

A-18: Knowledge and attitudes of school children with regard to malaria

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Parasitic and infectious diseases such as malaria, intestinal helminthiasis and tuberculosis have been shown to be important among school-age children. As health education plays an important part in the school curriculum, the objective of this study was to determine the knowledge and attitudes of school children with regard to malaria, an important public health problem in Sri Lanka.

A cross sectional study was carried out with a population consisting of 374 children attending years 8, 9 and 10 in 3 schools situated in the Moneragala District using a self administered questionnaire to assess the knowledge, attitude and practices of children with regard to malaria.

There were 182 males and 192 females, the ages ranging from 12 years to 18 years. 87% of children stated that the most common reason for not attending school is illness with headache (33%), fever (41%) and malaria (26%). These are the commonest illnesses which result in school absenteeism. There was no significant difference between males and females with regard to knowledge about the parasite, the vector, transmission of disease or diagnosis and treatment. The knowledge of female children with regard to the prevention of malaria was significantly better ($p=0.0464$) than male children. The children in year 10 performed significantly better with regard to the knowledge of vector and its habits, clinical disease and prevention of malaria ($p=0.0002$, $p=0.0574$ and $p=0.0009$ respectively). When the entire study population was considered 20% of the children felt that the community was responsible for control of the disease, 30% felt that the household was responsible and 51% felt that the individuals themselves had the responsibility for control of the disease.

As 30% of children felt that the household was responsible for malaria control and 50% felt that the individual was responsible this fact should be utilized to develop malaria control strategies.