



ANDROLOGY/SEXUAL MEDICINE

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Demographics and sexual characteristics of sex-enhancing medication users: Study of a web-based cross-sectional sample of sexually active men



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KEYWORDS

Characteristics;
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Sex-enhancing medication use

ABBREVIATIONS

ED, erectile dysfunction;
IIEF-5, five-item version of the International Index of Erectile Function;

Abstract Objectives: To evaluate the frequency of sex-enhancing medications (S-EM) use and to investigate the demographics and sexual characteristics of the S-EM users amongst a Saudi Arabian male population.

Subjects and methods: A cross-sectional sample of 1176 Saudi Arabian men was recruited using a web-based survey between 1 January and 1 April 2015. The survey included multiple open and closed questions to assess the frequency of S-EM use; and demographics, clinical, and sexual characteristics of S-EM users, as well as their perceptions of S-EM.

Results: Amongst the participants, 1008 were sexually active and included in the data analysis. Of the sexually active participants, 402 (39.9%) reported S-EM use in the form of herbal or phosphodiesterase type 5 inhibitors at some time in their lives. Comparing S-EM users with S-EM non-users, the S-EM users had a number of demographic and sexual characteristics including: higher education level, higher income, smoking, more than one sexual partner, longer sexual activity duration, higher frequency of sexual intercourse, and lower sexual satisfaction level. Most

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PDE5i, phosphodiesterase type 5 inhibitors; S-EM, sex-enhancing medications

of the S-EM users (82.1%) bought S-EM without a medical prescription and 62.5% had used them recreationally. In all, 52% of respondents used S-EM to treat ED and 69% of those who used it recreationally reported enhancement of erection with S-EM usage.

Conclusions: Demographic and sexual characteristics of S-EM users and the attitude of the users towards the S-EM were identified amongst a Saudi Arabian male population.

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Introduction

Male erectile dysfunction (ED) was defined by the National Institute of Health consensus in 1990 [1] as an inability to perform satisfactory sexual intercourse due to insufficiency in achieving or maintaining erection. This fundamental physiological activity has a major effect on the personal wellbeing and quality of life for patients and their families [2–4]. In a previous worldwide study [5], ED was shown to be a common health problem affecting >150 million males, with a predicted potential to double by the year 2025 due to the increasing life-span of the population. The treatment strategies for ED vary from psychotherapy and oral pharmacotherapy to surgery that is dependent on the cause of ED, which requires precise patient assessment by a specialist [6,7].

With the discovery of oral phosphodiesterase type 5 inhibitors (PDE5i), the use of sex-enhancing medications (S-EM) became more appealing to a large majority of males with ED, irrespective of the nature of their problem. Moreover, the use of S-EM has become more recreational, especially amongst the young [8–11].

There have been a few research investigations [2,11,12] of different magnitudes exploring the prevalence and characteristics of ED, and patterns of S-EM use in the Middle East. As data on ED is very variable from region to region around the world due to socioeconomic standards, demographics, racial, ethnic, as well as cultural and religious diversity, in the present study we pursued the aim of elucidating the frequency and pattern of S-EM use, demographics and sexual characteristics of S-EM users and their perception of S-EM use amongst a Saudi Arabian male population based on a web-based survey.

Subjects and methods

This study was designed as a web-based nationwide survey, distributed electronically (direct e-mail and social media), in which 1176 men aged >18 years were included between 1 January and 1 April 2015. All participants provided informed consent for using their private information in this study.

A preliminary pilot study was conducted on 30 sexually active men, with face-to-face interviews, in order to determine the validity of the questions in conjunction with the researchers' opinion for final adjustment before induction of the survey. The University Review Board Committee, according to the current policies and procedures of the institution, approved this study. All data were collected anonymously and kept confidential for research purposes only.

The questionnaire used in the survey has been published [13] and we therefore describe it only briefly here. The survey was based on 36 open and closed questions, which were divided in to three major parts: demographic and clinical characteristics, sexual characteristics, and assessment of S-EM perception amongst sexually active participants. Erectile function was assessed using a validated Arabic version of the five-item version of the International Index of Erectile Function (IIEF-5) questionnaire, where a score of ≤ 21 was used to define ED [14].

Data were collected, tabulated and presented as number and percentage or mean and standard deviation (SD). The participants were divided into two groups: S-EM users and S-EM non-users and the differences between groups were evaluated using the independent samples Mann–Whitney *U*-test, chi-squared test or Fisher's exact test. The correlation between erection level and S-EM use was evaluated using Pearson's correlation coefficient. All data analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS®, version 20; SPSS Inc., IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA) and an $\alpha < 5\%$ was considered to indicate statistical significance.

Results

Of 1176 participants in this survey, 1008 were sexually active and included in the data analysis. Of the sexually active participants, 402 (39.9%) used S-EM in the form of herbal or PDE5i during their lives. Most of S-EM users (67.2%) were aged ≤ 45 years. The number of smokers was higher amongst the S-EM users compared to non-users group (55.2% vs 25.7%; $P < 0.001$). The participants who had more than one sexual partner were

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