

SHORT REPORT

**Participatory assessment of risk behaviours for avian influenza
in a rural community**

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The World Health Organization (WHO) considers the avian influenza A/H5N1 virus a public health risk with pandemic potential. Since the first documented outbreak in humans in Hong Kong in 1997, the numbers of both affected countries and confirmed cases of influenza A (H5N1) virus infection have increased. The rationale for particular concern about the H5N1 pandemic is not its inevitability, but its potential severity, one which would have high human health impact posing a predicament for public health [1].

Studies done to reveal evidence of risk factors/ behaviours influencing transmission of influenza A H5N1 suggest that handling diseased poultry is an important risk factor and some animal handling practices may modify the risk for transmission [2,3,4] highlighting the value for identifying risk factors as regards poultry farming behaviours.

A participatory assessment of risk behaviours for avian influenza was performed at WaNetChaung village in Hmawbi Township, Yangon Division during April 2008. The village was chosen because of existence of poultry farms, both large and small scales. This is a preliminary report of the qualitative component of the pre-test for performing a larger scale study in a similar setting somewhere else in Myanmar. The methodology used was as follows.

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Social mapping

This technique was incorporated in the informal group interview. Participants of each informal group interview participated in drawing a social map of their village and in each map they identified poultry farms that existed in their village.

Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

Two FGD sessions were conducted with villagers who possessed poultry farms in each village. There were 8 participants in each FGD session. The issues for inquiry included keeping and caring poultry farms; slaughtering/ eating/ selling poultries; and perceptions on acquiring infections from poultries.

Unstructured observation of poultry farms

Findings indicated that majority of households breed poultry, from small scale (i.e., 1-2) to large scale (i.e., in thousands). All the small scale owners (backyard poultry raising) allowed free movement of the poultry, even into their houses. Larger scale owners confined their poultry in cages. Some families did not breed chicken but kept poultry, purchased from different sources of owners, overnight in their houses for sale the next day. These poultry, after being tied in bunches of 10-12, were carried to the market either by bicycles or by public transport, without any protection.

Slaughtering, either for commercial purpose or for serving guests, took place at houses

within the village. No personal protective measures (for example, wearing of masks or gloves) were made during the process of slaughtering. The chopping wood was not washed after each individual slaughtering.

When poultry was found to be sick, disposal of it was made either by selling it quickly or by eating it. After slaughtering and de-feathering, all the feathers were thrown into a stream near the village which is dried-up during the hot season. Thus, feathers were easily carried by wind from the stream to many parts of the village. Among the large farms, it was observed that dead chickens were buried in a designated place. But, even in those large commercial farms, the process of handling dead chickens was without any personal protection.

Commercial scale owners sold chicken manure for use as fertilizer. In this endeavour, large masses of chicken manure were packed in bags for selling and during this process there was no personal protection of any kind. Local villagers were aware of avian influenza because of the

news they heard about its outbreak at a locality within their township where mass killing of poultry was performed. However, they lacked details of the knowledge as regards details of prevention of transmission. They perceived that any disease occurring in pigs would only affect pigs and as such for chicken. Thus, mixed breeding of chickens and pigs was not uncommon.

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