

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF AN ALCOHOL EDUCATION PROGRAM IN CHANGING THE DRINKING PATTERN IN RURAL SRI LANKA

Prabhasha Siriwardhana¹, Sampath Thennakoon² Andrew Dawson¹, Ranil Abeysinghe³
¹South Asian Clinical Toxicology Research Collaboration, Faculty of Medicine, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka, ²Department of Community Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, University of Peradeniya, ³Department of Psychiatry, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka.

Introduction: One of the fastest growing issues Sri Lanka faces today is the excessive consumption of alcohol. The current existing preventive methods had not a significant impact on decreasing societal use of this substance. We believe that properly educating the community about physical and social effects of alcohol may limit its excessive usage.

Objective: To assess the effectiveness of an educational program on changing the drinking pattern of alcohol in a rural community.

Methodology: A community based comparative study of an intervention (n=121) group and a control (n=125) group. A community education program using street drama, poster campaigns, leaflets, and individual and group discussions was conducted in the intervention village for 6 months. The control group had no intervention during this period. The Alcohol Use Disorder Identification Test (AUDIT) was used to measure drinking pattern before and after the intervention. The control group too was assessed with AUDIT tool on two occasions corresponding to the pre and post test of the intervention area.

Results: After the intervention prevalence of low-risk drinking had increased to 53.8% from 33.1%, hazardous level has decreased to 26.1% from 29.8%, harmful level had decreased to 11.8% from 21.5% and dependent level had decreased to 7.6% from 15.7% in the intervention area (Chi square 14.06, p=0.007). No significant difference was observed in the control group (Chi square 3.53. p=0.472).

Conclusion: The alcohol education program has significantly changed for better the drinking pattern of a rural community in Sri Lanka. We believe that this type of educational programs could be used in other communities to reduce risky and hazardous drinking patterns.