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Letters to the Editor

“Travel travails” – Travel-related poisoning

Dear Editor,

Defense personnel are exposed to various hazards of travel namely accidents, injuries, thefts, assaults and also poisoning with criminal intent. A retrospective analysis of the hospitalization records of the individuals admitted at a zonal hospital with poisoning of unknown origin over 26 months was carried out. 86 patients were admitted with criminal poisoning while travelling in this time period, comprising 18.5% of all emergency admissions and 0.4% of all admissions. Based on the history, the different modes of administration of the offending agent were compiled and are as per Table 1. The commonest place of occurrence of the drugging was while on the train (81.3%) followed by the market place (18.6%); usually by an indl who appeared to befriend them. Nearly all the patients reported loss of personal belongings and identity cards. Fortunately, all patients admitted recovered without any neurological deficit, and there were no fatalities. According to literature, commonest drugs identified in blood and urine samples of victims are benzodiazepines (74%). The other drugs are alcohol, hypnotics (zopiclone, zolpidem), sedatives (neuroleptics, some antihistaminic agents) or anesthetics (gamma-hydroxybutyrate or “Liquid Ecstasy”, ketamine).^{1–3}

Indian troops are largely deployed in insurgency-affected areas; criminal poisoning not only results in physical injury and monetary loss but can also have serious implications in the form of leakage of sensitive information and loss of identity cards. Thus travel-related criminal poisoning is a grave medico-social-cum-administrative problem faced by military personnel. Therefore it is imperative the armed forces personnel should be repeatedly educated regarding the possibility of poisoning during travel and its medical as well as administrative implications.

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Table 1 – Distribution of cases as per mode of administration of the poison delivery agent.

S no	Mode of administration	Drug delivery agent	Number of episodes
1	Oral	Foodstuffs	28 (32.5%)
		Tea	13 (15.1%)
		Juice	09 (10.4%)
		Strange substance	05 (05.8%)
		Water	03 (03.4%)
		Tobacco	02 (02.3%)
		Soup	01 (01.1%)
		Liquor	01 (01.1%)
2	Inhalational	Cigarettes	02 (02.3%)
		Spray	01 (01.1%)
3	Unknown		21 (24.4%)