

ABSTRACT

Introduction:

Human papillomavirus (HPV) infection is the most common sexually transmitted infection in the world and the primary cause of cervical cancer. Cervical cancer is the second commonest cancer among Sri Lankan women. Public Health Inspectors (PHII) and Public Health Midwives (PHMM) are key grass root level health workers involving in HPV prevention programmes in Sri Lanka. Understanding the level of their knowledge on HPV and preventive measures is crucial for enhancing HPV prevention efforts and promoting public health interventions.

Objectives:

This study aimed to assess the knowledge of Human Papillomavirus (HPV) infection and its preventive measures among Public Health Inspectors (PHII) and Public Health Midwives (PHMM) within the Medical Officer of Health (MOH) system in the Matara district.

Methodology:

This descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted in the Matara district using a sample of 200 participants (57 PHII and 143 PHMM) recruited using stratified random sampling. A self-administered questionnaire was used to assess knowledge of HPV and its preventive measures. The level of knowledge was assessed using a scoring system and was categorized based on scores as satisfactory (75-100), fair (50-74) and inadequate (0-50). All data were analyzed using SPSS software. Independent sample t-tests were used to assess association of knowledge scores with socio-demographic and work-related factors, and to compare the knowledge levels of PHII and PHMM.

Results:

The response rate was 100%. The mean age of the sample was 41 years (SD= 10.71), 84.5% of participants were married, 67.5% had education up to the diploma level, and 58% had over 10 years of work experience. The mean percentage score for overall knowledge of HPV infection and preventive measures was 68.61(SD=9.6), while 25.5% of participants had satisfactory knowledge, 72% had fair knowledge, and 2.5% had inadequate knowledge.

The mean percentage scores for general HPV knowledge, knowledge of cervical carcinoma and other HPV-related diseases, knowledge of the HPV vaccine and knowledge on cervical cancer screening were 58.9 (SD=19), 64.8 (SD=14.9), 74.9 (SD=12.1) and 73.8 (SD=11) respectively, with 20%, 34.5%, 50.5% and 50.5% demonstrating satisfactory knowledge on above four aspects. The PHMM had a significantly higher mean knowledge score on cervical cancer screening than PHII (PHM=75.99, PHI= 68.22, $t = -3.873$, $p < 0.000$) however, no significant difference was observed between knowledge of PHII and PHMM on any other component tested or overall knowledge on HPV infection and preventive measures. A significant association was found between higher overall knowledge of HPV infection and preventive measures and participation in relevant in-service training programs (69.6 vs 66.6, $t = 2.049$, $p = 0.042$). The overall knowledge of HPV infection and preventive measures was not significantly associated with age, marital status, education level, work experience, involvement in the HPV vaccination programme, or participation in cervical cancer screening programme. ($p > 0.05$ for all)

Conclusion and recommendation:

The proportion of PHII and PHMM in the MOH system of Matara district with a satisfactory knowledge on HPV infection and preventive measures was low. PHMM has more knowledge on cervical cancer screening compared to PHII. Knowledge of HPV infection and preventive measures among PHII and PHMM was significantly associated with participation in a relevant in-service training programme. Increasing the frequency and reach of in-service training sessions for PHII and PHMM and providing access to updated information about HPV infection and preventive measures would be beneficial in addressing the existing knowledge gaps in these key grass root level health workers.

Key words:

HPV, prevention, knowledge, Public Health Midwives, Public Health inspectors