

Abstract

This study was conducted to develop and validate a screening instrument to assess behavioural abnormalities of children aged 4-6 years old and to describe the distribution and determinants of behavioural abnormalities among this age group. The need of such a study was felt due to lack of knowledge on these factors in Sri Lanka, despite the fact that a rising prevalence of mental health problems among this age group.

During the Phase 1 of the study, a screening instrument was developed following perusal of literature, conducting formal and in formal discussions and employing Delphi technique. The developed instrument was named as Child Behaviour Assessment Instrument (CBAI).

Judgmental validity, criterion validity and construct validity of the CBAI was measured and reliability was assessed by test-re test method and internal consistency analysis. The CBAI was proved to be a valid and a reliable instrument, to assess behavioural abnormalities of children aged 4-6 years in the community.

During the Phase II of the study, the prevalence, distribution and contributory factors of behavioural abnormalities among children aged 4-6 years was studied in the district of Gampaha, using cross sectional descriptive study design.

The prevalence of behavioural abnormalities among 4-6 years in the District of Gampaha was 19.2 per 100 children.

The study identified, economic factors, birth related factors, , factors related to care and upbringing of the child, marital life of the parents, childhood characteristics of parents, exposure to stressful life events and inadequate psycho social stimulation at home as the most important variables that predicted the presence of behavioural abnormalities of children aged 4-6 years.

Among these significant variables, poor quality of parenting of the mother has the strongest association with behavioural abnormalities, followed by mother reported as being abused during her childhood and inadequate psycho-social stimulation at home.

According to the results of the study, it can be concluded that the behavioural abnormality among children aged 4-6 years is a significant health problem and it is recommended to implement screening programs to identify these problems at early stages as this may enable early intervention resulting better prognosis.

When implementing screening programs to identify this problem, use of the Child Behaviour Assessment Instrument (CBAI) is recommended as a screening tool. High sensitivity, specificity, reliability, low cost and ability to administer by trained non professional interviewer with minimal discomfort to the children are some of the features that indicate feasibility and usefulness of this instrument.

Furthermore, it is time to introduce formal and informal educational programs for parents regarding the psycho-social development and wellbeing of children and healthy parenting practices. The results of the study emphasize the importance of implementing extensive programs to prevent child abuse.

Community oriented health intervention programs on stress relief, life skills and problem solving can be recommended in order to prevent marital disharmony, frequent argument, depression and ensure psychological wellbeing of the parents and adults.

Encouraging the parents to maintain a healthy home environment with psycho social stimulation will have a positive impact on the behaviour of the child. Efforts should be made to establish social support groups to help families with pre school children in order to improve social functioning of the family. A well organized system has to be developed to provide quality care to the children of employed mother as non maternal care associated with higher prevalence of behavioural abnormality.

It is suggested that these programmes can be organized in collaboration with Primary Health Care staff and relevant persons from government and non government organizations. The study recommends increasing the awareness of behavioural abnormality of children among health care workers, volunteers and other social groups.

