

Awareness on Snakebite Among Military Personnel: A Cross Sectional Survey

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Snakebite is associated with significant morbidity and mortality worldwide. This may be a serious occupational hazard for the military personnel as the troops are exposed to snakes particularly during deployment in the battlefield. We aimed to evaluate the awareness and the experience on snakebite among military personnel. This cross-sectional survey was conducted among military personnel deployed in Puthukudiyiruppu, Sri Lanka, in September 2013. All data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire. A total of 304 Sri Lankan Army personnel with the average age of 29.6 years (SD,6.6) were included in the study. Majority (n = 253, 83.2%) had been in the battlefield with an average battlefield experience of 8.3 years (SD = 5.6). Of the total, only 109 (35.9%) had participated in snakebite awareness programs in terms of workshops (52 (17.1%)) or as a component of professional training (89(29.3%)). 33(10.9%) personnel had a past history of snake bite of which only 6 (18.2%) occurred during duty hours. Identified snakes causing those bites were, hump nosed vipers (n=11, 28.9%), Cobras (n = 5, 13.2%), Cat snakes (n=5, 13.2%), Russell's vipers (n = 4, 10.5%) and Indian kraits (n = 3, 7.9%), and 8 (21.1%) were unidentified snakes. More than 20% of the total were not aware of most of the deadly venomous snakes in Sri Lanka, and over 60% did not have a good understanding about the recommended first aid following a snakebite. Despite encountering snakes during military work is very common, the awareness on snakes, snakebites and relevant first-aid among military personnel is very low. Improved awareness on such aspects would be imperative in minimizing potential health risks associated with snakebites among military troops.

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