

Consumer Awareness, Rights and Protection Regarding Pharmaceutical Products: A Study in Cuddalore City

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Abstract

There is a need for consumer awareness and protection within the pharmaceutical industry because of an increased number of cases of unethical business activities and a lack of awareness on the part of consumers. In this context, the present study assesses the extent of consumer awareness, rights, and protection of pharmaceutical products in Cuddalore. This study follows an empirical approach by collecting both primary and secondary information for analysis. Primary information was collected from 120 respondents using structured questionnaires and convenience sampling. The analysis involved percentage calculations and chi-square tests using the SPSS software. The results indicate that there is poor awareness of important issues such as expiry date, manufacturing details, and methods for verifying the product, and those consumers have poor awareness of their legal rights in the matter of protection laws. The study also shows a relationship between educational qualifications and levels of awareness, as well as gender differences in awareness. The conclusion indicates the inadequacy of awareness despite the presence of effective legal measures, which means that consumer awareness must be improved.

Keywords: Consumer Awareness, Consumer Protection Act 2019, Pharmaceutical Products, Legal Awareness, Consumer Rights, Health Literacy.

Introduction

Consumers are a key element in any economy, and more specifically, in the pharmaceutical industry, where consumers' use of products influences public health. The optimal situation would be that consumers expect products to be safe and effective, as well as have accurate and truthful information. However, information asymmetry may prevail in the pharmaceutical market, and consequently, consumers may suffer because of exploitation through deception.

Although regulatory systems, such as the Consumer Protection Act of 2019, exist, a significant number of consumers lack knowledge of consumer protection laws and other legal measures. In this regard, the problem is especially evident among consumers who are less educated or belong to poor socioeconomic strata and, therefore, lack sufficient information. Moreover, consumers rely on intermediaries, which worsens the problem because of the complexity of the products.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it attempts to bridge the above gap by providing an in-depth empirical analysis of consumer awareness and protection regarding pharmaceutical products in Cuddalore City. It highlights the extent of awareness among different groups of respondents and identifies critical deficiencies in knowledge and practice. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to policy formulation, consumer education initiatives, and strengthening legal

awareness programs. Additionally, it will aid government agencies, educational institutions, and consumer organizations in designing targeted interventions to empower consumers and ensure safe consumption practices in the pharmaceutical sector.

Review of Literature

Kulkarni (1997) defined a consumer as one who purchases goods or utilizes services for personal use or ownership rather than for resale or use in production and manufacturing. Consumer interests can also be protected by promoting competition in markets that directly and indirectly serve consumers, consistent with cost efficiency. Consumer protection can also be asserted via Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) and individuals through consumer activism.

Goel et al. (2025) systematically reviewed consumer protection literature over three decades. This study highlights the growing importance of consumer awareness in ensuring fair trade practices and safeguarding consumer rights. It identifies key themes, such as advertising ethics, financial services, and digital transactions. The authors emphasize that despite extensive legislation, gaps still exist in consumer knowledge and its implementation. This study recommends strengthening consumer education and regulatory enforcement to enhance consumer welfare.

Paliwal and Kalladka (2025) analyze pharmaceutical marketing regulations in India within a global framework. This study highlights the complex regulatory environment involving multiple laws, such as the Drugs and Cosmetics Act and the Consumer Protection Act of 2019. This emphasizes the role of regulatory bodies in ensuring ethical practices and consumer safety. The findings reveal challenges in enforcement and compliance, especially in digital marketing practices. This study underscores the need for stronger monitoring mechanisms and transparency in pharmaceutical promotions.

Pandey and Rashid (2024) investigated the factors influencing consumer behavior in purchasing over-the-counter (OTC) pharmaceutical products. The study revealed that consumer decisions are influenced by price sensitivity, brand loyalty, and recommendations from peers and pharmacists. It also

highlights the growing role of marketing and digital platforms in shaping consumer choice. The findings indicate that consumer awareness is moderate but still insufficient in critical aspects, such as safe usage and informed decision-making.

Reddy & Rao (2023), Consumer behavior towards over-the-counter medicines in India, *Indian Journal of Marketing*, 53(2), 44–52. This study investigated consumer behavior in purchasing OTC medicines in India. This reveals that factors such as price, brand image, and pharmacist recommendations heavily influence buying decisions. The study also identified low awareness of expiry dates, dosage, and side effects among consumers. This highlights the risks associated with self-medication and a lack of regulatory knowledge. The authors recommend stricter regulations and consumer awareness initiatives to ensure the safe use of pharmaceutical products.

Parthiban (2023) opined that every consumer must know that the law is to keep a check on the unhealthy activities of sellers who dominate the market and exploit consumers. They adopt unfair trade practices, particularly adulteration, false weights, and measures, making exaggerated claims about the quality of their goods and services. They also indulge in selling defective and substandard goods.

Sharma & Verma (2022), Awareness of consumer rights among urban consumers in India. *International Journal of Research in Commerce and Management*, 13(4), 12–18. This study focuses on the level of awareness of consumer rights among urban populations in India. Although consumers are aware of their basic rights, detailed knowledge of legal provisions and complaint procedures is limited. The research highlights that education and media exposure significantly influence awareness. The authors suggest integrating consumer education into academic curricula and public campaigns. The study concluded that awareness gaps persist even in urban areas.

Singh & Kaur (2021) Consumer protection and awareness in India: Issues and challenges. *Indian Journal of Commerce and Management Studies*, 12(1), 30–36. This study analyzes the challenges faced by

consumers in India despite the presence of strong legal frameworks, such as the Consumer Protection Act, 2019. It highlights issues such as a lack of awareness, low literacy levels, and weak enforcement mechanisms. The authors found that rural and semi-urban consumers are more vulnerable to exploitation than urban consumers. This study emphasizes the need to strengthen consumer education and improve access to grievance redressal systems. The study concludes that awareness is key to effective consumer protection.

Kumar and Navdeep (2020) examined consumer awareness regarding pharmaceutical industries and its impact on healthcare decisions. The study found that consumer knowledge of pharmaceutical products is limited, leading to poor decision-making and increased vulnerability to misleading information. This highlights the importance of education and awareness in building consumer trust and improving healthcare outcomes. The authors suggest targeted awareness programs and improved transparency of pharmaceutical information.

Objectives of the study

The following are the broad objectives of this study:

- To analyze consumer awareness regarding pharmaceutical products
- To evaluate awareness of consumer rights and protection laws
- To examine the relationship between education and awareness
- To suggest measures to improve consumer protection

Hypotheses

This study was conducted based on the following hypotheses:

1. There is a significant difference between gender status and awareness of the sample respondents in the study area.
2. There is a significant relationship between the respondents' educational level and the extent of their awareness of pharmaceutical products.
3. There is significant variation in the opinions of the sample respondents about the utility of consumer protection laws; and
4. There was significant agreement among the

respondents that the existing laws are sufficient to protect the interests of consumers.

Research Methodology

This study employs an empirical research approach using primary and secondary sources. The primary source of information was a structured questionnaire, which emphasized consumer awareness, rights, and protection of drugs, while the secondary sources were books, journals, and reports.

The study took place in Cuddalore City using a non-probability sampling method, where 120 respondents were selected conveniently, including advocates, college students, and the general public. Personal interviews and emails were used to collect data from November 2025 to January 2026. Additionally, a pilot survey was conducted with 15 respondents for the validation.

Cronbach's alpha was used to measure the reliability of the research tool. SPSS was used to analyze the data through percentage analysis and chi-square tests, interpreting the findings at the 5% level of significance.

Limitations of the Study

1. This study is based entirely on the information gathered from the sample respondents.
2. It is presumed that the information provided by the respondents about their socioeconomic status and opinions is genuine and that they have provided all the necessary information.
3. Moreover, due to time and financial factors, the sample size cannot be expanded beyond the chosen one.

Table 1 Characteristics of Respondents

(a) Gender

| Gender | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------|-----------|------------|
| Male | 92 | 76.67 |
| Female | 28 | 23.33 |
| Total | 120 | 100 |

(b) Age

| Age | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------|-----------|------------|
| Below 21 years | 32 | 26.67 |
| 22 – 35 years | 38 | 31.67 |
| 36 – 45 years | 40 | 33.33 |

| | | |
|----------------|-----|-------|
| Above 46 years | 10 | 08.33 |
| Total | 120 | 100 |

(c) Educational Qualification

| Educational Qualification | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Up to X | 08 | 06.67 |
| HSC | 40 | 33.33 |
| UG | 32 | 26.67 |
| Professional (Law) | 40 | 33.33 |
| Total | 120 | 100 |

Source: Questionnaire

| | | |
|-----------------------------|------------|------------|
| Other Consumer related Acts | 39 (32.50) | 81 (67.50) |
| Consumer Rights | 46 (38.33) | 74 (61.67) |

Source: Questionnaire

Hypothesis 1 (Educational level Vs Awareness)

H_0 : There is no significant relationship between educational qualifications and awareness of pharmaceutical products.

H_1 : There is a significant relationship between educational qualifications and awareness of pharmaceutical products.

Table 2 Other Information

(a) Consumer Awareness and Protection

| Consumer Awareness & Protection | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Male: yes | 48 | 40.00 |
| No | 72 | 60.00 |
| Total | 120 | 100 |
| Female: Yes | 21 | 17.50 |
| No | 99 | 82.50 |
| Total | 120 | 100 |

(b) Information about Pharma Products

| Pharma Products | Yes (Percentage) | No (Percentage) |
|-----------------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Price | 102 (85.00) | 18 (15.00) |
| Expiry Date | 21 (17.50) | 99 (82.50) |
| Content of products | 32 (26.67) | 88 (73.33) |
| Manufacturer | 17 (14.17) | 103 (85.83) |
| Verification of the product | 37 (30.83) | 83 (69.17) |

(c) Legal Awareness and Knowledge

| Legal Awareness & Knowledge | Yes (Percentage) | No (Percentage) |
|-----------------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Consumer Protection Act | 42 (35.00) | 78 (65.00) |
| Drugs related Acts | 21 (17.50) | 99 (82.50) |

Table 3 Cross Tabulation

| Educational Qualification | Aware (Yes) | Not Aware (No) | Total |
|---------------------------|-------------|----------------|-------|
| Up to X | 2 | 6 | 8 |
| HSC | 18 | 22 | 40 |
| UG | 20 | 12 | 32 |
| Professional (Law) | 29 | 11 | 40 |
| Total | 69 | 51 | 120 |

Table 4 Chi-Square Tests

| Test | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|-------------------------|--------|----|-----------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 10.040 | 3 | 0.018 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 10.321 | 3 | 0.016 |
| Linear-by-Linear Assoc. | 6.842 | 1 | 0.009 |
| N of Valid Cases | 120 | | |

The above table shows that the calculated Pearson Chi-Square value is 10.040 with 3 degrees of freedom and the p-value (0.018) is less than the significance level of 0.05.

Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. The study concluded that there is a statistically significant relationship between educational qualification and awareness of pharmaceutical products. This indicates that higher levels of education contribute to better awareness of pharmaceutical products among consumers.

The significant association implies that professionally qualified respondents, particularly those with legal education, exhibit higher levels of awareness than less educated groups. This finding supports the argument that education plays a crucial role in consumer empowerment and informed decision-making, especially in technical sectors such as pharmaceuticals.

Hypothesis 2 (Gender vs Awareness)

H₀: There is no significant difference between male and female respondents in their awareness levels.

H₁: There is a significant difference between male and female respondents' awareness levels.

| Gender | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|--------|----|------|----------------|-----------------|
| Male | 92 | 2.10 | 0.85 | 0.089 |
| Female | 28 | 1.60 | 0.70 | 0.132 |

| Test | Value |
|-------------------------|-------|
| Levene's Test (Sig.) | 0.214 |
| t-value | 2.78 |
| Degrees of Freedom (df) | 118 |
| Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.006 |

The above table shows that the significance value of Levene's test (0.214) is greater than 0.05, indicating that equal variances can be assumed. The calculated t-value was 2.78 with 118 degrees of freedom, and the p-value (0.006) was less than 0.05.

Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. It was concluded that there is a significant difference between male and female respondents in their level of awareness of pharmaceutical products.

Findings of the Study

This study examined and analyzed consumer awareness, rights, and protection regarding pharmaceutical products in Cuddalore City. The major findings of this study are as follows:

- Respondents' gender was predominantly male, comprising 76.67%, with only 23.33% being female.
- The majority of the respondents (65%) belong to

the age category of 22-45 years, which constitutes the active consumer group.

- Majority of the respondents (33.33%) were HSC qualified or professionally qualified (Law).
- Despite the fairly good level of education, the level of awareness regarding information about products such as expiry dates, manufacturers, and checking of authenticity is quite low.
- A major percentage of respondents neither verified the expiry date (82.50%) nor checked the manufacturer of the products (85.83%).
- Legal awareness of consumer rights and drug-related acts is very low among respondents, except for those who are professionally qualified.
- Results from the Chi-square test indicate that there is a significant relationship between educational qualification and awareness of pharmaceutical products.
- Higher levels of education, especially professional qualifications, lead to greater awareness.
- This demonstrates the importance of education in raising consumer awareness and making sound judgment.
- The t-test results indicate a significant difference in awareness levels between male and female respondents.
- Male respondents showed a higher level of awareness than female respondents.
- This suggests a gender disparity in access to information and awareness of consumer rights and pharmaceutical products.

Suggestions

1. Government agencies and NGOs should conduct periodic awareness campaigns on pharmaceutical safety through health camps, outreach programs and the media.
2. Educational institutions should introduce consumer education modules, consumer clubs, and regular workshops with experts to promote consumer education.
3. Targeted awareness programs for women should be implemented through self-help groups and the regional media.
4. Authorities should strengthen legal literacy by organizing programs on consumer laws, grievance mechanisms, and helplines.

5. Digital tools, such as mobile applications and QR-based systems, should be promoted for product verification and information access.
6. Mass and social media should be effectively used to disseminate awareness content in regional languages.
7. Regulatory authorities should ensure the strict monitoring and enforcement of pharmaceutical standards and practices.

Conclusion

The study concludes that, despite the existence of a comprehensive legal framework, consumer awareness of pharmaceutical products remains inadequate. This limits the effectiveness of consumer protection mechanisms and increases the vulnerability to exploitation. The findings emphasize that legal provisions alone are insufficient without informed and proactive consumer participation. Therefore, strengthening awareness initiatives and promoting consumer education are essential to ensure effective consumer protection in the pharmaceutical sector.

This research can be extended to other geographical locations and include various demographic groups. A study comparing the behavior of rural and urban people and the influence of technology and healthcare providers on educating consumers is recommended.

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