



Spider bite related fatality in Thailand, was public opinion overly influenced by the media?

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Objective: In 2014, a male died following a spider bite in Thailand. This was followed by intensive media coverage over the next three weeks. This survey aims to evaluate public opinion and understanding of the case. The primary objective was to determine whether the public accurately understood the main details of the case.

Methods: A cross-sectional survey was conducted at the out-patient units of Siriraj Hospital, during August and September 2015. Survey questions referred to the aforementioned patient. The cause of death was confirmed to be from secondary bacterial infection. Participants included patients and visitors to the hospital. The survey was undertaken in the Thai language. The self-administered questionnaires included questions of the participants' characteristics, their awareness of the particular case, their source of information, the cause of death to their understanding and the influence of the news on their negative feeling toward spiders.

Results: A total of 1855 people participated in the survey. The mean age was 42.5 years (SD 15.2). Most participants were female (66.7%), held a bachelor degree (42.0%), and resided in Bangkok (60.1%). Of the participants, 1748 responded to the question of whether or not they were aware of the case. Of these, 1213 (69.4%) indicated awareness of the case, with the source of awareness indicated as through television (83.2%), Internet (17.3%), newspaper (14.6%), radio (5.3%), and through conversations (4.4%). Participants who lived outside Bangkok had association with awareness of the case (OR 1.09, 95%CI 1.01, 1.16). Of the 1213 participants aware of the case, 1146 respondents indicated their understanding of the cause of the death. However, only 367 participants (32%) correctly understood the cause of death. Factors associated with misinterpreting cause of death included level of education lower than bachelor degree (OR 1.33, 95%CI 1.23, 1.43) and being non-healthcare workers (OR 1.48, 95%CI 1.34, 1.63). Sixty percent of participants with awareness of the case indicated that the news had influenced their perception of spiders. Moreover, 31.7 percent of participants indicated that spiders should be eradicated.



Conclusion: Of the general public who participated in the survey, the majority were aware of the case concerning the spider bite related fatality, however most had not correctly understood the reported facts. It is therefore proposed that medical content presented in the media should be reviewed, and the method of delivering information to the general public should be improved.