

ABSTRACT

Investing on adolescent health as the foundation for building healthy nations for tomorrow's world is not a new concept. But in practice not all groups of adolescents meet their needs for better growth. Being a minor, neglected population, the adolescents in judicial rehabilitation centers do not attract the attention of many. Therefore their needs are less frequently assessed and addressed. Bearing that in mind the present study aimed research on such a group of adolescents who are residing in certified schools in Sri Lanka.

This research was carried out with the objectives of describing some demographic and socio economic characteristics and reasons for admission to and assessing the mental health status of adolescents in certified schools in Sri Lanka and some facilities and services currently available for them in those schools.

A cross-sectional survey of the adolescents, in all four certified schools in Sri Lanka was conducted. The study comprised of three components.

Component 1-To describe demographic characteristics, the reasons for admission of adolescents in certified schools in Sri Lanka , using a data extraction form.

Component 2-To describe selected socio economic, and family characteristics, and mental health status of adolescents in certified schools in Sri Lanka, using a self administered questionnaire including, Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire

Component 3- To assess some facilities and services currently available in certified schools in Sri Lanka using a check list.

The mean age of 304 adolescents was 14.9 ± 1.6 years. Males were 59.2% and the male female ratio was 1.5:1. Majority were Sinhalese (80.3%) and Buddhists (78.6%). One third (30.6%) were from the Western province. 46.4% were in certified schools for a period up to 12 months. 87 % were admitted for conflict and 22.7 % in need of care and protection. 57.2 % were offenders while 20.1% were victims. Reasons for admission was statistically significantly different in

those < 14 years and \geq 14 years ($p < 0.05$), among males and females ($p < 0.001$) and province of residence ($p < 0.05$).

Mental health status was assessed in 231 adolescents with consent. 89.2% were first time admissions. 1/3rd were the eldest, 33.4 % had ≤ 4 siblings, 47.7% were in social class Va. and 80% had studied beyond primary education. Both parents were alive in significantly higher proportion of males ($p < 0.05$). 80.8% of fathers and 67.2% of mothers were employed. A significantly higher proportion of males lived with both parents before admission. ($p < 0.05$) Residing at home prior to admission is significantly lower ($p < 0.5$) among those in need of care and protection. Quarreling in family was significantly higher ($p < 0.05$) in females. Alcohol consumption is significantly higher in family members of males. ($p < 0.05$) 50% had a loving and warm perception of the family. Even though the educational level prior to admission to a certified school is significantly higher ($p < 0.05$) in females. attending a school while at the certified school is significantly high in males. ($p < 0.05$)

Among adolescents age 11 -16 years mental health status was abnormal in 58% and borderline in 22.1% and normal in 19.9%. Mental health problems were present in 80.1%. 82.1% males and 76.7% females had mental health problems. 22.1% had emotional symptoms, 48.9% conduct problems, 83.1% hyperactivity/inattention. 84.8% peer problems and 81.8% prosocial problems. Conduct problems were significantly higher ($p < 0.05$) in younger adolescents. Emotional problems were significantly higher ($p < 0.05$) in males. Peer problems was significantly higher ($p < 0.05$) among adolescents with ≥ 2 siblings.

Rammuthugala the only certified school in Sri Lanka for females is overcrowded. Hikkaduwa Certified School has satisfactory Facilities. Keppitipola has the least facilities.

Underlying reasons for admission to certified schools need to be addressed. Certified school based mental health services need to be established to manage the mental health problems of adolescents.