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AWARENESS ABOUT SPINAL CORD INJURIES AMONG SCHOOL ATHLETES OF THE KANDY EDUCATIONAL ZONE

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Spinal cord injuries (SCI) most commonly result from road traffic accidents, falling from a height, high velocity crashes and certain types of sports accidents. Even though sports related SCI is rare, it carries a high rate of mortality and morbidity which limits the day to day and sport activities of the athlete because of the altered quality of life that often accompanies such injuries.

Although the effect of the initial trauma is irreversible, the spinal cord is at risk from further injury by injudicious early management. Therefore, the emergency services such as proper handling and transferring must be available to avoid such complications in unconscious patients. In this study, the focus is to evaluate the awareness of SCI among school athletes.

Self-administered questionnaires were distributed among 243 school athletes (approximately 70% around 15-17 years) of both genders (males-50.2%, females-49.8%) in 10 schools in the Kandy educational zone. Among them, 145 (58%) had no idea about SCI. Out of the 132 responses of 98 students (39%) who knew something about SCIs, 5.58% thought they had knowledge regarding anatomy and further 5.58% regarding etiology. Further, 1.49% knew about handling and transferring techniques and 18.21% were correct about clinical features. The rest of the 3% responses were not specific about their knowledge. However, when the total sample was considered, it was evident that most of the athletes did not have sufficient knowledge regarding SCIs. Although this study was limited to a small geographical area, the results suggest that the awareness of spinal cord injuries was inadequate among school athletes.

Further studies with a wider population should be conducted in relation to this issue and assess the need for programmes to raise the awareness of the community including the groups at high risk of SCI.