

The effect of Sinhala and Tamil new year on self poisoning admissions in Sri Lanka

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Introduction: The Sinhala and Tamil festival is celebrated every 14th of April by about 88% of the Sri Lankan population. Accidental injury with fire crackers and road traffic accidents are known to increase during this period. We wanted to investigate whether this festival period is associated with an increase in intentional self poisoning.

Objective: To determine whether there is significant increase in poisoning attempts during new year period in Sri Lanka and whether the level of income, alcohol use and conflicts have influence on the likelihood of self-poisoning.

Methods: Three teaching hospitals were selected in three different provinces and all the demographical data were collected prospectively from all patients presenting with self poisoning to these hospitals from 1st January 2007 to 31st July 2009. Reasons for attempted suicide during festival period (13-04-2009 to 19-04-2009) were recorded using a standard questionnaire.

Proportional differences during festival and other periods were statistically analysed using statistical software STATA -10.

Results: There were 9488 admissions due to self poisoning during this period. The proportion of poison admissions during festival period and other days of the study period was 15/day and 10/day respectively (95% CI -0.05% to 0.16%; p= 0.32) (graph01). During festival periods 64/104 of self-poisoning admissions were women and 90/104 were age limit between 16 and 50 years old. Most common types of poisons of prescribed or over the counter medicines over dose, pesticide poisoning and plant poisoning.

In 2009 new year period from 90 patients; 69% of the cases were due to financial problem and conflict with other family members, 17% due to failure of love affairs, 5% under influence of alcohol and the remaining cases were due to chronic diseases and psychiatric disorders. Most had (39%) monthly income less than US\$ 90 and 10% were unemployed.

Conclusion: Cases self poisoning were high during festival period, but it is not statistically significant. The graph shows that admissions increase immediately after the festival days. Most of the patients were young adults. They were from low income group. Financial crises just after festival may be a precipitating factor for the suicidal tendency. Better financial planning by people in the lower social strata may reduce deliberate self harm.

Graph 01

