

Health Problems after Oil Spillage

In August 2003 an oil tanker ran aground while entering the Karachi port and spilled approximately 30,000 tonnes of Iranian crude oil in close proximity to the city.

Three weeks after the first episode of spillage, a study was conducted at all three campuses of Ziauddin Medical University (Clifton, North Nazimabad, the Karachi Dockyard Labour Board Hospital). Faculty members, students and staff were given a self administered questionnaires seeking information about whether they experienced headache, burning eyes, nasal irritation, sore throat or cough since the spillage. A total of 369 subjects participated in the survey; the response rate was 88.5% (263 out of 297) for medical students and 57.6% (106 out of 184) for faculty and staff members. Majority of the respondents worked at the Clifton campus of the university, which is close to the site of spillage.

The commonest symptom reported was headache, by 206 (56%), sore throat by 163 (44%), nasal irritation 163 (44%), cough 132 (36%) and burning eyes by 112 (30%). Other symptoms such as fever, vomiting, body ache were reported by 72 of 369 respondents (19.5%).

The relative risk of different symptoms for those living working in Clifton and Defence area versus those living/working at the North Nazimabad and KDLB campus was the same. The residents of Karachi were effected.

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