

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Occupational injuries cause globally 2.3 million deaths annually, and it is estimated that over 313 million non-fatal occupational injuries occur every year. In Sri Lanka, underreporting is a major problem and the actual magnitude of burden of work related injuries is not revealed. This leads to less empathies being paid by the government as well as the industries to this important area affecting the health of the economically productive population.

Objective: To determine the incidence of occupational injuries, assess knowledge, work practices and their association with occupational injuries among patients with occupational injuries attending the Accident Service Unit of the Colombo South Teaching Hospital.

Methods: A cross sectional study was conducted among 221 patients with occupational injuries attending the Accident Service Unit of the Colombo South Teaching Hospital. Convenient consecutive sampling technique was applied. An interviewer-administered questionnaire was used as the data collection tool. Frequency distribution tables were used to describe data and Chi square test was done to determine associations.

Results: The incidence of occupational injuries among patients attending the Accident Service Unit of the Colombo South Teaching Hospital was 6.9 per 100 patients. A majority (94.6%) of patients with occupational injuries were males. Most of the respondents (40.3%) were between 18 to 30 years. Of the respondents 31.2% were engaged in construction work and 68.3% were employed in the informal sector. The commonest (32.6%) cause of occupational injuries was cut injuries and the upper limbs were the most frequently (41.2%) affected region of the body. Lacerations were reported as the commonest type (41.2%) of injury. A majority of the study population (85.5%) had a good level of knowledge. Assessment of work practices showed only 24.4% regularly used Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and 61.1% handled unguarded machines or tools. There was no statistically significant association ($P=0.871$) between frequency of occupational injuries during the past year and level of knowledge on occupational hazards. However, a statistically significant ($p<0.05$) association was seen between the frequency of occupational injuries and being engaging in a trained occupation.

Conclusions and Recommendations: Extending the injury surveillance system of the Ministry of Health to include data on occupational injuries is important to overcome the issue of under reporting of occupational accidents and injuries to a certain degree. Proper implementation and strengthening of the existing legislation should be done especially in the areas of use of PPE, operating unguarded machinery and working under the influence of alcohol.

Key words: Occupational injuries, Occupational hazards, Accident Service Unit, Knowledge, Work practices