

Health problems related to rubber tapping in Welikala, Horana, Sri Lanka

Kalubowila NS¹, Vidanapathiraja M¹

¹*Faculty of Medical Sciences, University of Sri Jayewardenapura.*

Objectives: Rubber tapping causes health problems such as medical and musculo-skeletal problems, and health hazards. It varies from musculoskeletal aches to structural damage and poisoning due to chemicals. This study was conducted to describe the health problems of rubber tappers in Welikala, Sri Lanka.

Methods: A descriptive cross sectional study was conducted among a randomly selected 100 tappers using interviewer administered questionnaire. Anonymous data were analyzed using SPSS statistical package.

Results: Majority were females between 50-69 years. Twenty nine percent had medical problems. The most common musculoskeletal problem was backache (54%). There was a significant association between upper limb pain and number of trees tapped per day ($p < 0.05$). The health hazards included cuts (44%), eye injuries (32%), chemical injuries (26%) and snake bites (8%). Knowledge regarding safety measures had been gained by 30% tappers.

Conclusions: Usual medical problems were not common among rubber tappers. The most common hazard was cut injuries. There was no significant relationship of musculoskeletal problems with age or gender of the tappers, and carrying method of latex, but with number of tapped trees. The safety training programmes had been focused on safe use of equipment and agrochemicals but not on safe postures during work. Awareness programs should be conducted regularly.