

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH ISSUES AMONG THE PHYSICALLY DISABLED POPULATION IN SRI LANKA: A CASE STUDY OF MAHARA DIVISIONAL SECRETARIAT, GAMPAHA DISTRICT

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Abstract: *Around 10 per cent of the global population live with a disability. Although they spend their life with a disability, they also have the same needs, and face the same problems related to Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH). However, in Sri Lanka, there is a lack in research on the SRH problems among the physically disabled people. The main objective of this paper therefore is to examine the SRH issues faced by the physically disabled population. One hundred and fifty three (153) disabled persons (90 males and 63 females) were selected randomly from the Mahara Divisional Secretariat of the Gampaha District for the study. Data were gathered by using interviewer administrated questionnaires and unstructured interviews. The study found that the majority of disabled persons were not married, and their level of education was at a low level. Both disabled men and women became disabled after birth. The data revealed that physically disabled persons have limitations during their sexual intercourse and face problems regarding use of family planning methods. As the physically disabled persons face several problems related to SRH, the study strongly suggest that it is important to develop SRH programmes to specifically address their SRH problems.*

Keywords: Disable population, Reproductive health, Contraceptive use, Sexual relations

Introduction

Physical wellbeing the population is a significant factor in determining social, economic and political development of a country. However, physical shortcomings could occur due to congenital health issues, environmental factors, long term sicknesses which are non-communicable diseases, accidents, terror attacks, civil war and aging (De Silva et.al., 2007). Due to reasons as above, around 10 per cent of the global population live with a disability (UNFPA, 2010). These people have the same sexual and reproductive health (SRH) needs as other people. But the SRH issues faced by disabled people have been deeply neglected. As a result of that, disabled persons face SRH problems in the areas of family planning, maternal health, sexually transmitted infections, sexual harassment, gender based violence etc. Therefore, this study focuses on the SRH issues faced by the physically disabled population.

Disability

The term 'disability' covers impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions (WHO, 2010). An impairment is a problem in body function or structure, an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action and a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual when involved in life situations. A disabled person is defined as "a person who is unable or is limited in carrying out day to day activities that he or she can do due to congenital or long term physical/mental disabilities" (Department of Census &

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