

SUMMARY

Colombo is the only city which has an underground sewerage system in the country. This poorly maintained system has frequent blockages and requires urgent repairs. As a result sewage workers have direct and prolonged contact with sewage and face many occupational hazards leading to the health problems and diseases. In Sri-Lanka no research has been done or studies have been done nor any data available in relation to the occupation related health problems among this category of workers. In addition no information is available regarding the levels of exposure, related health risks of morbidity and mortality data for sewerage workers of the Colombo Municipal Sewerage Management Division. Hence investigating the health hazards of "night soil" and spectrum of its ill effects on the health of those handling it are worth studying and quite rightly justified. This study was designed to be a comparative cross-sectional study, where the main objective of the study was determining the hazards of sewage and to assess its effects on the health of sewage workers. Accordingly diseases conditions such as sewage workers syndrome, skin diseases, diarrhoeal diseases, and worm infestations were studied. Water workers were selected as a control group. The data collection techniques used in this study included; an interviewer administrated questionnaire, clinical examination of the study subjects, laboratory investigations of stools for AOC and other intestinal parasites and working environmental monitoring. This study revealed an association, which seems to be the exposure to sewage and development of certain diseases such as "Sewage workers syndrome", skin diseases, worm infestations, diarrhoeal diseases, occupation related injuries and accidents. It was observed that poor hygienic and safety practices of sewage workers are responsible for most of these disease conditions and could be prevented to a greater extent if improved hygienic and safe measures are adopted.