

## THE ROLE OF PESTICIDE DEALERS IN PROVIDING INDIVIDUALS WITH SUICIDAL THOUGHTS ACCESS TO PESTICIDES IN SRI LANKA

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**Introduction:** In Sri Lanka pesticides continue to be a major cause of admission for intentional self-poisoning. Previous studies revealed that every one sixth of intentional poisoning cases accessed pesticides through dealers. However, little work has been done with dealers to help them identify and prevent intentional poisoning.

**Objective:** To understand the role of pesticide dealers in providing access and exploring the possibility of their involvement in prevention.

**Methods:** 22 pesticide dealers were interviewed in a two step interview process. The first part was a structured questionnaire that focused on description of the outlet, customer behaviour, and the recent bans. The second part was a semi-structured questionnaire with a range of open-ended questions to elicit stories of dealer's response to high risk buyers.

**Results:** Dealers felt that they had good skills in recognizing high risk buyers but they all could remember incidents where they had sold pesticides which were used in a self-harm attempt. Dealers took precautions when selling pesticides to female customers, people under the influence of alcohol, teenagers, and with people with chronic disease or disabilities. The most common strategy employed by dealers when faced with a high risk buyer was cross-questioning and observing the customers behavior. Dealers' identified a number of behaviors they considered typical of high risk buyers such as sadness, excessive perspiration, nervousness, shyness, disheveled appearance, aggressive, garbled speech and/ or trembling. Dealers' responses to high risk buyers included attempts to offer counseling, asking the customer to leave, alerting other nearby dealers and / or family members, asking the buyer to come back the following day, informing the police and selling the customer a non-toxic product. Dealers felt that they would benefit from additional training about self harm and how to identify high risk buyers. There was no evidence of any penalties from the community if dealers sold to people who attempted self-harm.

**Conclusion:** Accessing pesticides for self-harm through dealers' remains a problem in the community. More comprehensive dealers training programs are urgently required. In addition support needs to be given to the sales people about strategies to prevent access to pesticides for people they believe to be at high risk. A trial of training and safety for dealers which includes help identifying high risk buyers and providing effective strategies needs to be assessed further.