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COMMUNITY AWARENESS ON CUTANEOUS LEISHMANIASIS AND IT'S VECTOR IN FIVE DISTRICTS IN SRI LANKA

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Cutaneous leishmaniasis is one of the notifiable vector-borne diseases in Sri Lanka, with increasing cases island-wide. The poor knowledge of the public on the vector (Sandfly: *Phlebotomus argentipes*) and the disease affects the success of the intervention programs. A questionnaire survey was conducted to assess public awareness about leishmaniasis and its vectors in selected districts in Sri Lanka. Six MOH areas in five districts (*i.e.,* Rambukkana and Kegalle from Kegalle District, Kadugannawa from Kandy District, Dambulla from Matale District, Kekunadura from Matara District and Kurunegala from Kurunegala District) were covered. The questionnaire gathered information about respondents' socioeconomic-demographic details, environmental observations, risk factor analysis, knowledge, and attitudes on leishmaniasis and the vector. A total of 258 respondents (27% Dambulla, 20% Kegalle, 20% Rambukkana, 20% Kadugannawa, 8% Kurunegala, and 7% Kekunadura) participated with 60% females and 40% males. Approximately 50% of the study population knew about the disease mainly via peers, healthcare workers and media (including the five people previously diagnosed with leishmaniasis). Only 16% of the respondents knew the relationship between vector sandflies and the disease. However, it was noticed that three fourth of respondents were unaware of the disease symptoms. Individuals who knew about the disease and the vector had at least primary education and were within the 35-55 age group. According to the one-way ANOVA analysis, there is a statistically significant difference in disease awareness among different age groups ($p = 0.003$, $F = 4.05$, $df = 4$). Individuals in the age group of 35-55 demonstrated a moderate level of understanding about the disease and its vector. 22% of the sample could be considered at high risk as they work outside during the peak active hours of sandflies. Out of the 75% of the population who used mosquito nets, the majority were aware that the use of mosquito nets helps to prevent the disease. Only 36% of the participants use insect repellents, while 25% do not use any protective measures. The results showed that respondents, especially those who live in areas with high disease prevalence, had less understanding of the disease and the vector, highlighting the importance of proper awareness programs about leishmaniasis.

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