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Comparison of selected occupational health problems among coir industry and coconut estate workers in the Puttalam district

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Objective: To compare the prevalence of selected occupational health problems among coir industry (SG) and coconut estate (CG) workers in Puttalam District.

Methodology: A descriptive cross sectional study was carried out in the MOH areas of Dankotuwa, Marawila and Chilaw, in the Puttalam district. Sample size computed was 190 for each group. Sample was selected using simple random sampling method. Interviewer administered questionnaire was used to determine the socio-demographic characteristics and prevalence of selected occupational health problems among the two groups.

Results: The mean duration of service was 12.3 (SD=8.6) years for SG and 13.7(SD=9.9) years for CG.

Musculoskeletal symptoms - prevalence of carpal tunnel syndrome (OR =2.8; 95 %CI: 1.2-6.5) was higher among SG while knee joint pain was higher among CG (OR=0.5; 95% CI: 0.3 – 0.7).

Dermatological conditions - prevalence of finger tip wastage (OR=1.25; 95%CI: 8.1–53.1), oedema of terminal phalanges (OR=5.5; 95%CI: 2.9 – 10.6) and paronychia (OR=5.4; 95%CI: 3.2-9.0) were higher among SG, while the CG showed a higher prevalence of callosities (OR=undefined).

Occupational injuries - prevalence of abrasions (OR=0.06; 95%CI: 0.03-0.13), lacerations (OR=0.09; 95%CI: 0.04-0.18), contusions (OR=0.07; 95%CI: 0.03-0.15) and cut injuries (OR=0.13; 95%CI: 0.06-0.27) were higher among the CG.

Varicose veins – prevalence of varicose veins was higher among SG (OR=1.87; 95%CI: 1.12-3.13).

Respiratory conditions - prevalence of sneezing (OR=1.74; 95%CI: 1.11-2.79) and common cold (OR=2.28; 95%CI: 1.46-3.57) were significantly higher among SG while nasal obstruction (OR=0.21; 95%CI: 0.10 – 0.45), breathlessness (OR=0.26; 95%CI: 0.12 – 0.53) and asthma were significantly higher among CG (OR=0.34; 95%CI: 0.18 – 0.62).

Conclusions and Recommendations: Prevalence of individual musculoskeletal, skin and respiratory conditions differed among coir workers and coconut estate workers. However, varicose veins were more among coir workers while occupational injuries were more among coconut estate workers. Recommend use of protective gear.