

5.5 Prevalence of Atopic Diseases Among Schoolchildren in Western Province

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ABSTRACT

Background : Atopic diseases such as asthma, rhinitis and eczema in children are major public health problems in developed, industrialized countries as well as in some developing countries. Our objective was to assess the prevalence of atopic diseases in schoolchildren in grade 5 in the Western Province of Sri Lanka.

Method : Schoolchildren in grade 5 were selected by stratified – random sampling from 17 schools in the Western Province. Internationally validated ISAAC (International Study of Asthma and Allergies in Childhood) questionnaire, filled by the parent or guardian was used to collect details regarding atopic diseases.

Results : A total of 640 schoolchildren were recruited. Five hundred and eleven (79.8%) returned the completed questionnaire. The mean age was 10 years ($SD \pm 0.3$) and 55.9% of the study population was boys. Prevalence of asthma, rhinitis and eczema was 17%, 21.4% and 5% respectively, while 33.7% had one or more diseases. Thirty three (21.4%) of the children with an atopic disease was on long term treatment. Only the prevalence of allergic rhinitis showed a statistically significant difference between the two sexes, being more common in boys. Less than 30% of affected children's parents recognized that their child had either asthma or rhinitis, whereas a higher number of parents (54.2%) recognized that their child had eczema. Among children with asthma, 44.4% had rhinitis and wheezing was severe enough to disturb their sleep in 52.4% of children.

Conclusion: One in 3 children in grade 5 had either asthma or rhinitis or eczema, but parental recognition of these conditions was poor. Atopic diseases are a significant health problem among schoolchildren in the Western Province.