KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES RELATED TO HELMINTH INFECTIONS AMONG MOTHERS LIVING IN A SUBURBAN AREA OF SRI LANKA

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Abstract. Intestinal helminth infections are a global problem. We assessed maternal knowledge among Sri Lankans about helminth infections and patterns of anthelmintic use to treat their children. We conducted this cross sectional study at the University Pediatric Unit in Teaching Hospital Ragama, during September 2011 to November 2011. Two hundred children admitted to the Pediatric Unit and their mothers were randomly recruited into the study. An interviewer administered questionnaire asking about socio-demographic factors, availability of sanitary facilities and safe drinking water, knowledge about intestinal infections and anthelmintic use. Nearly all the mothers interviewed reported having a safe toilet and 62% reported having safe drinking water. Eighty-four percent of children were given anthelmintic medication periodically irrespective of symptoms. Of these, 39.3% were treated every 3 months, 55.3% every six months and 5.3% annually. Of the children who received routine anthelmintic treatment, 81% had risk factors for helminth infection and 62.5% had evidence of a helminth infection in the past. There was no statistically significant association between routine anthelmintic medicine use and the presence of risk factors (odds ratio 0.28; confidence interval 0.04-1.31) or having symptoms of helminth infection (odds ratio 1.67; CI 0.73-3.8). Maternal knowledge regarding helminth infection was poor. Health education programs regarding helminth infections and their treatment are indicated.

Keywords: anthelmintics, helminth, knowledge, practices, mother, Sri Lanka