

Evaluating Perception of Farmers towards the Health Effect of Pesticides: A Cross- Sectional Study in the Oil Palm Plantations of Papar, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Introduction:

Agriculture is an important occupation in Malaysia that generates a major portion of the national revenue. Similar to elsewhere in the world, pesticides are used to boost agricultural production in Malaysian farms. However, chemical pesticides are associated with human health hazard and are not environment friendly as they persist in nature for long periods of time.

Materials and methods:

In this cross-sectional study, we surveyed 19 palm oil plantations in the Sabah district of Malaysia and evaluated the perception of the workers towards pesticide use and their awareness regarding the health effects associated with pesticide exposure.

Results and discussion:

Our analysis shows that most of the workers among the 270 respondents were 30-year-old males with average education, and belonged to the low-income group. Majority opined that they were aware of the health hazards of pesticide use and suffered from symptoms (with mean duration of three days) such as vomiting, diarrhea, skin irritation, and dizziness. Surprisingly, the opinion was almost equally divided on whether they perceived pesticides to be the cause of their health problems, and a major percentage did not avail of medical help. Most of the workers responded that they did not receive any training in pesticide handling. Interestingly, they would not read the safety material even if it was provided.

Conclusion:

We concluded that the farmers should also be educated about alternative and eco-friendly ways of farming. Finally, the plantation management should intervene and proactively advocate the use of safe farming practices.

