purchase	57
Don't know / No any advantage	03

From above data it was noted that 57% of respondents feel that discount for purchase is the major advantage of online pharmacy. 26% of respondents say that customers can access the medicines as per their convenience. 14% of respondents feel that customer have greater selection choice of generic medicine.

Q-7: DRAWBACKS OF ONLINE PHARMACY**Table 7: Drawbacks of Online Pharmacy**

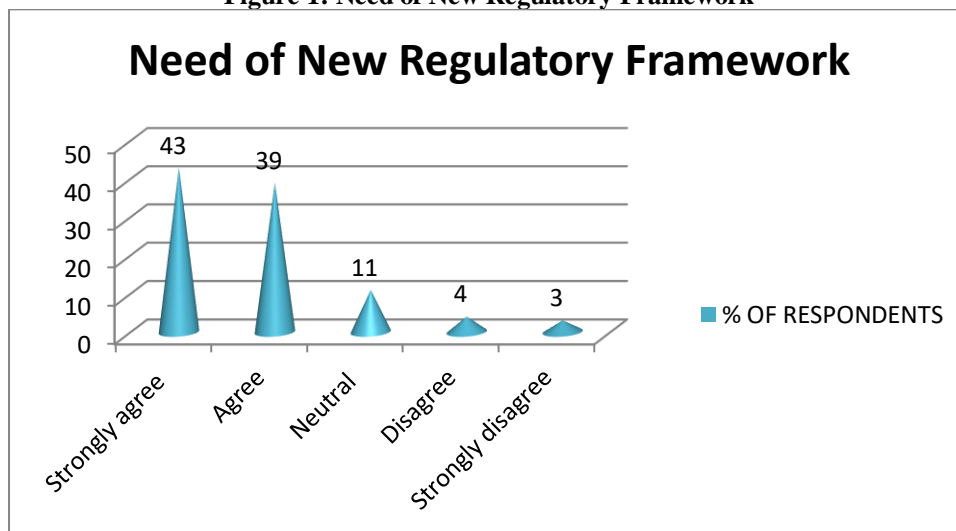
RESPONSE	% OF RESPONDENTS
Dispense of drug through unauthorised pharmacies	24
Prices can change quickly	15
Limited or no opportunity for advice from pharmacist	37
Obtaining inappropriate or counterfeit medicines	24

It was observed that 37% of respondents feel that due to online pharmacy stores, pharmacists have limited opportunity to inter act and give advice to patients. 24% of respondents are of opinion that drugs can be dispensed through unauthorized pharmacies due to absence of stringent regulations. Further, 24% of respondents feel that there may be chances of selling counterfeit medicines through online pharmacy.

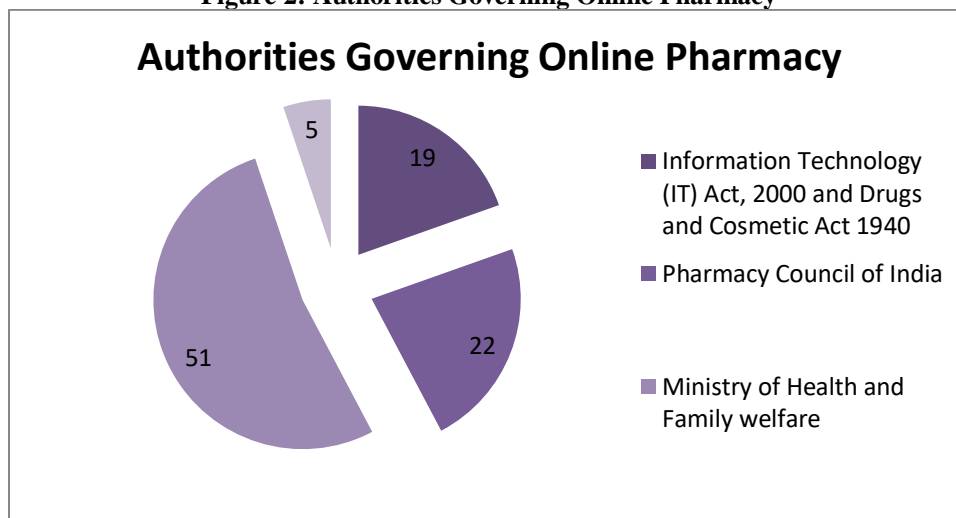
Q-8: GUIDELINES FOR E-COMMERCE PLAYERS IN THE PHARMACEUTICAL SECTOR**Table 8: Guidelines for e-commerce Players in the Pharmaceutical Sector**

RESPONSE	% OF RESPONDENTS
Strongly agree	33
Agree	49
Neutral	09
Disagree	06
Strongly disagree	03

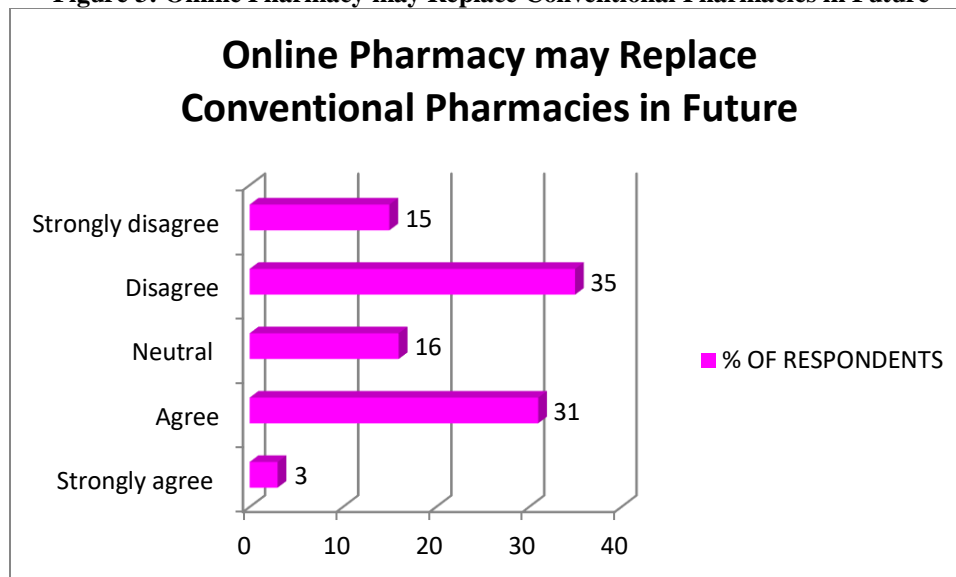
Majority of respondents were aware of Drugs and Cosmetic Act 1945. As per the respondents, guidelines for e-commerce players in the pharmaceutical sector do not exist. The Indian pharmaceutical industry needs a new regulatory framework to effectively bring e-pharmacy under its ambit.

Q-9: NEED OF NEW REGULATORY FRAMEWORK**Figure 1: Need of New Regulatory Framework**

Majority of respondents are about 43% and 39% feeling that there is need of new regulatory framework governing online pharmacy in India. However, 11% of respondents are neutral.

Q-10: ONLINE PHARMACY IN INDIA IS CURRENTLY GOVERNED BY**Figure 2: Authorities Governing Online Pharmacy**

51% of respondents are of opinion that online pharmacy in India is governed by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. 22% of respondents feel that online pharmacy comes under Pharmacy Council of India and about 19% of respondents say that online pharmacies come under Information Technology Act 2000 and Drug and Cosmetic Act 1940.

Q-11: ONLINE PHARMACY MAY REPLACE CONVENTIONAL PHARMACIES IN FUTURE**Figure 3: Online Pharmacy may Replace Conventional Pharmacies in Future**

35% of respondents disagree with the posed question. Taking sum of option 4 and 5 almost 50% of respondents strongly felt that it may not replace conventional pharmacies in future.

CONCLUSION:

From this survey, we can conclude that most of respondents were aware of online pharmacy in India and expressed positive attitude towards online pharmacies. Currently it is gaining popularity in metro cities, but penetration in rural areas is awaited. The future of online pharmacies depends on the support and governance by the government or regulatory authority. It was observed that there well set guidelines for conventional retail pharmacies but the same is lacking as far as online pharmacies are concerned. Hence, the regulatory authority should come out with clear guidelines and plug the loopholes for the betterment of not just the ones who are interested in online pharmacy business but also patients and physicians.

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