

Liver fluke infection risk in Thailand – a social ecological model perspective

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Infectious diseases linked to poverty, particularly neglected tropical diseases, have adversely affected the socio-economic development in less wealthy regions. One of the neglected tropical diseases of concern is human liver fluke infection through the consumption of raw freshwater fish. Despite decades of health campaigns, high infection prevalence remains in different areas of the Lower Mekong region. This necessitates the consideration of the infection differences between the human-environment complexities of disease transmission. This study proposed using the socio-ecological model as a framework to examine liver fluke infection risk. Questionnaire surveys were conducted to gather participants' knowledge on liver fluke infection and reasons for raw fish consumption. The findings were analyzed to identify factors influencing liver fluke infection at four socio-ecological levels. At the individual level, gender and age differences in food consumption habits and personal hygiene of open defecation presented the behavioral risks. At the interpersonal level, family tradition and social gathering affected the disease risk. At the community level, physical-social-economic environments of land use and modernization and health volunteer support accounted for the varying degree of infection. At the policy level, impacts of regional and national regulations on disease control and health system organization structure were of concern. The findings provide insights into how infection risks are shaped by people's behavior, social connectedness, interactions with places, and the interplay of these multi-level socio-ecological influences. The framework allows a more comprehensive understanding of liver fluke infection risks to inform a culturally sensitive and sustainable disease control program.

Primary author: WANG, Yi-Chen (National University of Singapore)

Presenter: WANG, Yi-Chen (National University of Singapore)

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