

ABSTRACT

Tobacco is a cash crop grown worldwide and it is used for both economic and medicinal purposes. However, from the time the tobacco seed is planted to harvest, the health of farmers is at risk. Indeed, there have been reported illnesses due to the occupational health exposure by tobacco farmers but there has been a limited investigation. Similarly, the use of the PPE has not been evaluated. Therefore, this study intended to identify self-reported illness among tobacco farmers, determine the association of occupational health exposure with the self-reported illnesses and establish the effect of PPE on the exposure and self-reported illnesses among 280 tobacco farmers in Suna West Sub County. A descriptive cross-sectional study design was used. Random sampling methods were used to recruit the study participants. The data collection tool was a structured questionnaire. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used for data analyses. The findings of the study showed that the leading illnesses was headache (34%) n=95 followed by difficulty in breathing (19%)n=52, nausea & vomiting (11%) n=30, skin allergy (10%) n=29 and others such as dizziness, abdominal cramps and irritation were below 10%. In general, occupational exposure had an association with the reported illnesses ($p = 0.045$) and in particular, headache had significant association with exposure ($p=0.007$). Other reported illnesses such as difficulty in breathing and irritation has common occurrence with headache ($p < 0.05$). The possible sources of exposure are hand picking of tobacco ($p=0.003$), smoke during tobacco curing ($p=0.001$) and pesticides during tobacco cultivation ($p=0.003$). However, the study found no effect of use of PPE on exposure and headache. The study reports association between occupational exposure and reported illnesses. Further reports no effect of PPE use on exposure and headache suggesting inappropriate and inconsistent use of PPE. However, recommends illnesses that may guide the clinical observation of tobacco exposure. Also, recommends creation of awareness on the use of PPE and improvement on the affordability to farmers.