

# APACPH 2020



## PUBLIC HEALTH IN THE NEW NORMAL

5TH - 9TH DECEMBER 2020



**VIRTUAL CONFERENCE**

**WEBCAST LIVE FROM COLOMBO, SRI LANKA**







**Sri Lanka Medical  
Association**



**Asia Pacific Academic Consortium  
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**Faculty of Medicine  
University of Colombo**

# **APACPH 2020**

## **PUBLIC HEALTH IN THE NEW NORMAL**

# **Proceedings and Abstracts**

**Virtual Conference**

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(82.8%) acknowledged that travelling within the country is safe during the outbreak. In the adjusted model good knowledge was associated with the job category ( $p=0.05$ ), number of family members at home ( $p=0.04$ ).

**Conclusion:** Although overall knowledge was satisfactory among HCWs, there are few areas that needs to be improved which is crucial especially in the in the face of rapid spread of the pandemic.

**Abstract ID: 230**

**INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOURS ON COVID-19 THROUGH SOCIAL AND MASS MEDIA IN SRI LANKA: AN ONLINE SURVEY**

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**Introduction and objectives:** The use of social and mass media increased greatly during the COVID-19 pandemic. An online survey was conducted to assess the use of social and mass media for obtaining information on COVID-19 in Sri Lanka.

**Methods:** A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted using a pre-tested online questionnaire (n=304) which assessed usage, preferences and trustworthiness of various social and mass media platforms. Chi square test was used to determine the associations.

**Results:** Mean age of respondents were (30.62±8.84) and 213 (70.1%) were females. The respondents received information on COVID-19 most frequently through social media as WhatsApp (n=204,67.1%), Facebook (n=154,50.7%), YouTube (n=141,46.4%), Google+ (n=53,17.4%) and Twitter (n=41, 13.5%). Television was the main form of mass media used (n=168,55.3%) with 28.3% (n=86) and 20.4% (n=67) using radio and newspapers respectively. The trustworthiness of news received from social media was low with the highest trustworthiness reported from Google+ (n=183,23.0%) and Twitter(n=67,22.0%). Comparatively higher percentages of

trustworthiness were seen for television (n=127,41.8%) and radio (n=87,28.6%). Being educated only up to advanced level was statistically significantly associated with higher use of WhatsApp ( $\chi^2=41.0$ ;  $p<0.01$ ). Similarly, males were more frequent users of Facebook ( $\chi^2=24.85$ ;  $p<0.01$ ). More than one third of the sample (n=118,38.8%) were very satisfied about the international news, while the corresponding figure for local news was 28.6% (n=87).

**Conclusion:** There is a high use of social media to seek information on COVID-19; however, the trustworthiness of such information is low. Mechanisms should be developed to monitor the information circulated on social media platforms.

**Abstract ID: 235**

**LEVEL OF EXPRESSION OF SELECTED GENES IN PROTEIN KINASE RAF-MEK-ERK1/2 PATHWAY AND ITS ASSOCIATION WITH ORAL SQUAMOUS CELL CARCINOMA.**

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**Introduction and Objectives:** Oral cancer is highly prevalent in Asian countries. In Sri Lanka it's the commonest cancer among male population. In the present study, we aimed to determine the level of expression of selected genes in protein kinase pathway in oral squamous cell carcinoma (OSCC).

**Methods:** Fourteen histologically confirmed primary OSCC and histologically normal adjacent tissues were included in the study. The focus gene array was used to detect the gene expression of the

intracellular signalling cascade of the Ras-Raf-MEK-ERK pathway. The experiments were done in duplicate, keeping the GAPDH, HPRT1, and RPL-30 gene as the housekeeping gene.

**Results:** In cancer tissues, the HRAS gene had the mean expression  $27.54 \pm 44.97$ . The normal tissues, the gene expression for the HRAS had a mean value of  $5.57 \pm 2.83$ . The ARAF and BRAF genes showed a 3.8 and 2.6-fold increment in cancer tissues, while CRAF has shown a 215.2-fold increment. The gene expression of ERK 1 and ERK 2 was 0.68 and 2.00, respectively. The C-FOS gene in the cancer samples had a mean value of  $5.98 \pm 3.69$  while normal tissues, had mean value of  $5.40 \pm 3.32$ . VEGF-A gene in tumors showed a 3.6-fold increment while normal adjacent tissue showed 2.18-fold.

**Conclusions:** Although these tissues were negative based on histopathological findings, there may be molecular changes in these tissues. In oral cancers, a theory called “field cancerization” is being suggested, which explains the unavailability of specific differences between oral cancer and the adjacent tissue in focus gene array.

**Abstract ID: 242**

**STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION ASSOCIATED WITH COVID-19: A QUALITATIVE STUDY**

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**Introduction and Objectives:** Stigma and discrimination associated with COVID-19 negatively impact on psychological health of the affected as well as on preventive work in a country. Hence, we explored the nature of stigma and discrimination associated with COVID-19 in patients following hospital discharge in Sri Lanka.

**Methods:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted via telephone among 182 COVID-19 patients discharged from March to May 2020, from four main hospitals treating COVID. The responses for open-ended questions on experienced stigma and discrimination since diagnosis in multiple settings were analyzed using thematic analysis.

**Results:** Of the 139 (76.4%) patients responded, the majority (56%) felt that they have been stigmatized. Social discrimination included barriers in accessing basic needs, insulting, blaming, defaming, spreading rumors and no support during emergencies. Workplace discrimination included loss of jobs, not allowing re-entry and loss of earning due to self-employment. Discrimination by healthcare workers included breaching of confidentiality, lack of respect, not providing health services and communication barriers. Discrimination has led to social isolation, not seeking help and severe psychosocial issues affecting their family relationships. Irresponsible media reporting and sensationalism of news coverage leading to breaching of privacy and confidentiality, defaming, false allegations and reporting household details without consent were perceived as the main factors underlying the public views.

**Conclusions:** Stigma and discrimination experienced by COVID-19 patients in the society, workplaces and in healthcare facilities have serious negative consequences at individual and family level. Regulations on responsible media reporting including an effective risk communication strategy to counteract its effects are strongly recommended.

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