

## **ABSTRACT**

**Introduction:** Accidental poisoning is a preventable cause of morbidity and mortality among the paediatric population. As mothers are typically the primary caregivers for children in Sri Lankan families, they need to know about preventive practices and appropriate actions in case of an accidental poisoning incident.

**Methodology:** This is a community-based, descriptive cross-sectional study, carried out at the office of the Medical Officer of Health (MOH), Ragama. Mothers who attend the clinics at MOH, Ragama, and who have at least one child less than 12 years old were recruited. A pre-formed questionnaire was given and used to collect the data. Ethical clearance was obtained.

**Results:** The study sample consisted of 500 mothers, the majority of whom were 25-35 years old, 74% were married and living with their partners, and were predominantly Sinhalese (62.6%). 37% of the sample had education up to grade 6 or ordinary level. 50% of the sample were housewives. 64.2% of the mothers had nuclear families, and 97.2% of them had four or fewer children under the age of 6. One-third of the sample had a history of accidental poisoning. The majority identified poisonous substances and poisons were kept out of reach in 66% of families. Death, disability, chronic conditions, and no effect were expected following poisoning by 82%, 55.8%, 43.8%, and 12.4% respectively. 62.2% of them believed that the carelessness of parents is the cause of the accidents. Hospitalisation following poisoning was chosen by 64.8% and taking medical advice was chosen by 17.6%. The majority (70.6%) stored poisons in safe places. Children were kept under constant supervision in 88% of families. In 87.8% of families, mothers had the responsibility for poisoning prevention. Safer homes (67.6%), constant supervision (70.6%), and increasing awareness in families (68.2%) were chosen as practices of prevention. Mothers identified parents (44.2%), friends/neighbours (33%), books (43%), radio/television (39%), and healthcare personnel (35.2%) as sources of knowledge. 38.2% of mothers were aware of the national poison information centre. There is a statistically significant association between the prevention of accidental poisoning with mothers' age, occupation, and ethnicity.

**Conclusions:** In conclusion, the mothers' knowledge of the identification of poisons, safe storage, and seeking medical advice was satisfactory. However, there was a significant association between the mother's age, ethnicity, and occupation with taking essential preventive measures. Therefore,

it is important to educate parents and caregivers about common poisonous substances in households, safe storage, and immediate medical assistance in the case of accidental poisoning at the community level.