



PATTERN OF METHADONE POISONING CASES AMONG CHILDREN REFERRED TO THE MALAYSIA NATIONAL POISON CENTRE

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Objective: Methadone is a narcotic drug prescribed for the treatment of opioid dependence in Malaysia. Methadone poisoning can be fatal, especially in children or even in adults if used without a prescription.

This study evaluates the pattern of methadone poisoning referred to the Malaysia National Poison Centre (NPC) with the objective to strengthen policy decisions and prevention efforts.

Method: All methadone poisoning cases referred to the NPC in a period of 9 years (2006 – 2014) are incorporated in this study. Demographic data include age, location of exposure, and circumstances of exposure. Data are analyzed using the descriptive statistical method.

Result: There are 40.2% cases involving children ages up to 14 years old from a total of 132 reported cases. The highest percentage, 84.9%, affects age category of 1-4 years old, followed by 5 -14 years old accounting for 13.2%. Incidents involving infants up to 12 months was 1.9%. All of the cases (100%) occur at home. From the overall cases, 94.3% are accidental poisoning and 5.7% are intentional poisoning. The findings indicate an increased trend of accidental poisoning among children which stood at 1.9 % in 2006 rising to 20.8% in 2011/2012.

Discussion and Conclusion: This study shows a trend of increasing cases of accidental methadone poisoning particularly among the young population in Malaysia. The findings of this study could be used to support the need for policy change in methadone substitution therapy such as improved guidelines, heightened awareness program on the safety issue of methadone, formulation change and regulatory control. Introduction of specially designed methadone bottles, striking solution colour, child resistant cap, proper labelling and storage are some of the approaches to curb accidental methadone poisoning among young children.