

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Betel quid chewing, consumption of processed areca nut products, smoking and alcohol consumption are contributory factors for oral cancer and Oral Potentially Malignant Disorders (OPMDs). Identification of high-risk groups engaged in these practices is a cost effective and affordable strategy for oral cancer prevention in “lower middle income countries” like Sri Lanka.

Objective: To determine the prevalence and associated socio-demographic and work environmental factors of selected known oral cancer related lifestyle practices and awareness on oral cancer and OPMDs among rice mill workers in Polonnaruwa district

Methods: A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among 630 rice mill workers in Polonnaruwa district using multistage cluster sampling technique. An interviewer-administered questionnaire was used to assess oral cancer related lifestyle practices (betel quid chewing, consumption of processed areca nut products, smoking and alcohol consumption) and level of awareness on oral cancer and OPMDs. Relationships between lifestyle practices and associated factors and level of oral cancer awareness were assessed using Chi-square test.

Results: Prevalence of current betel quid chewing was 61.9% (365) out of 590 participants who consented for the study. Prevalence for current chewing of processed areca nut products, alcohol consumption and smoking were 5.7% (34), 49.1% (290) and 35.4% (209) respectively. Statistically significant differences were observed between gender and ethnicity with betel quid chewing status: gender, level of education and total monthly income with smoking status: gender, age group and total monthly income with alcohol consumption status. Of the work environment factors only peer usage of quid was statistically significant with betel chewing status ($p=.001$). A majority of the respondents (56.6%; $n=334$) had satisfactory awareness regarding oral cancer and OPMDs. The level of awareness was statistically significant with the status of chewing of processed areca nut products and smoking.

Conclusions and recommendations: This study revealed a high prevalence of oral cancer related lifestyle practices among rice mill workers. Urgent attention is needed to address the determinants of these practices in workplaces and to integrate oral cancer screening into conventional screening programmes conducted at rice mills.

Key words: Prevalence, lifestyle, oral cancer awareness, rice mill workers