

A-08: Public knowledge and behaviour related to coronary heart disease

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One focus for coronary heart disease (CHD) prevention programmes should be on raising awareness and improving public knowledge. The objective of this study was to investigate the public knowledge and behaviour related to CHD.

The Yatinuwara Divisional Secretariat Division has 95 Gramasevaka Divisions. Four rural and 2 urban Gramasevaka Divisions were selected randomly from them. Using electoral lists, 300 adults (125 males), 150 rural adults and 150 urban adults were randomly selected for the study. They were 20-70 years of age. Subjects were asked to rank what they believed to be the most important causes of heart disease. Additional questions in the survey, identified their knowledge regarding other environmental factors that predispose to CHD. The chi square test was used for statistical analysis.

Smoking, hypertension, diabetes mellitus and eating food high in fat and not eating adequate amount of fruits and vegetables were considered very important causes of CHD by 46%, 12%, 2%, 37% and 9% of subjects with minimal differences between sex and age. There was a significant difference in the responses in subjects from different education levels ($p < 0.01$). 45% of those unemployed and 52% of manual workers were unaware of the importance of the above risk factors. Significant differences ($p < 0.01$) also did exist between social groups in beliefs about the impact of external environmental factors such as stress, lack of exercise, overweight and not eating adequate fruits and vegetables on the development of CHD.

The above differences related to levels of education and social class emphasize the importance of matching educational programmes to the current beliefs and state of awareness of the target population. Limited resources should be primarily aimed at sectors of the population which need educational programmes most.