

Awareness of oral cancer disease and its risks factors among adults patients in the out-patient department, Teaching Hospital Jaffna

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Background and objective: The prevalence of oral cancer disease is high in Sri Lanka, especially in Northern Province. It is a preventable disease as its occurrence mainly depends on the lifestyle practices. Adequate awareness regarding early manifestations and the risk factors of oral cancer disease among the public will help to reduce the burden of the disease. This study aimed to assess the awareness of oral cancer disease and its risk factors and their association with socio-demographic factors among adult patients in the Out-Patient Department of Teaching Hospital Jaffna.

Methods: An analytical cross-sectional study was conducted among 402 adult participants who were recruited by systematic sampling. An interviewer-administered questionnaire consisting of socio-demographic characteristics and questions regarding awareness of oral cancer disease and its risk factors was used. A scoring method was developed and the results were statistically analyzed with chi-square test and risk assessment by using SPSS (v26) software.

Results: Among 402 participants, 117 (44%) were males; 186 (46.3%) had a satisfactory level of awareness regarding oral cancer disease, which showed a statistically significant association with sex, education, and occupation ($p \leq 0.05$). A majority of participants identified the possible sites of oral cancer (inner surface of oral cavity (84.1%), gingiva (66.2%) and tongue (59.2%)) and associated symptoms (white and red patches (69.4%), lump in oral cavity (75.9%), non-healing ulcers (75.9%) and burning sensation (60%)) but 38.3% had a misconception that oral cancer is contagious. In the sample, 47.7% had a satisfactory level of awareness regarding risk factors of oral cancer; 95.5% and 89.6%, respectively, stated that chewing betel with areca nut, lime and tobacco and smoking were risk factors, while only 63.9% identified alcohol consumption as a risk factor. Males had less awareness (16.7%) compared to females (31.1%) regarding risk factors (OR 2.052, 95% CI 1.373 -3.067). Risk factor awareness showed a statistically significant association with sex and occupation.

Conclusion and recommendations: Awareness regarding oral cancer disease and its risk factors in Jaffna is still lacking, even though awareness and screening programmes exist. This deficit should be compensated by reassessing and establishing these programmes at primary health care units along with the active involvement of mass media in educating the people.

Keywords: Oral cancer, Early manifestations, Northern Province, Sri Lanka, Public awareness, Risk factors