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Trends and Patterns of Acute Paediatric Poisoning: A two-year study from Base Hospital, Valaichenai, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka

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Background: Acute poisoning in children is a leading cause of paediatric hospitalisation and represents a major public health concern. The patterns and trends of poisoning are influenced by the availability and accessibility of toxic substances to children, along with social, cultural, and economic factors.

Methods: This cross-sectional study reviewed all pediatric acute poisoning admissions to Valaichenai Base Hospital from July 2023 to June 2025. Data on demographics, poison type, and outcomes were retrospectively collected using a structured checklist, refined after a pilot of five cases. Administrative clearance was obtained to access the patient bedhead tickets. Data were analyzed with SPSS version 22.

Results: During the study, 79 children were admitted with poisoning, mostly boys (67.1%) and those aged 1–5 years (68%). Accidental ingestion accounted for almost all cases, with only 3 intentional poisonings (3.8%) among adolescents. Pharmaceuticals were the most common agents (36.7%), followed by household chemicals (31.6%) and plants (21.5%); no pesticide-related cases were recorded. The lucky money plant (11.3%), kerosene (10.1%), and paracetamol (8.8%) were the frequently used toxins. Most children recovered with observation; one (1.3%) required transfer, and there were no deaths.

Conclusion: Paediatric poisoning trends at Base Hospital Valaichenai are consistent with previous hospital-based studies in Sri Lanka, with plant poisons being more common than household agents. Much of the associated morbidity and mortality could be prevented through simple measures such as parental education, safe medication storage, and childproof packaging.

Keywords: Paediatric poisoning, Intentional poisoning, Safe medication, Plant poisoning