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Knowledge on common snakes of Sri Lanka, bite prevention, first aid and associated factors among the adults of Ragama Medical Officer of Health area

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Introduction

Snakes, being keystone species in maintaining the existence of ecosystems, always have had a unique influence on humans throughout history. Poor public understanding of snakes has contributed to an increase in disease burden from snakebites. World Health Organisation identifies snake bites as a neglected tropical disease.

Objectives

To evaluate the knowledge on common snakes of Sri Lanka and snakebites among the adults of Ragama Medical Officer of Health area.

Methods

A descriptive cross-sectional study was done using cluster sampling with a sample population of 637 residents (323 females, 314 males, mean age of the population 41.31, SD of 15.59). Interviewer administered questionnaire was used.

A unified score was calculated for each participant considering ability to identify of common snakes, knowledge on venom status, bite prevention measures and first aid for snake bites.

Participants who achieved 50% or above were attributed with 'good knowledge'. SPSS (version 22) was used. Statistically significant associations were identified by performing the Chi-square test.

Results

59% of the total population had a 'good knowledge'.

Of the highly venomous snakes, 98% identified *Naja naja*, 57% identified *Daboia russelii*, 44% identified *Hypnale Spp* and *Craspedocephalus sp*, 36% identified *Bungarus ceylonicus* and 28% identified *Bungarus caeruleus*. Statistically significant associations regarding knowledge were recognised with sex, previous education on snakes and occupation.

Conclusions

The population had a satisfactory knowledge and awareness on the domains examined.

Statistically significant associations were noted between knowledge and sex, participants' occupation and previous education on snakes.

Key words: *Snake bites, Toxicology, Community awareness*