

Prevalence of Occupational Hazards among Paddy Farmers and Role of Agricultural Extension: A Study in Horowpathana DS Division, Anuradhapura District, Sri Lanka

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Occupational safety and health is a prime area of concern for international labour regulations. Different occupational safety and health issues could be evident among farmers. There are limited studies conducted in Sri Lanka from the perspective of occupational safety and health among farmers. A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted to identify the prevalence and awareness of occupational hazards among paddy farmers in Horowpathana DS division, Anuradhapura district. Data were collected from five key informant interviews, two focus discussions with officers, a questionnaire survey on 300 paddy farmers, and an informal discussion with 20 paddy farmers and analyzed using qualitative and quantitative methods. More than half (62.1%) of the respondents were male, paddy farmers. The majority (32.6%) was in their middle age (42-52 years) with the mean age of 48 years. The majority (28.7%) had farming experience for 11-22 years and about 24.3% of respondents had more than 34 years of paddy farming experience. The average land area under paddy cultivation was 3.1 ha. and 91.3% of respondents were members of different farmer organizations. Different types of agricultural diseases such as leptospirosis (5.1%), kidney diseases (6.7%), muscular disorders (30.9%), and accidents such as agrochemical poisoning (5.1%), injuries (22.4%), wild elephant attacks (1.0%) and snake bites (8.4%) were prevalent in the area. Awareness of some occupational hazards was poor among respondents and extension officers. Therefore, improving awareness of occupational safety and health is needed, adopting a multi-institutional approach. Kanna meeting was identified as the most appropriate platform to conduct awareness programmes. Incorporating occupational safety and health into agricultural extension policies would be helpful to ensure farmers' well-being.

Keywords: Occupational Hazards, Paddy farmers, Agricultural extension, Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka

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