



PRESS STATEMENT

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MALARIA: WHY SOME BEDNET OWNERS DON'T TAKE COVER

In Papua New Guinea, even a child knows that using an insecticide treated mosquito net (ITN) can protect you against malaria if used regularly. Programs to distribute treated nets are well supported and well received around the country.

A recent countrywide survey by IMR revealed that over 80% of surveyed households had at least one ITN available, yet fewer than 50% of those surveyed reported sleeping under a treated net the night before the survey

So why do some Papua New Guineans living in areas where malaria is common choose not to use a mosquito net when it is available?

An IMR team led by Dr Justin Pulford investigated, conducting surveys in urban, highlands and lowlands areas (National Capital District, Western Highlands, East Sepik, Morobe).

“We found multiple reasons why people did not use their nets, but it was indifference rather than lack of understanding that was a highlight,” Dr Pulford told a recent international conference in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

“Some seemed indifferent to malaria infection due to their life experience,” he said.

“Where malaria is seen as an inevitable illness rather than a preventable illness, some people become resigned to it and showed a general lack of concern about protecting themselves.

“Nets were too difficult to hang or too hot, or made the sleeping space too small, some said. Some urban residents only used their nets in the bush where there were lots of mosquitoes, while some bush residents said they preferred sleeping by the fire as a preventive -- then admitted that they still got bitten.

“The vast majority were aware that malaria could be caused by a single mosquito bite and that nets were an effective protection against such bites.

“Behavioural change campaigns may promote greater net usage, especially if it involves health workers broaching net usage during fever-related consultations,” Dr Pulford said.

Study findings were presented by Dr Pulford at the XVIII International Congress for Tropical Medicine and Malaria, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 24-28 September 2012. The study is published in the journal Social Science and Medicine and dedicated to IMR scientist Tania Oakiva, who was working on the study when she disappeared at sea with four other IMR scientists and three crew members in August 2011.

Media contact: Geraldine Vilakiva – phone: (+675) 532 2800 or (+675) 7205 6686
Email: geraldine.vilakiva@pngimr.org.pg