



SUMMARY

This study describes occupation related health problems among tea plantation workers working in Kegalle district, factors associated with their problems and usage of occupational safety measures. The study sample includes 534 male and female tea plantation workers (plucking tea leaves, pruning tea bushes, cleaning tea estates and spraying insecticides).

A structured questionnaire was administered to the plantation workers by ten midwives and social welfare officers working in the estates. A sub group of 100 workers were examined by the principal investigator.

According to the literature review, 50 occupational related health problems in agricultural workers were found. After prioritising the above problems by E.M.A.s and A.M.O.s working in the estates, 20 common problems were selected for this study. The questionnaire was administered to five randomly selected larger tea estates in the Kegalle district.

Majority of the sample population are females (68.7%) and below 41 years (68.5%). Very poor literacy level is seen and only 1.3% had completed G.C.E. (Ordinary Level).

Musculoskeletal disorders are found to be common among tea plantation workers and 23% of them have chronic knee joint pain, 30.1% chronic backache and 18% chronic neck pain.

Abrasions (4.3%) are common among minor occupational injuries. Insect bites were common and 18.5% of the workers had wasps and hornet bites during last three months. During their life time, 18.5% of workers had snake bites and 3.6% had fractures and dislocations.

Chronic Bronchitis is seen among 10.7% of workers and Bronchial Asthma is seen in 8.4% of workers.

It reveals that 3.7% of workers have Dermatitis or Eczema and 7.3 % of workers have callosities.

Varicose veins are seen among 12% of workers . There are 109 workers who spray insecticides out of which 11% has been exposed to pesticide poisoning during their life time.

Bites and stings are the commonest cause of occupational injuries and injuries due to improper use of hand tools are minimal(0.9%). Usage of occupational safety measures are low and only 26.6% of workers who spray insecticide use protective measures. Only 35% of workers wear slippers during work.

In their occupation, they do heavy work and carry a basket containing tea leaves weighing more than 20 kg per day. Apart from that, they have to work in an open environment exposed to cold weather and hence are more susceptible to occupational injuries. The factors mentioned above are associated with their occupational health problems.

On clinical examination of a sub group of sample, it reveals that 56% of plantation workers have abrasions and 46% have lacerations in their hands. On examination of musculoskeletal system, 23% of workers are found to have chronic knee joint pain, 52% backache and 36% chronic neck pain.

The present role of occupational health services should be widened to find out solutions to these occupation related health problems in plantation workers.