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## ASSESSING THE LEVEL OF AWARENESS ON CUTANEOUS LEISHMANIASIS INFECTION AMONG PEOPLE LIVING IN POLPITHIGAMA MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH (MOH) AREA IN KURUNEGLA DISTRICT, SRI LANKA

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### ABSTRACT

Cutaneous Leishmaniasis (CL) is the most common manifestation of Leishmaniasis reported in Sri Lanka. According to the records from 2009- 2016, there is nearly an 18-fold increase in Kurunegala District indicating the requirement of an effective control programme. Community awareness on a disease in local communities is a key element in successful disease management. Since this is an emerging infectious disease in the country, level of awareness on the disease among the general public has not assessed in detail. Therefore, the objective of this study was to determine the level of awareness regarding the disease and knowledge gaps among local residences in Polpithigama Medical Officer of Health (MOH) area which is a disease endemic area in Kurunegala District of Sri Lanka. A total of 127 households were visited randomly and their knowledge regarding the disease was gathered using an interviewer administered questionnaire. Of them 44 households indicated with past cases and 83 were recorded with no past records. Interestingly, 45% (n= 57), had no idea about CL. None of them were aware of the causative agent and 80.3% (n=102) was not having any clue on disease transmission. The majority was not responsive to biting time of vectors (98.4%, n=125), diagnostic methods (98.4%, n=125) and protective measures against vector biting (91.3%, n=116). There was no significant impact on improving awareness of the disease with past disease incidence as indicated by two sample t test analyses ( $P > 0.05$ ). Inadequate knowledge and awareness of leishmaniasis in this endemic area is a major challenge in disease control. It is recommended that the health authorities should take immediate steps to improve awareness of this disease among endemic communities.

**Keywords:** Leishmaniasis, Awareness, Polpithigama, Sri Lanka