INTRODUCTION

Influenza is an acute respiratory tract infection caused by influenza virus, of which there are 3 types - A, B and C. All known pandemics were caused by influenza A strains. The disease is characterized by sudden onset of chills, malaise, fever, muscular pains and cough. It occurs in all countries and affects millions of people every year. Its behaviour is unpredictable. It may occur in several forms. It may smoulder in a community without clinical recognition, being manifest only by serological surveys. It may occur in pandemics every 10-40 years due to major antigenic changes, as occurred in 1918 (Spanish influenza), 1957 (Asian influenza), and 1968 (Hong Kong influenza). Worldwide, the annual epidemics are estimated to result in about 3-5 millions cases of several illness and above 250000 to 500000 deaths.

In epidemiological terms, the hallmark of an influenza is the excess mortality that it causes combined with an enormous burden of ill-health that saps the energy of...
individuals, families and communities throughout the whole world.4 The unique features of influenza epidemics are the suddenness with which they arise, and the speed and ease with which they spread. The short incubation period, large number of subclinical cases, high proportion of susceptible population, short duration of immunity, and absence of cross-immunity, all contributes to its rapid spread.3

More recently, influenza A (H1N1) virus of swine origin emerged in Mexico during the spring of 2009 and was given name – pandemic influenza A (H1N1) 2009 virus.1 The pandemic influenza A ((H1N1) 2009 virus differs in its pathogenicity from seasonal influenza in two key aspects. First as the majority of human population has little or no pre-existing immunity to the virus, the impact of the infection has been in a wider age range, in particular among children and young adults. Secondly, the virus can infect the lower respiratory tract and can cause rapidly progressive pneumonia, especially in children and young to middle aged adults. Following its emergencies in March 2009, pandemic A (H1N1) 2009 virus spread rapidly throughout the world, leading to the declaration of an influenza pandemic by WHO on 2009.5 The world is now in post-pandemic period. In India it causes local outbreaks. During 2014, India reported 937 cases and 218 deaths, a case fatality rate of 23.2 percent.6

Based on knowledge about post-pandemics, the (H1N1) 2009 virus is expected to continue to circulate as a seasonal virus for some years to come. While level of concern is now greatly diminished, vigilance on the part of national health authorities remains important, when the behaviour of H1N1 virus as a seasonal virus cannot be reliably predicted.7 On 26th September 2011 WHO has adapted a new nomenclature as influenza A (H1N1) pdm09.8

Public and political awareness of the ever-present potential of a worldwide pandemic needs to be strengthened. Despite this century’s pandemics, influenza remains a poorly understood and appreciated infection.4 Knowledge regarding swine flu is crucial to control and prevent the outbreak of this disease and also to protect from illness. Studies in rural areas in India regarding swine flu are very sparse. So the present research was undertaken to assess the existing knowledge among rural community regarding swine flu. This will be helpful to plan awareness raising program among rural community i.e. in developing information, education and communication.

**Objectives**

- To study the awareness of H1N1 Influenza (Swine flu) among rural population.
- To find out the association between socio demographic variables and awareness of H1N1 Influenza (swine flu).

**METHODS**

**Study design:** Cross sectional study.

**Study period:** September to November 2017.

**Study area**

Study was carried out in three villages of Chittoor district, Andhra Pradesh. These three villages were Amudala Kona, Rupalanaik Thanda, Kothakadapalli where diagnostic/social service camps were conducted in the months of September, October, and November 2017.

**Study subjects**

Study was conducted among rural adults both males and females above 18 years of age, who are permanent resident of these villages and who attended these camps and who were willing to participate and gave informed consent were included in the study.

**Study instrument**

To collect data, structured and pretested questionnaire was used. The proforma included questionnaires to collect sociodemographic information and to assess their level of awareness.

**Data collection technique**

Eligible adults who attended the diagnostic/social service camps were interviewed. The study subjects were explained the purpose of the study and informed consent was taken from them. The study subjects were interviewed about their socio demographic profile and their level of awareness of H1N1 flu.

**Statistical analysis**

Data were entered in the Microsoft Excel sheet and analysed using SPSS software version 23.00. Data presented as proportions while Chi-square test was used to find out the association. P<0.05 were considered significant.

**RESULTS**

As shown in Table 1, total study population constituted 167 rural adults, out of which 74 (74.44%) were males and 93 (93.56%) were females in the age group of 30 to 75. In this study, a slightly higher proportion belonged to female sex (55.7%). Major fraction of the population in this study was in the age group of 31 to 45 years old.

A majority (97.6%) of the respondents were Hindus. A nuclear family system was seen to be the most common (61.1%) among the population interviewed, followed by the joint family. Literacy was found to be low in the study population. Majority of them (53.9%) of them were
illiterate and were daily labourers 70 (41.9%). Most of the study participants belong to lower middle class and lower class as per modified BG Prasad classification (71.8%).

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of study population (n=167).

| Age (in years)  | Frequency | Percent (%) |
|----------------|-----------|-------------|
| Up to 30       | 37        | 22.2        |
| 31-45          | 57        | 34.1        |
| 46-60          | 50        | 29.9        |
| 61 and above   | 23        | 13.8        |

| Gender         |             |             |
|----------------|-------------|-------------|
| Male           | 74.44       |             |
| Female         | 93.56       |             |

| Literacy       |             |             |
|----------------|-------------|-------------|
| Illiterate     | 90          | 53.9        |
| Primary        | 23          | 13.8        |
| Secondary      | 46          | 27.5        |
| others         | 8           | 4.8         |

| Occupation     |             |             |
|----------------|-------------|-------------|
| Daily labourer | 70          | 41.9        |
| Agriculture    | 49          | 29.3        |
| Housewife      | 29          | 17.4        |
| Others         | 16          | 9.6         |
| Business       | 3           | 1.8         |

| Socioeconomic  |             |             |
|----------------|-------------|-------------|
| Upper class    | 3           | 1.8         |
| Upper middle class | 16   | 9.6       |
| Middle class   | 28          | 16.8        |
| Lower middle class | 62   | 37.1      |
| Lower class    | 58          | 34.7        |

| Religion       |             |             |
|----------------|-------------|-------------|
| Hindu          | 163         | 97.6        |
| Muslim         | 4           | 2.4         |

| Type of family |             |             |
|----------------|-------------|-------------|
| Nuclear        | 102         | 61.1        |
| Joint          | 61          | 36.5        |

Table 2: Source of information of study participants.

| Source of information | n=59 | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------|------|----------------|
| Media                 | 45   | 76.3           |
| Health persons        | 15   | 25.4           |
| Friends               | 4    | 6.8            |

* = Multiple responses.

As depicted in Table 2, media was the most common source of information, 45 (76.3%) in this study followed by health persons like doctors, health care workers, friends (6.8%).

As shown in Figure 1, in this study, out of 167, only 59 (35%) participants previously heard about the disease H1N1 flu.

As shown in Table 3, majority of them 26 (44.1%) didn’t knew the cause of H1N1 flu. Those who knew about H1N1 flu, among them relatively less proportion i.e.17 (28.8%) knew the cause correctly i.e. H1N1 virus. Others, i.e. 11 (18.6%) said cause is mosquito, flies and by touch etc. Almost half of the subjects identified that infection spreads through droplets of coughing and sneezing of infected person (55.9%) and 44.1% responded that they were not aware of mode of transmission of the disease. Regarding knowledge about communicability 44 (74.6%) said disease is communicable. Others 12 (20.3%) participants were not aware of communicability of the disease.

In this study, when asked about the people who are at high risk of getting infected, majority of them were not...
aware i.e. 36 (61%). Only 23 (38.98%) people were aware that working in crowds, poultry and health personnel have more chances of getting this infection and when questioned, whether H1N1 flu causes death, only few of the study participants i.e. 15 (25.4%) were aware that H1N1 flu can cause death while majority were not aware, 38 (64.4%). Only 6 (10.2%) participants said H1N1 flu does not cause death.

Table 4: Distribution of study subjects by responses regarding symptoms.

| Symptoms                          | n=59 | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------------------|------|----------------|
| Fever and cough                   | 36   | 61             |
| Sneezing and Running nose         | 12   | 20.3           |
| Headache                          | 1    | 1.7            |
| Muscle and joint pains            | 11   | 18.6           |
| Sore throat                       | 20   | 33.9           |

As shown in Table 4, Among those who were aware of the disease, 66% participants were aware of few symptoms like fever and cough, sneezing and running nose, headache, sore throat, muscle and joint pains. 33.9% were not aware of any symptoms.

Table 5: Distribution of study subjects based on their knowledge of prevention.

| To prevent swine flu, what you do? | n=59 | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------------------|------|----------------|
| Cover mouth and nose while coughing and sneezing | 23   | 39             |
| Frequent hand washing with soap and water | 11   | 18.6           |
| Avoid crowded places and contact with sick people | 12   | 20.3           |
| Don’t know                          | 27   | 45.8           |

As shown in Table 5, among those who were aware of H1N1 flu, half of them i.e. 27 (45.8%) had no knowledge of preventive measures while 46 (77.9%) participants had knowledge of preventive measures like covering the mouth and nose while coughing and sneezing, frequent hand washing with soap and water and to avoid crowded places and contact with sick people.

As shown in Table 6, only 27.1% and 28.8% of the study subjects were aware that there is treatment and investigation to diagnose H1N1 flu respectively. The awareness regarding availability of vaccine was poor with only 15.3% of study subjects having knowledge about vaccine.

Table 6: Distribution of study subjects based on awareness regarding treatment, investigation, vaccine.

| S. No | Question                          | n=59 | Percentage (%) |
|-------|-----------------------------------|------|----------------|
| 1     | Treatment available                |      |                |
|       | Yes                               | 16   | 27.1           |
|       | No                                | 14   | 23.7           |
|       | Don’t know                        | 29   | 49.2           |
| 2     | Investigation available            |      |                |
|       | Yes                               | 17   | 28.8           |
|       | No                                | 0    | 0              |
|       | Don’t know                        | 42   | 71.2           |
| 3     | Vaccine available                  |      |                |
|       | Yes                               | 9    | 15.3           |
|       | No                                | 1    | 1.7            |
|       | Don’t know                        | 49   | 83.1           |

Table 7: Association between age & awareness of participants who heard of H1N1 flu.

| Age       | Not heard | Heard | Total |
|-----------|-----------|-------|-------|
| Up to 30  | 15        | 22    | 37    |
| 31-45     | 36        | 21    | 57    |
| 46-60     | 37        | 13    | 50    |
| 61 & above| 20        | 3     | 23    |
| Total     | 108       | 59    | 167   |

Chi square=16.391; p=0.001 (p<0.05=sig).

Table 8: Association between education and awareness of participants who heard of H1N1 flu.

| Education      | Not heard | Heard | Total |
|----------------|-----------|-------|-------|
| Illiterate     | 80        | 10    | 90    |
| Primary        | 15        | 8     | 23    |
| Secondary      | 13        | 33    | 46    |
| Graduate and above | 0     | 8     | 8     |
| Total          | 108       | 59    | 167   |

Chi square=64.441; p=0.000 (p<0.05=highly significant).

Table 7, awareness regarding swine flu decreased as the age of the individuals increased. The association between age and awareness of H1N1 flu was found to be statistically significant.

As shown in Table 8, awareness regarding H1N1 flu (heard of H1N1 flu) decreased as level of education of the study participants decreased.

Association between level of education and awareness of Participants who heard of H1N1 flu was found to be statistically significant.

As shown in Table 9, majority of the study participants who never heard of H1N1 flu belonged to lower middle and lower socioeconomic status. Awareness regarding H1N1 flu (heard of H1N1 flu) decreased as socioeconomic status of the study participants decreased.
Association between socio economic status and awareness of Participants who heard of H1N1 flu was found to be statistically significant.

DISCUSSION

In this study, out of 167, only 59 (35%) participants previously heard about the disease H1N1 flu which was lower than other studies. In a study conducted by Kumar et al, among rural population of Belgaum district, Karnataka in India reported 79.6% of the participants had previously heard about swine flu. Similarly study by Kumari in rural area of Jammu also found that more than 90% had heard of swine flu, knew prevalent season and had knowledge of disease symptoms. Also other studies like Bharadva et al in Bhuj, Shilpa et al, Singh et al, Anusha et al reported that more number of participants previously heard of swine flu. In this study, lower level of awareness among the rural people may be due to their illiteracy (53.9%).

Regarding awareness about communicability of H1N1 swine flu, 44 (74.6%) respondents said disease is communicable. Others 12 (20.3%) participants were not aware of communicability of the disease. In a study conducted by Dayanand et al in Nepal found that, 58.5% people were aware about the swine flu as a communicable disease while Rath et al reported that 96% of the Vadodara population in their study were aware that influenza is an infectious disease.

Almost half of the subjects identified that infection spreads through droplets of coughing and sneezing of infected person (49.2%). And 26 (44.1%) responded that they were not aware of mode of transmission of the H1N1 flu. Kumar et al in their study among rural population found that a majority i.e. 67.3% did not know the mode of spread of the H1N1 flu, while only 26.6% said that it was through the inhalation route. In contrast to this study other studies reported higher level of awareness regarding transmission of the H1N1 flu. Rath et al, Shilpa et al, Bharadva et al reported 45%, 56.0%, 60% of awareness among study participants respectively. But Dayanand et al in their study in Nepal revealed that more than 80% of respondents stated swine flu can spread through air and working with infected pigs. But Kumari et al found that 77.4% of the participants knew about transmission of H1N1 flu. Among only those who were aware of the disease, only 66% participants were aware of few symptoms like fever and cough, sneezing and running nose, headache, sore throat, muscle and joint pains. 33.9% were not aware of any symptoms. Similarly Kumar et al in their study among rural population reported that fever was known to 80.9% while 50.8% and 51.8% of the respondents knew cough and cold respectively. Shilpa et al reported that a common symptom of Swine flu such as fever was known to 82.6% while 72.3% and 55.4% of the respondents knew cough and cold as a symptom respectively. Also Dayanand et al found regarding symptoms, around half of the respondents knew fever, cough, sneezing and running nose are major sign and symptoms of swine flu. Good knowledge was found in both sexes regarding sign and symptoms of the disease (92%) in a study conducted by Kumari et al in a rural population of Jammu region.

In this study, regarding treatment and investigation availability for swine flu, only 28.8% people had knowledge. But only 15.3% people were aware about the vaccine availability for the disease. In a study conducted by Kumar et al, 32.7% were aware of free treatment and testing facilities by the government. Kumari et al reported that awareness of availability of its treatment was 88.8%. Shilpa et al reported in their study that half of the participants 50.5% knew there was treatment available and testing facilities by Government for swine flu, while only 10.3% of them had heard about the drug Tamiflu. Only few, i.e., 15.8% of them were aware of swine flu vaccine and 16.3% among them were willing to take it. Dayanand et al found in their study that 93% respondents were unaware about medicine to treat swine flu and 60.6% of them did not know about diagnostic test of swine flu. Bharadva et al reported that 46.9% knew that Influenza A (H1N1) can be diagnosed by Lab test. More than half (59%) knew that treatment is available for disease. Also Naik et al revealed in their study that 53% were aware of test to detect H1N1 flu.

When study participants were asked regarding vaccine of H1N1 flu, survey revealed that only 15.3% people were...
aware about the vaccine availability for the disease. Similarly Kumari et al, Bharadva et al, Anusha et al revealed in their study that knowledge about preventing vaccine was low.\textsuperscript{10,11,14}

In this study, preventive measures like covering the mouth and nose while coughing and sneezing, frequent hand washing with soap and water and to avoidance of crowded places and contact with sick people was known to 32 (54.23%) while 27 (45.8%) had no knowledge of preventive measures. Similarly In a study by Shilpa et al reported that use of mask/handkerchief as a preventive measure against swine flu was known to 81.5%, others said it could be prevented by maintaining personal hygiene 37.0%, avoiding crowded places 32.1% etc.\textsuperscript{12} Kumar et al in their study revealed that the use of the facemask as a preventive measure was known to 45.7% of the study population while others said that it could be prevented by maintaining personal hygiene (30.2%), avoiding crowded places (15.1%), not going to school (9%), by taking Ayurvedic (2%) and homeopathic treatments (1.5%), killing pigs (4.5%), and staying at home (12.1%), while a few (2%) were not aware about how to prevent swine flu.\textsuperscript{9} Rathi et al in their study among literate urban adult population of Vadodara, respondents said disease is preventable and they were aware about preventive measures like frequently washing hands, avoid going out and in crowded places.\textsuperscript{16}

In this study, when asked about the people who are at high risk of getting infected, majority of them were not aware i.e. 36 (61%). Only 23 (38.98%) people were aware that working in crowds, poultry and health personnel have more chances of getting this infection.

When asked whether swine flu causes death, only few of the study subjects among those heard were aware that swine flu can cause death, 15 (25.4%) and majority were not aware, 38 (64.4%). Only 6 (10.2%) participants said swine flu does not cause death.

Tele media was the most common source of information to the study population, 45 (76.3%) in this study. Similarly Kumar et al, Singh et al, Bharadva et al, Anusha et al reported that tele media was the most common source of information of H1N1 flu.\textsuperscript{9,11,13,14}

CONCLUSION

Overall awareness regarding H1N1 flu was low among rural adults. Low awareness denotes poor mass media coverage in rural community. As most of the participants are illiterates, use of TV and mass media as an effective media to dissipate information must be utilized to maximum. Awareness generated by health staff is not significant. Health workers at primary level should be equipped with knowledge and skills in order to create awareness and organize Health education sessions in all areas which can be made more effective by involving public health professionals to develop communication messages.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank Honourable Director cum Vice Chancellor of SVIMS, Sri Padmavathi Medical College (W), Tirupati, Dr T. S. Ravikumar for his encouragement. We are thankful to PHN, Mr S.Shareef for his help during the study. We thank participants of the study for their cooperation.

Funding: No funding sources
Conflict of interest: None declared
Ethical approval: Not required

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Cite this article as: Ade AD, Yamasani B, Kondagunta N. Awareness of H1N1 influenza (swine flu) among rural population of Chittoor district, Andhra Pradesh. Int J Community Med Public Health 2018;5:5171-7.