

## RÉSUMÉ

*The fact that a significant proportion of patients who seek treatment at the Clinic for Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) tend to present relatively late, has been an observed clinical impression for a considerable length of time. A relatively long period of time between the onset of symptoms and the time of presentation could not only lead to further complications from the disease itself but also to further spread of the disease through sexual practices during this time. This project was initiated to investigate the reasons, if any, for delay in the presentation of patients at the Central Clinic for STDs of General Hospital, Colombo.*

*A pilot study, carried out in February 1993, confirmed that around 55% of the males and 46% of the females presented, at least eight days or later, following the development of symptoms.*

*A pretested structured questionnaire was used to obtain information from 200 consecutive males and 200 consecutive females who presented to the STD Clinic for the first time for treatment. This phase of the study was carried out from April to August 1993. Those who presented late were retrospectively identified as people who presented on the 8th day or later following the onset of symptoms. The socio-demographic aspects, disease characteristics and behavioural traits of all patients were analysed by a specifically designed computer programme.*

*There were no statistically significant differences in sex, race, religion and ethnicity, between the late and early attendee groups. Unmarried females presented late in significant numbers but otherwise, the marital status seemed to have little influence in the time of presentation, especially in males. Significant numbers of females from Gampaha presented early and those from Puttalam presented late. Assessment of the educational level showed very clearly that those with lower levels of education, among both males and females, presented*

late. Significant numbers of males from the security forces and those engaged in manual labour, are presenting late. A considerable number of prostitutes are presenting late. There is no correlation between these groups and their income.

Significant numbers of males and females with genital ulcers presented early and those with discharges presented late. Significant numbers of males with symptoms not directly referable to the genital tract, presented early. Males and females who were treated by pharmacists and females who had been to their general practitioners, presented late.

Females who contracted the illness from their husbands showed up late. Males who were referred by their G.P.s presented late. Males and females who thought that they had a STD, presented early.

Significant numbers of males, who obtained information regarding STDs from the mass media, presented late. Parents and teachers seemed to play a very insignificant part in the education process for both, males and females. The knowledge of STDs was poor in the prostitutes as a general group and they tended to present late in significant numbers.

Those patients who had the most negative attitude tended to present early. They considered STDs as a terribly stigmatising disease. There were no significant differences in the behaviour patterns of early and late attendees of either sex in the specific features of behaviour that was looked for in this study. The inadequate use of condoms by all those studied in general, and by the prostitutes in particular, was certainly not what it is expected to be.

This study highlighted the fact, that the late attendees, did have some characteristics which could be used in a productive manner, to modify and reappraise the health education programmes, so that their numbers could be significantly reduced in the future.