

Oral Abstracts

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CHANGES IN THE POPULATION INCIDENCE OF DELIBERATE SELF POISONING IN NORTH WESTERN PROVINCE OF SRI LANKA – SIGNS FOR A DECLINE

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Objectives: Deliberate self poisoning has been a major public health issue in rural parts of Sri Lanka. We noted recent speculation among hospital staff that the number of deliberate self poisoning cases was declining. A large proportion of self poisoning patients are treated in hospitals and evidence of declining admissions could be a signal of decreasing self poisoning rates in these rural districts. In this study, data collected from all hospitals in Kurunegala district in North Central Province over period of four years were analysed to assess the changes in the population incidence of deliberate self poisoning.

Methods: Data were collected from 43 peripheral hospitals from 2011 to 2014 as part of hospital based cluster RCT on promoting treatment guidelines using different educational approaches. Patients who were transferred from other hospitals outside the district were excluded using their addresses and village names. Population data of Kurunegala district together with the subgroups of age and gender were used to calculate the annual population incidences for different age groups and genders.

Results: In 2011, the population incidence of deliberate self poisoning was 235/100,000 for the total population. This rate declined to 231/100,000 in 2012, 178/100,000 in 2013 and 162/100,000 in 2014. This decline was similar in both genders. The 15 to 19 age group recorded the highest population incidence (627/100,000) in 2011 and decreased to only 385/100,000 in 2014. Females aged 15 to 19 years had the highest population incidence (823/100,000) in 2011. This declined to 523/100,000 in 2014, although this sub-group continued to have the highest risk. The proportion of self poisonings aged between 15 to 35 was similar in 2011 (75%) and 2014 (71%).

Conclusion: The population incidence of self poisoning in Kurunegala district of North Western Province of Sri Lanka decreased remarkably from 2011 to 2014. The decline occurred fairly uniformly across all age groups. Young people remain the group at highest risk of self poisoning. It is important to conduct similar investigations in other rural districts in Sri Lanka to identify if this is a nationwide change in deliberate self-harm. It is also essential to assess whether the total number of suicides has also declined over this time or whether this reflects a change in methods of deliberate self-harm being used. However, a real decline seems the most likely explanation and may reflect increasing prosperity and optimism following the end of the decades of civil war.