

BRIDGING THE GAP, THE SRI LANKAN INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AND THE SMOKELESS TOBACCO USAGE

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Sri Lankan indigenous people, “Veddas” are considered as the first people in the country. They are inhabited island’s semi-evergreen monsoon dry forest for at least 16,000 years and probably much longer. They are a special and important community group in any country as they maintain and protect the hereditary values of a nation. Although they are considered as a special community group which should be protected, they have been isolated and disadvantaged since the very past due to many reasons. Thus once a proud and independent people, they are now reduced to tourist attractions facing much more disparities than the general population.

“Veddas” are experiencing disparities in many aspects with compared to the general population. Health disparities are common among those and cannot be ignored due to its magnitude and the impact.

There are many prevailing underline factors for the health disparities that they are experiencing. One is that these specific community group is hard to reach, include and follow-up with the existing health line. Another important underline factor is that some of their own lifestyle patterns which they are putting in to an unhealthy group. One of those negative behaviors is smokeless tobacco usage along with the betel chewing.

Betel chewing has considered as one of the highly embedded feature among indigenous people in Sri Lanka. It is apparent that almost all the indigenous people including very younger ones also chew betel. It is a much normalized behavior among them. Observations suggest that aboriginals had been used native products as an ingredient of the betel chew instead of tobacco and areca nut since the past. But in recent years, commercial tobacco products as an ingredient for the betel chew have become more famous among them. Commercial tobacco products usage along with the betel chew have proven that having oral health complications among these people. When considering about the scientific literature, Jayashantha et al (2016) has found that 97% of Sri Lankan indigenous people including children in Dambana area are areca / betel chewers. Further oral health complications such as erythroplakia and oral submucous fibrosis also detected during that study.

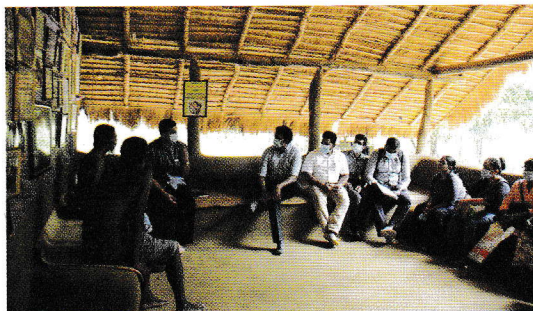
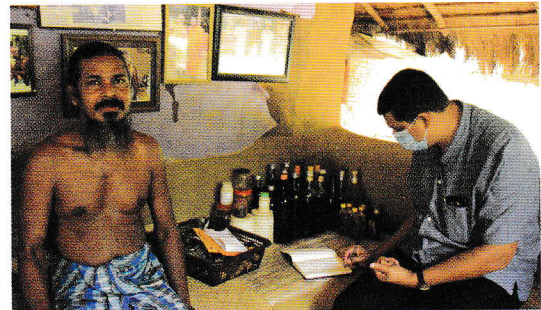
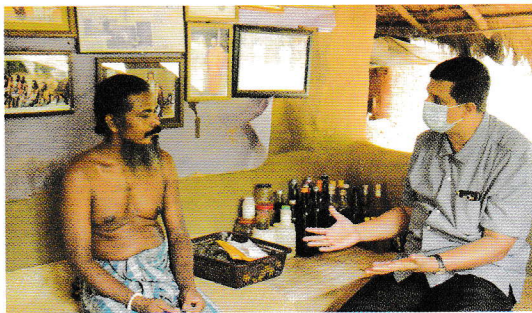
In September 2020, The National Authority on Tobacco and Alcohol (NATA) conducted a study to explore the current trends, perceptions and oral health complications related to smokeless tobacco consumption with betel among Sri Lankan indigenous people. An oral health screening programme also carried out along with the study with the contribution of well experienced oral health specialists. 103 of indigenous people aged among 15-71 in Dambana area were participated for the study.

NATA intends to publish the results in near future adding novel information to the existing literature. Apart from that the authority is getting its prompt actions to address the issue based on the results found through the study.

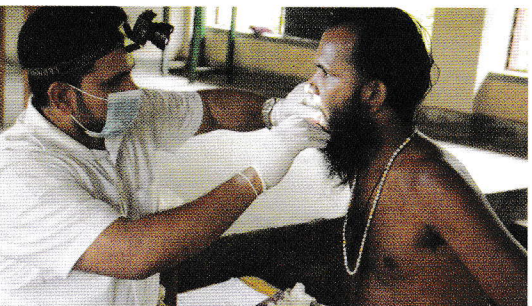
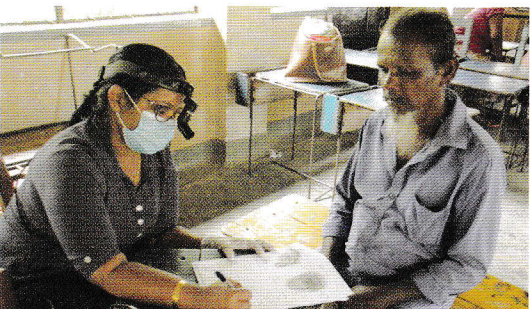
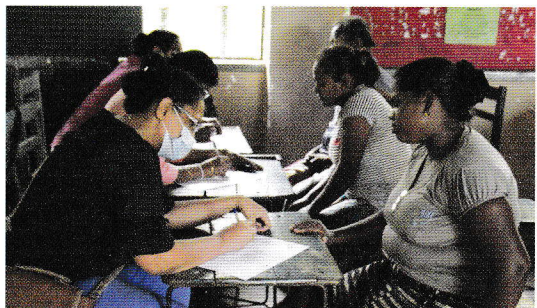
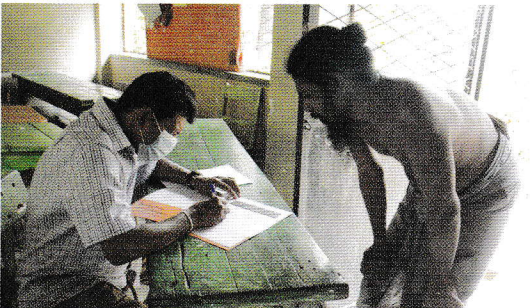
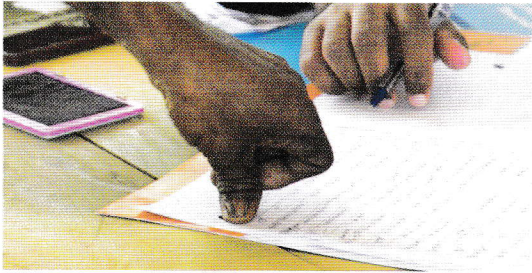
References

1. Jayashantha, P., & Johnson, N. W. (2016). Oral Health Status of the Veddas—Sri Lankan Indigenous People. *Journal of health care for the poor and underserved*, 27(1), 139-147.

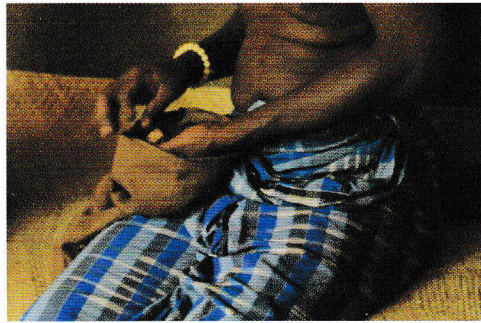
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කල පොතු (මූලික)



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හිත් තඹල (මූලික)



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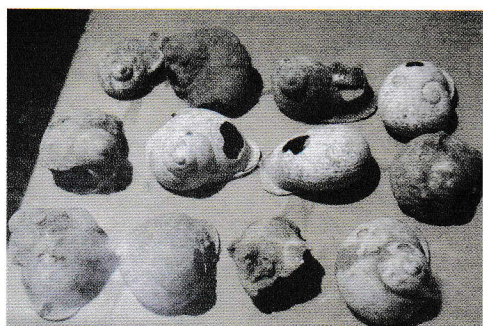
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