

Health Halo Effect in Supplement Marketing: A Content Analysis of Medical Claims in Community Pharmacies

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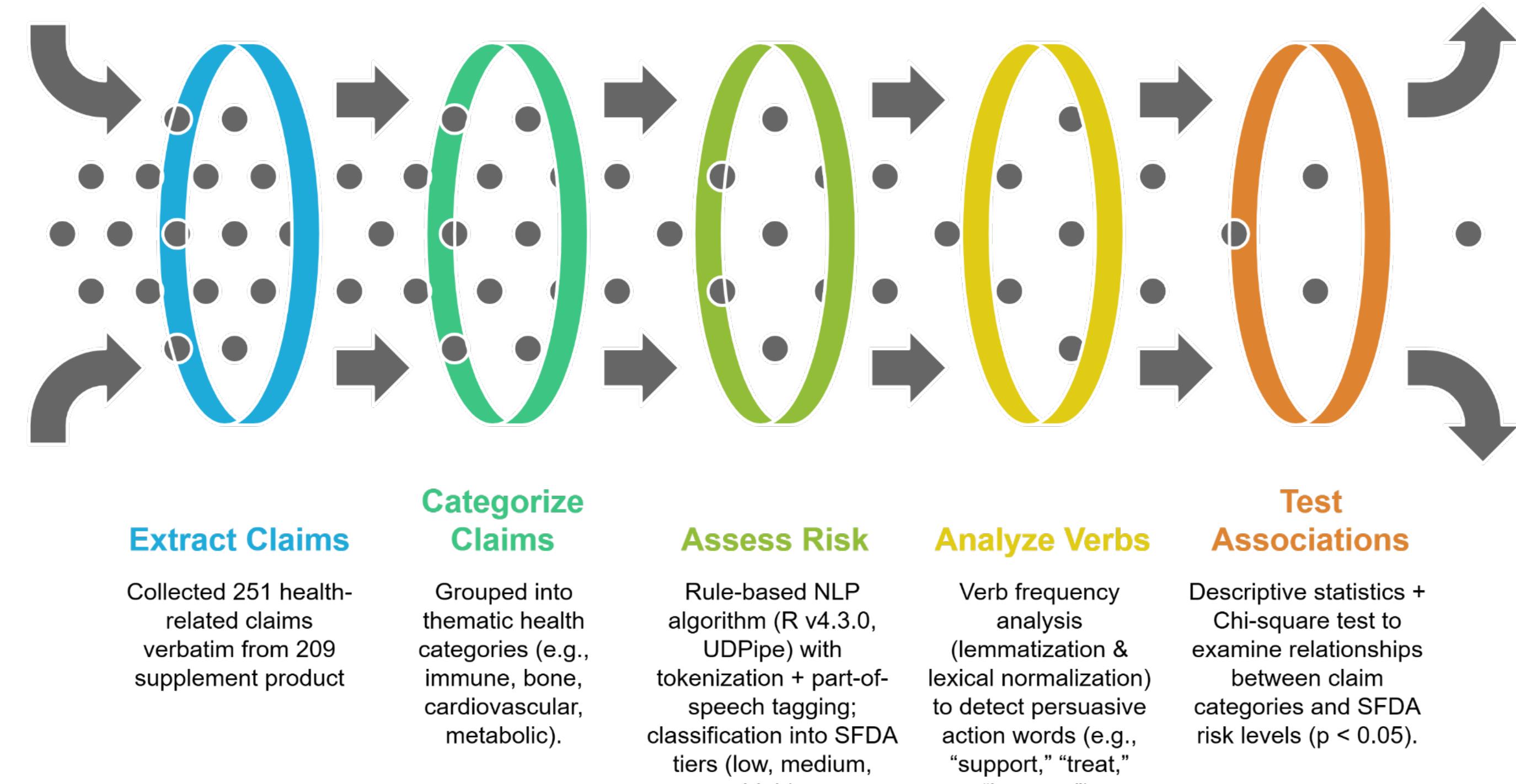
INTRODUCTION

Dietary supplements are widely promoted online, often using persuasive health claims that trigger the “health halo effect,” where consumers infer unproven therapeutic benefits. In Saudi Arabia, the rise of online listings by nutraceutical and dietary supplement companies has amplified the visibility of such claims, raising questions about their regulatory compliance.

OBJECTIVE

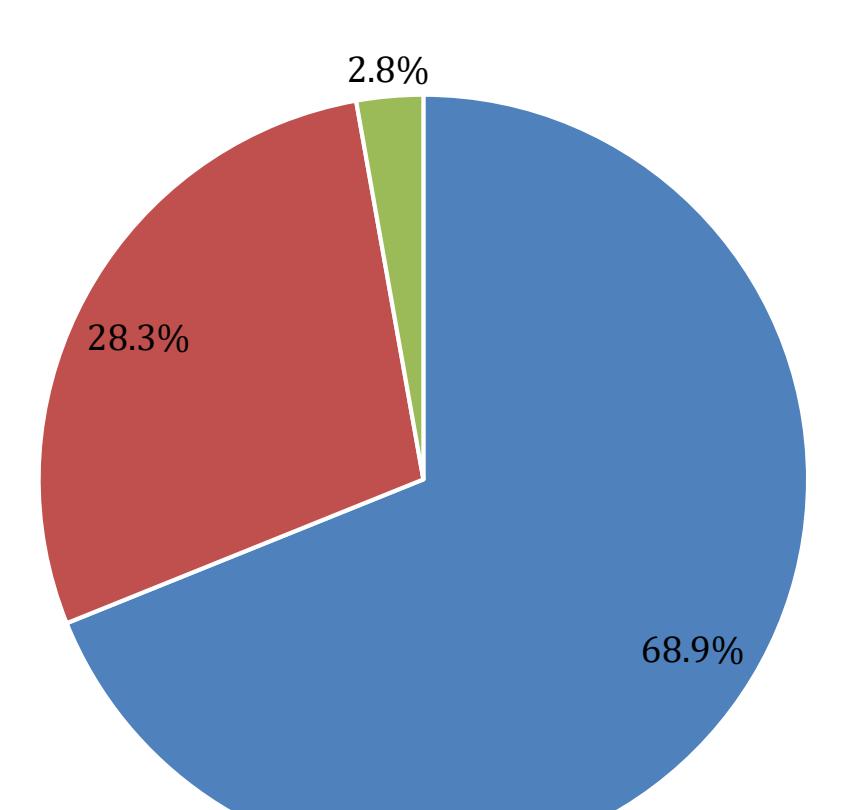
To examine the nature and regulatory risk of health-related claims in dietary supplements marketed by nutraceutical and dietary supplement companies through Saudi community pharmacy websites and assess their alignment with Saudi Food and Drug Administration (SFDA) guidelines.

METHOD

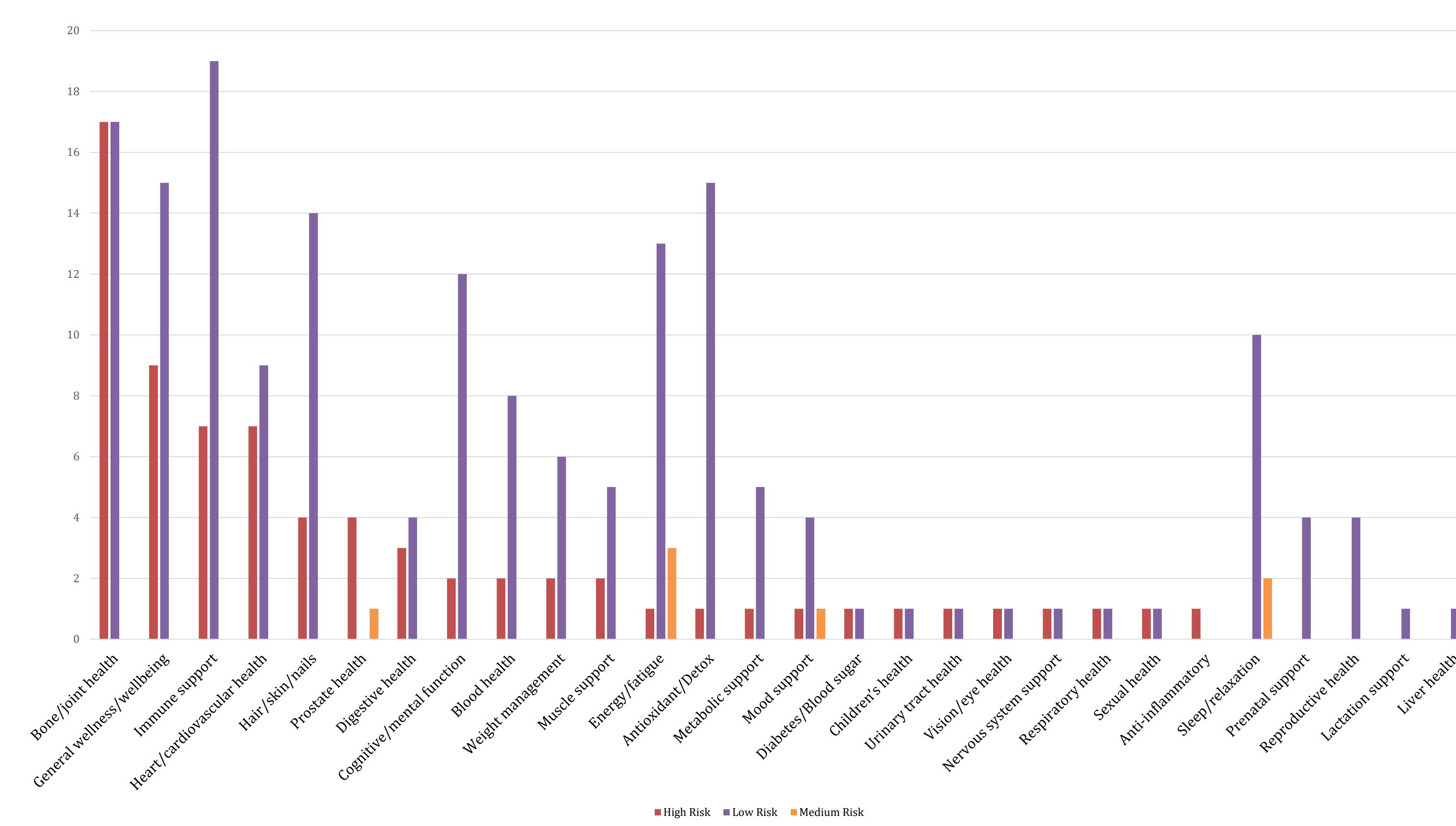


RESULTS

Of the 251 claims analyzed, 173 (68.9%) were classified as low risk, 7 (2.8%) as medium risk, and 71 (28.3%) as high risk. The most common claim categories were bone/joint health (14%), immune support (10%), general wellness/wellbeing (10%), hair/skin/nails (7%), energy/fatigue (7%), antioxidant/detox (6%), and cardiovascular health (6%). High-risk claims were most concentrated in categories related to bone/joint health, general wellness, and cardiovascular support. The most frequent action verbs were “support,” “improve,” and “treat.” A significant association was observed between claim category and regulatory risk level ($p < 0.001$).



Proportion of Supplement Claims by SFDA Risk Level



CONCLUSIONS

A notable proportion of supplement claims implied therapeutic benefits such as treatment, cure, or prevention of disease. According to SFDA regulations, these high-risk claims are not permissible for dietary supplements, as they fall under drug or herbal product classification. In contrast, most low-risk claims related to support and maintenance of health are generally acceptable when evidence-based and not misleading. Strengthening SFDA oversight and ensuring compliance with claim standards, along with enhancing consumer awareness, are essential to reduce misleading marketing and protect public health.

REFERENCES



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