
Risk behaviours for oral cancer among tea industry workers: How do they relate with cancer awareness?

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Oral cancer is a common malignancy worldwide, which ranks first among cancer deaths in Sri Lankan males. Poor health literacy and harmful behaviours increase one's susceptibility for oral cancer. Evaluation of harmful practices and their relationship with knowledge of oral cancer in vulnerable populations is important to identify preventive strategies for this deadly condition. To determine the prevalence and correlates of selected harmful practices related to oral cancer among Tea industry workers in Hiniduma, Galle and their association with oral cancer awareness. A descriptive, cross-sectional study was conducted among 337 tea industry workers in selected tea factories with estates in Hiniduma area. Data were collected using an interviewer-administered questionnaire. Betel quid chewing was the commonest harmful behaviour among the study participants (65.6%), followed by alcohol use (27%) and smoking (18.7%). Prevalence of all harmful behaviours were significantly higher among estate workers ($p < 0.001$) and minor ethnic groups ($p < 0.05$). Both smoking and alcoholism were significantly associated with male sex ($p < 0.001$) but not with age, educational level or income. In contrast, betel quid chewing was significantly associated with older age ($p < 0.01$), low educational level ($p < 0.001$) and low income ($p < 0.05$), but not with gender. A poor knowledge on oral cancer was significantly related with betel quid chewing ($p < 0.01$), but not with other harmful practices. Risk behaviours for oral cancer are high among tea industry workers, in some instances due to poor awareness. Oral cancer prevention programmes should focus on improving awareness and preventing harmful behaviours among high risk groups.

Key words: oral cancer, knowledge, practices, tea industry workers, Sri Lanka

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