

INTRODUCTION

Increasing costs of medicines is a global challenge, especially in low- and middle-income countries, since this is seen as a deterrent for patients to gain access to vital treatment modalities.¹

Improvements in the affordability of essential medicines are most important in countries where there are still high out-of-pocket payments which may lead to patients not receiving treatment.²

The United Nations laid out seventeen sustainable development goals to be met by 2030, where the third goal puts high priority in ensuring that every person has access to treatment through a universal health coverage and be able to have access to safe and effective medicines and vaccines.³

Generic medicines could play a vital role in addressing medicines access issues since they allow cost savings by creating competition with the originator medicines, while rendering the same therapeutic effect.⁴

AIMS

To compare the prices of originator medicines with their generic counterparts available on the Maltese market.

SETTING

Community Pharmacy

Acknowledgments

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METHOD

The study employed a quantitative descriptive approach and focused on solid oral dosage form pharmaceuticals available on the Maltese market (January 2020). The methodology flow is shown in Figure 1.

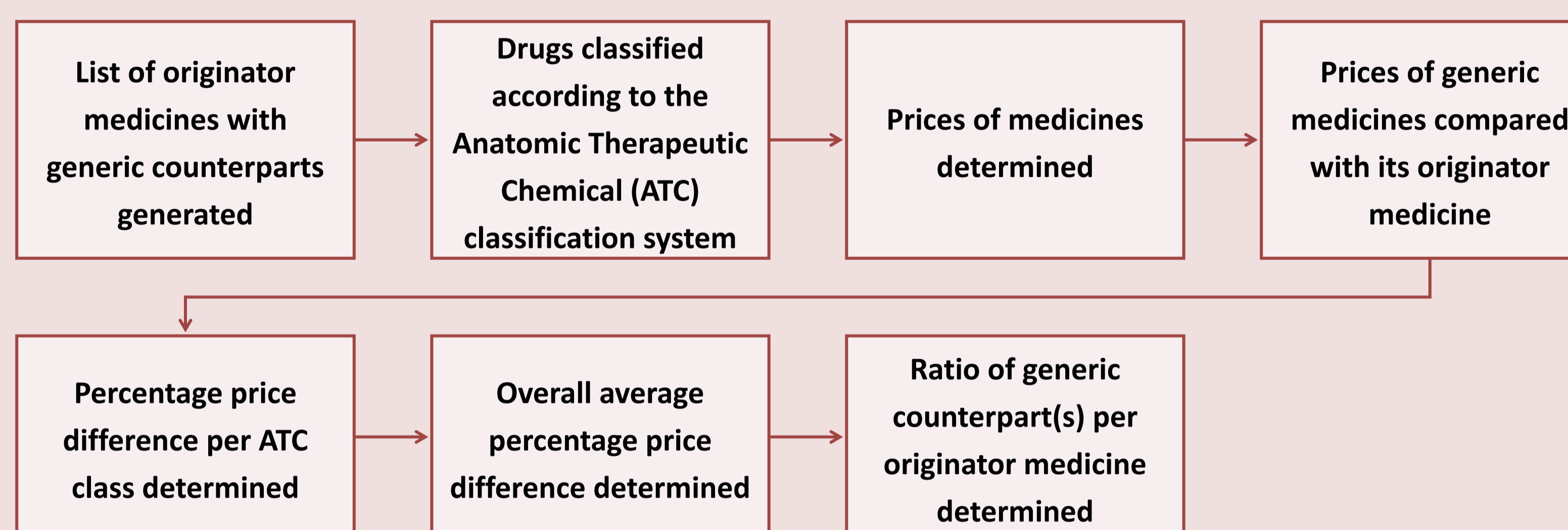


Figure 1. Methodology flowchart

RESULTS

Generic medicines availability on the market

There were 76 originator medicines and their generic counterparts (N=148) included in the study. The generated list encompasses drugs from 9 different ATC anatomic classes (level 1). Figure 2 shows the distribution of medicines included in the study based on marketing classification, resulting in a 1:2 ratio of originator (66%) to generic medicines (34%).

Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of originator and generic medicines for each ATC class. Among the ATC classes, the one which has highest number of generic medicines is the class for anti-infectives for systemic use (n=34), followed by the class of drugs for cardiovascular disorders (n=32). Both mentioned classes have the same number of originator medicines (n=15).

Cost savings of generic medicines

Table 1 shows the price difference of generic medicines compared with originators. Drugs for blood disorders showed the highest average price difference from the originator (-51.93%), followed by drugs for cardiovascular disorders (-46.37%), then drugs for the alimentary tract and metabolism (-38.52%). Drugs for respiratory conditions had the lowest average price difference (-5.50%). The overall average price difference between originator and generic medicines across all ATC classes is -29.12%.

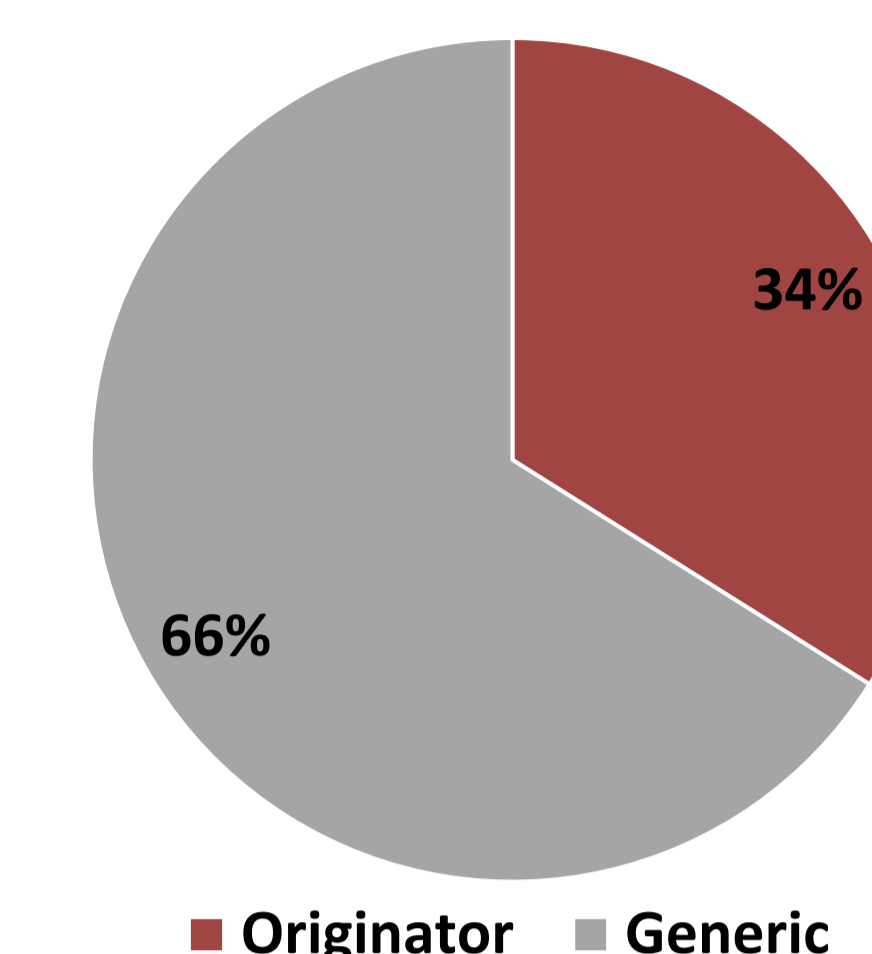


Figure 2. Percentage distribution of originator and generic medicines

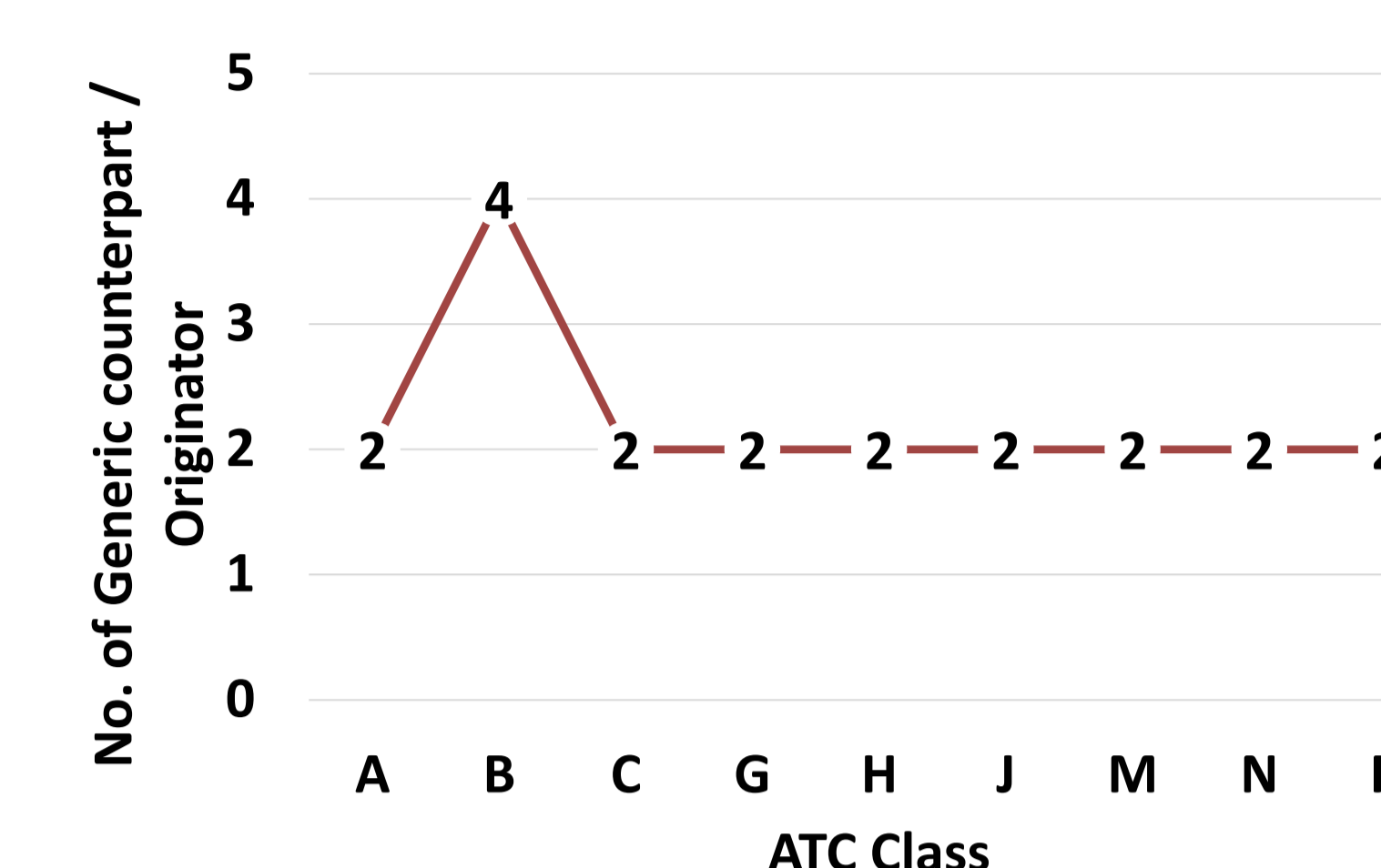


Figure 3. Number of generic counterpart(s) per originator medicine by ATC Class

Table 1. Percentage price differences between originator and generics by ATC Class

ATC Code	Description	N	Mean (%)	Std. Dev.
A	Alimentary tract and metabolism	14	-38.52	22.21
B	Blood and blood forming organs	4	-51.93	3.99
C	Cardiovascular system	32	-46.37	20.54
G	Genito urinary system and sex hormones	10	-32.00	17.02
H	Systemic hormonal preparations	6	-16.43	21.20
J	Antiinfective for systemic use	34	-14.78	41.38
M	Musculoskeletal system	15	-32.18	33.72
N	Nervous system	28	-23.16	36.19
R	Respiratory system	5	-5.50	34.65
Total		148	-29.12	33.18

CONCLUSION

There was a price decrease when generic medicines were compared with their originator medicines across all ATC classes. From a consumer standpoint, this translates to money saved from a patient's regular expenses. From a public health perspective, this translates to cost savings on government expenditure for medicines covered by the National Health Services scheme.

Generic alternatives are currently available in Malta for most of the commonly used medications, in the majority of a ratio of 1 originator: 2 generic medicines. More generics on the market translate to more competition, leading to driving prices down further.

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