

Disability in medical officer of health area, Ragama: prevalence and extent of handicap

Chrisantha Abeyseena¹, Pushpa Jayawardana¹, Lalith Wijerathne¹

Research on prevalence of disabilities is scarce in Sri Lanka. It is important to assess the magnitude of the problem in order to plan the required services which would enhance the quality of life of those affected.

The objective of this research is to determine the prevalence of disability and the extent of handicap among disabled persons in the Medical Officer of Health (MOH) area, Ragama.

A cross sectional descriptive study was conducted in the MOH area, Ragama. Three Public Health Midwife (PHM) areas were randomly selected out of 14. The study population included all members of all households in the areas selected. The respondent was the head of the household. Two questionnaires were administered: Questionnaire I was used to screen for disability and II to extract relevant personal and disability related information.

The total study population included was 10683 out of which 2533 were children below 15 years of age. Overall prevalence of all types of disabilities was 7% (95%CI; 6.5%-7.5%). Prevalence among adults and children were 8% (95%CI; 5.0%-6.0%) and 3.8% (95%CI; 3.1%-4.6%) respectively. A significantly higher proportion of females (8.5%; n=449) were affected than males (5.6%; n=301).

The overall prevalence of individual disabilities were as follows: visual impairment- 4.4% (n=473), hearing impairment- 0.8% (n=89), speaking difficulties- 0.6% (n=67), locomotor disabilities- 1.4% (n=149), fits- 0.5% (n=55) and abnormal behaviour- 0.6% (n=59).

The proportion of disabled who were able to perform all five activities of daily living were as follows: overall- 82% (617/750), visually impaired- 86% (408/473), locomotor disabilities- 63% (94/149) and behavioural problems- 70%(41/59).

The prevalence of overall disabilities was 7% in the MOH area, Ragama. The extent of handicap in relation to activities of daily living ranged between 14% to 37%. Recommend establishing special services towards meeting the needs of these differently-abled people.

Key words: Disability, Prevalence, Visual impairment, Hearing impairments, Locomotor disorders.

¹Department of Public Health, Faculty of Medicine, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka