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Knowledge attitudes and practices on infection control among funeral industry workers in selected provinces in Sri Lanka

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Objectives: The study was aimed at assessing the knowledge, attitudes and practices of embalmers and their helpers regarding infection control.

Methods: A descriptive cross sectional study was carried out among funeral industry workers in Colombo, Gampaha and Matara districts in 2014, using an interviewer based questionnaire. A score of 1 was given for each correct response, attitude or practice. A total score of more than 75% was considered good, 50-74% moderate and less than 50% poor for each category.

Results: Our study included 70 participants of which 41(59%) employed as embalmers and 29(41%) employed as helpers. 47(67%) participants had been employed for >10 years.

The participants had an overall moderate knowledge (52%), poor Attitudes (42%) and moderate practices (53%) regarding infection control. While 42(60%) respondents had heard of Hepatitis B, of them 41(98%) had poor knowledge regarding its transmission, symptoms and prevention. Further, 66(94%) respondents were unaware of the availability of Hepatitis B vaccine. 38 (54%) respondents identified pricks / cuts as occupational accidents but only 19 (50%) of them knew it could transmit infections, while 33(47%) individuals stated embalming bodies infected with HIV, HBV or rabies was acceptable.

Thirty six (52%) individuals did not adhere to good practices during cadaver handling. Among them, 15 (42%) embalmers claimed to have embalmed bodies infected with HIV, HBV or Rabies. Although none had received formal training in cadaver handling and infection control, all respondents wanted to obtain professional training in this regard.

Conclusions: Majority of funeral industry workers are at risk of occupational exposure to infectious agents. Formal training programmes and guidelines are needed to improve the embalming practices and reduce the possibility of occupational infection in this group.