

Women more likely to self-medicate

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16- to 44-year-olds are the population group most inclined to self-medicate.
Credit: SINC

Approximately 20% of Spaniards take non-prescribed medication and women are the group most inclined towards this practice. This is the conclusion of a research study carried out by experts from the Rey Juan Carlos University in Madrid, which also links this habit to nationality, income level and alcohol and tobacco consumption amongst the population.

"In spite of the negative connotations generally associated with the idea of self-medication, it is actually the most significant method of self-care

for the population", explains Pilar Carrasco, main author of the study and head of the department of [Preventative Medicine](#), Public Health, Immunology and Microbiology at the Rey Juan Carlos University in Madrid.

According to the research, published in *Pharmacoepidemiology and Drug Safety*, 20.17% of Spaniards use medication without a medical prescription. Of those, it is the women that self-medicate more than the men (with a prevalence of 16.93% compared to 14.46%).

This gender-based difference can be explained by referring to the exposure to the consumption of medication, which is higher in women than in men. This is due to the fact that "women are more likely to suffer from emotional disorders and are more vulnerable in our society", says Carrasco. She adds: "This may be due to a greater disposition among women to acknowledge and voice their symptoms".

To carry out the study, scientists used data gathered between 2006 and 2007 from 20,738 people through the National Health System. Age, sex, nationality, marital status, level of education and occupational status were the independent variables analysed.

Those surveyed, all over the age of 16, were asked if, in the last two weeks, they had consumed any of the drugs on a list drawn up by the researchers, without medical prescription.

Both men and women had consumed painkillers, antipyretics (to reduce fevers) and drugs to relieve the common cold or [sore throat](#), without a medical prescription.

From young, single women to the higher paid

16- to 44-year-olds are the population group most inclined to self-

medicate, with differences based on gender, level of education, nationality and health habits. "The consumption of non-prescribed drugs is more prolific among young women without chronic pain. This practice is also related to tobacco and alcohol consumption and the use of alternative therapies in this group", indicates Carrasco.

Furthermore, according to the authors, university-educated single women, men with a salary of more than 1,200 Euros per month and male immigrants are the most likely to ingest non-prescribed drugs.

To combat this practice, the World Health Organisation suggests creating spaces where the public can receive information on the correct use of drugs. "The irrational consumption of medication without prescription may have severe consequences for the individual and collective health of the population and, therefore, it is always recommended to consult a professional if you have any queries", concludes the researcher.

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