ORAL PRESENTATIONS

[ID-O#055] Epidemiology and risk factors of snake bites in the paediatric age group: A multi-provincial study in Sri Lanka.

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Background: Snake bites in children are a potentially serious yet preventable environmental hazard in most parts of Sri Lanka. This study aimed to assess the patterns of paediatric snake bites across six provinces of Sri Lanka.

Methods: This study included all children who presented with snake bites over past 3 years (2021–2024) across seven referral hospitals in six provinces of Sri Lanka (North Central, Central, Eastern, Western, Southern, Northern). Case-control study for risk factors was conducted in the two referral hospitals of North Central province. Data were collected by trained medical graduates.

Results: The study recruited 710 children with snake bites and mean age was 12 years (range 0.5–18 years). Male children (419, 59.1%) outnumbered female children ($p>0.05$). The snake was confirmed in 398 children (56.1%); highly venomous (178, 44.7%), moderately venomous (104, 26.1%), mildly venomous (7, 1.8%) and non-venomous (109, 27.4%). Transfer rate was 26.3%. The majority of venomous snake bites were due to Sri Lankan hump- nosed pit viper (96, 54.5%), Russel's viper (32, 17.9%) followed by Krait (25, 14.1%), cobra (11, 6.3%), and sea snake bites (2, 1.1%). Harmful first-aids included applying a tight tourniquet (33.3%), and lime over bite-site (14.8%). Twenty children were transferred to intensive care units. Potential risk factors for snake bites were not wearing protective foot wear outdoors ($p<0.05$), farming ($p<0.05$), not carrying a torchlight in the dark ($p<0.05$) and detection of snakes in home garden ($p<0.001$).

Conclusion: Interventions to enhance snake identification and avoid harmful first-aids should be evaluated in the light of observations of this study. Community based educational interventions to encourage snake-bite prevention practices and ensure home environmental safety should be studied as cost-effective measures of reducing snake-bite burden in children.