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**Awareness and self-reported practices regarding leptospirosis among paddy farmers in Weligepola Medical Officer of Health area in Ratnapura District, Sri Lanka**

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**Background:** The impact of leptospirosis is huge since it causes high morbidity and mortality while remaining as a neglected disease due to unawareness and gaps in using preventive measures.

**Objective:** To assess the awareness and practices regarding leptospirosis among paddy farmers in the Weligepola MOH area in Ratnapura District, Sri Lanka.

**Method:** A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among 344 paddy farmers from selected five Grama Niladari divisions. Data were collected using a content validated, pre-tested, interviewer-administered questionnaire from the participants recruited through a multistage cluster sampling technique. Socio-demographic characteristics of the participants, awareness of leptospirosis, and self-reported practices to leptospirosis were obtained. Ethical approval was granted by the University of Sabaragamuwa. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

**Results:** The majority of the sample were males (71.5%) and between 18-80 years. Fifty-two percent of respondents had a good awareness of leptospirosis. Though, almost all farmers (99%) had heard about leptospirosis, their knowledge of the disease reservoir was mainly restricted to rats and other rodents. Farmers' awareness of clinical features of leptospirosis was average ( $54.8 \pm 28.4$ ) while awareness of organ involvement was insufficient ( $37.3 \pm 38.6$ ). Most of the farmers knew about available preventive methods ( $85.6 \pm 18.8$ ), but only a minority of farmers used boots (16.3%) and gloves (18.6%). Satisfactory practices were reported using natural preventive methods including maintaining proper drainage of water and avoiding the accumulation of waste in the environment. Though most farmers were aware of doxycycline as prophylaxis (98%), only 66% of them used it. Farmers' adherence to the national recommendation was found to be unsatisfactory due to fear about the side effects of doxycycline and ignorance.

**Conclusion:** Although, the overall knowledge of farmers regarding leptospirosis was average, findings indicated important gaps in knowledge. The practice of using personal preventive measures and adherence to national recommendations seemed to be insufficient.