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Headache due to analgesic overuse in the context of hospitalizations in the DATASUS system: correlations and perspectives in relation to the goals of the World Health Organization (WHO)

Yasmin Barros Leão, Alana Débora Santos Moreira Mattos, Aida Carla Santana de Melo Costa

Tiradentes University, Aracaju, Sergipe, Brazil

Yasmin Barros Leão
yasmin.leao@souunit.com.br

Introduction
Medication Overuse Headache (MOH) is a chronic secondary disorder associated with the frequent use of analgesics. The World Health Organization (WHO) classifies migraine as the third leading cause of years lived with disability (DALYs) worldwide. Despite its clinical relevance, low medical awareness and the indiscriminate use of analgesics contribute to a culture of self-medication in Brazil, leading to pain chronification and subsequent overload of the public healthcare system.

Objective
To analyze the correlation between hospital admission indicators for headaches within the Brazilian Unified Health System (SUS) and confirmed cases of intoxication due to self-medication, comparing the Brazilian epidemiological scenario with the goals established by the World Health Organization regarding health education and the rational use of medicines.

Methods
A retrospective study based on secondary data obtained from DATASUS, covering the period from March 2016 to March 2026. Indicators of hospital admissions, direct costs, and average length of hospital stay related to ICD-10 codes G43 (Migraine) and G44 (Other headache syndromes) were analyzed. These data were correlated with records of exogenous drug intoxication confirmed as resulting from self-medication, in addition to regional information on self-medication prevalence obtained from PNAUM.

Results
During the analyzed period, 107,450 hospital admissions were recorded, with a financial impact exceeding BRL 55 million and an average hospital stay of 4 days. A total of 31,637 confirmed cases of exogenous drug intoxication associated with self-medication were also identified. The Southeast region presented the highest absolute number of hospital admissions (33,133) and intoxication cases (15,561), while the Northeast registered the highest total expenditure (BRL 19.8 million) and the longest average hospital stay (4.9 days). Females accounted for most hospital admissions (71,311), hospital costs (BRL 34.8 million), and intoxication cases (22,496). Adults aged 20 to 39 years represented the most affected economically active population, totaling 38,217 hospital admissions and 14,063 intoxication cases associated with self-medication.

Conclusion
The findings demonstrate the epidemiological and economic impact of headaches associated with the excessive use of analgesics in Brazil, linked to self-medication practices and the overload of the Brazilian Unified Health System (SUS). The predominance among women and economically active adults reinforces the social relevance of this condition. Furthermore, the identified scenario contrasts with the World Health Organization guidelines for the promotion of the rational use of medicines, highlighting the need to strengthen policies focused on health education and awareness regarding the risks of self-medication.

Keywords:
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