

D 1620

ABSTRACT

Jaffna district is one of the conflict affected districts in Sri Lanka. The effect of war on children and adolescent are many and varied. Psychological consequences, risk factors and protective factors operating in this war situation on adolescents have not been systematically studied so far. The objective of this present study was to determine the mental health status of mid adolescent school children in Jaffna district and to identify some of the psychosocial factors associated with mental health.

In the present study an instrument to assess the mental health of adolescents (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire) was translated into Tamil and validated. Focus group discussions were conducted among various groups like adolescents, parents, and school teachers to identify the psychosocial factors associated with mental health of adolescents and to describe the psychosocial problems of adolescents. A self administered questionnaire was prepared incorporating psychosocial factors identified from the focus group discussions. This self administered questionnaire and SDQ self report was given to a representative sample of 1243 school children of 14-15 years of age. Based on SDQ results adolescents were classified into 'adolescents with normal mental health' and 'adolescents with mental health problems'. Various psychosocial factors were compared within these two groups. A multivariate analysis was performed to adjust for confounding factors.

Tamil translation of SDQ self report was found both valid and reliable. ROC curve differentiated well between normal mental health and mental health problems. Area

under the curve is 0.87 with the 95% confidence interval of 0.79 – 0.93. Internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha: 0.78) and test retest reliability (kappa: 0.67) of SDQ self report were good.

The results showed 30% of adolescent school children were having mental health problems. This proportion was high when compared with other Sri Lankan and international studies using the same instrument.

Verbal abuse, defined as scolding unnecessarily at home was significantly associated with mental health (OR: 4.2, 95% C.I: 1.9 – 9.8). Quarrel in the family with the influence of alcohol was also an important factor associated with mental health (OR: 4.4, 95% C.I: 1.4 – 13.6), compared to those where alcohol was not reported (OR: 3.7, 95% C.I: 1.8 – 7.5). Scolding for poor educational performance (OR: 1.7, 95% C.I: 1.2 – 2.5) and parents not supporting educational decision taken by adolescents (OR: 1.9, 95% C.I: 1.3 – 2.8), were also identified as having strong association with mental health of adolescents in Jaffna district.

Participants of the focus group discussions had the view that adolescents in Jaffna district live in a restricted environment where their day to day activities are under threat. The importances of the ceasefire agreement between the warring parties were also indicated to have made many progressive changes in the economic situation in the Jaffna district. However, in a restricted environment, sudden economic change was also shown to have some adverse psychosocial outcomes in adolescent behaviour.