Dog Causes Rabies— Community need be Conscious

Some Observations Based on a Study

by

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RABIES is an acute and rapidly fatal infection of animal populations, incurred by man usually by the bite of a rabic animal. It is characterised clinically by a long variable incubation period, a short period of illness due to acute encephalitis ending in death. When it occurs in man it is called hydrophobia (fear of water) which is most characteristic symptom of the disease due to painful spasms of the muscles of deglutition. Rabies is the only communicable disease which carries the mortality of cent percent. Dog bite is major source of this infection.

Rabies has been found on all continents except Australia and Antarctica. It is a big public health problem in India. Cases occur throughout the year in all parts of the country. More than 300 thousand persons bitten by rabid animals undergo anti-rabies treatment annually. This is perhaps associated with the people's habit of keeping animals—dog in their houses without adequate prophylactic measures. Stray dogs roaming about in the streets are additional source of this nuisance.

Objectives

The present study has been conducted to :

(1) Know the community's knowledge, and practices with regard to the rabbies.

(ii) Assess people's reaction to dog menace.

Methodology

The undermentioned procedures were adopted:

(i) Selection of the area and the community,

(ii) Selection of a sample population.

(iii) Formulation of an instrument of interview after pretesting.

(iv) Selection of respondents on incidental basis.

(v) Interview of 200 population.

Identification of Respondents

The respondents included in the scope of this study hail from villages like Chhawla, Nangli Sakrawti, Goela and Tajpur. Transportation facility is the main consideration for the selection of universe of study. The respondents are representing jats, ahirs. brahmins and other communities in the area of study.

45.9 %, 48.7% and 5.5% of the respondents are falling in the income range of 501 and above,. 251-500 and upto 250 per mensem respecti vely. Their predominent occupations are service.

Functional literacy rate as observed in the area is 35%.

Findings

Q. 1. Have you heard or read about rabies? Yes/No.

Ans. 83% of the respondents have heard about rabies. 17% did not hear. Those who had heard about it mentioned the following sources of first hand information :—

Own observation—	91%
Radio —	5%
Other sources —	4%

Q. 2. Do you know how rabies is caused? Yes/No. If yes, how?

Ans. A majority of respondents— 85% could not give rational view. 15% could state lick or bite of rabid dog. The majority of respondents appear to be not holding any rational view of the causation of illness but they simply knew that dog is the major source of infection.

Q. 3. Have you seen a case of rabies? Yes/No.
Please mention signs and symptoms, if yes.

Ans. It is observed from the analysis of data that 73% of the respondents had confirmed that they have seen a case of rabies but could not mention the signs and symptoms of it. 27% of the respondents were all together silent. It is thus evident that rabies and its complications are not yet familiar to the community.

Q.4. Do you know that rabies can cause death? Yes/No.

Ans. 81.5% had observed that rabies is such a fatal infection which ends in death. 81.5% remained neutral. hence it appears that a majority of population did acknowledge the severity of infection. It serves motivating factor for us to be vigilant from the dog menace. It helps making our communication effective against this infection.

Q. 5. Do you know how rabies can be prevented? Yes/No.

Ans. It is observed that 85.7% of the respondents stated killing of dogs, tieing of dogs, injections etc. as the preventable measures of this illness. 14.3% remained silent. It is felt that a majority of respondents are in the know of the preventive measures.

Q.6. In your opinion what treatments should be taken in case of a dog bite?

Ans. 87.4% of the repondents have informed that medical aid from the health centre should be had just after the dog bite. 12.6% believed in domestic treatment like pouring chillies powder on the affected portion. Community seems to be inclined to rational treatment.

Q. 7. Do you think that dogs should be properly protected so that they do not become a public nuisance?

Ans. It is quite encouraging to note that 81% of the respondents were in favour of tiening and killing of dogs. 19% had belief that prophylectic measures i.e. giving injections etc. should be tried. The measures enumerated above reveal that the community is more in favour of protecting dogs and is also prepared to react to dog nuisance in case of a need.

Discussion

The community, as observed in the foregoing pages, seems to be possessing knowlede to some extent rational opinion how to deal with dog nuisance. A majority of people who have either heard or seen cases of rabies in the area do not possess correct knowledge with regard to its signs and symptoms. A wide spread awareness is highly desirable and needs to be created among the community by the professionals and community health workers. No doubt the community is in a position to identify a case of rabies and realise its repurcussions even to the extent of death but the knowledge pertaining to its signs and symptoms need to be strengthened to enable the community to resort to prompt action. This will save ignorant population from meeting the gravest consequence. 85% of the informants clearly indicated community's preparedness to listen to our communication because of presence of an element of fear with this illness. It has also been observed from the data exhibited above that Health Centre over and above other viable places can be centre of effective communication and hence our educational approach needs to be augmented in the existing systems.

The health workers have to to play an immense role in arousing community consciousness in connection with this public health nuisance. It is realised that the people's habit of keeping such animals in their homes can not be discontinued altogether. It is, however, an uphill task to change the behavour of the people. But the community can be conveniently motivated to take such actions or measures like killing and tietning of pet as well as stray dogs when there is a possibility of their becoming a nuisance. Protection of dogs with the immunizing agents should be drastically emphasised to avoid or to keep the scourge of infection at arms length. It is expected that health education can bear fruits in this respect. It is likely to reduce the incidence of illness.

The cooperation of the community should be solicited which will help in minimising the incidents and on the other side, the ignorant people will be protected against the fatal results of this public health menace. Health education undoubtedly will help people to make a right decision of keeping animals or to abandon such practices. This point is of a great significance that most health problems are created by the people. Nothing to exaggerate, the success of any health programme depends considerably on the environment of the people who happen to be active partners. This can be brought about by the concerted efforts of the health functionaries through educational media.

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