AWARENESS OF FIRST AID FOR SNAKE BITES AMONG VILLAGERS IN A RURAL AREA

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Snake bite is one of the most neglected public health issues in rural communities and the annual death rate in Sri Lanka due to snake bite is the highest in the world. Following a snake bite, accurate first aid is essential to minimize life threatening effects. Common traditional first aid interventions, such as cutting flesh around bitten area, sucking out toxin, or the application of tourniquet are not currently recommended. In Sri Lanka snake bites are most common in the dry zone and particularly in North Central Province. Therefore, First mile post Padaviya in North Central Province was selected as the study area. A descriptive cross sectional study was conducted during a period of one week to consider the level of awareness of first aid practices for snake bites, among villagers in this rural area. Whole families were studied and 124 people were interviewed through an interviewer-administered questionnaire. Of the 124 subjects, 65 had personal experiences of snake bites and they were for the purpose of the study, categorized as victims. The data was entered and analyzed in Minitab 16 software.

Eighty three percent (83\%) of the subjects agreed that the incidence of snake bites is high in the selected area. When asked about their actions following an event of snake bite, 78.2\% of people confirmed that they would administer first aid, 21.8\% would take no first aid action. Of those responding with first aid measures 3.2\% would cut into the bite wound, 12.1\% would apply suction and 55.6\% would apply a tourniquet. As a recommended method 58.8\% would wash the wound with soap. None of the informants mentioned use of the recommended first aid response which is Pressure Bandaging and Immobilization (PBI). Among the 65 victims interviewed 95.7\% went to hospital but only 32.3\% people had taken the snake to hospital. The remaining 4.3\% resorted to using traditional treatments. Of the 65 victims only 33.8\% confirmed that they had followed some form of first aid in the actual situation. The proportion of victims who used first aid is significantly lower compared to the whole population (Two proportions test p-value=0.000).

Responses indicate that the people living in Padaviya First Mile Post lack awareness of accurate first aid methods that are appropriate for snake bites whereas the majority resort to the use of hazardous first aid interventions. There is an urgent need to educate the community to strengthen the knowledge of first aid related to snake bites with a special attention to PBI techniques.