

Abstract

The urbanization and economic development has brought about dramatic results in case of the developed countries with increased access to health services and environmental improvements. Most of the developed and the developing countries, it is a case of increasing the urban poor and over crowding the cities symbolizing the maldistribution of resources. They are faced with epidemiological transition from communicable to non communicable disease or the double burden of ill health. Urban housing and health has been a neglected area of interest worldwide.

There were no scientific studies done on health aspects of housing in Sri Lanka, especially on flat dwellers though successive governments are encouraging private and state sector to develop apartment complexes as a solution for diminishing land space in Colombo. Therefore, a community based descriptive cross sectional study on flat dwellers at Soysapura was undertaken with the objectives of describing the socio-demographic and environmental factors, describing the occurrence of selected communicable and non communicable diseases and to describe their health seeking behaviour. A stratified simple random sample of flats was used with an interviewer administered questionnaire to collect the data.

The age distribution was close to the normal urban population and there were 76% of nuclear families which was more than the urban population in Sri Lanka. The family size was around 3.5 and it is comparatively smaller than the general population. Population density is not ideal in most of the houses for health as 72% of the families were in the category of 50-100 square feet per person. Around 80% of flat dwellers had education above the level of O/L passed and 63% of the households were below the per capita income of US dollar 1 per day poverty line.

Mosquitoes troubled 90% of the households and coils (47%) was the preferred repellent. 99% of the households were satisfied with their water supply and the availability. Gas was used by 94% of the households as their main energy source of cooking. There was lesser prevalence of communicable diseases among flat dwellers but prevalence of chicken pox was comparatively high. The non communicable diseases appear to increase with the advancing age of the flat dwellers and there was overall 11% Hypertension and 10% diabetes among the age group of above 19 years. Symptoms of musculoskeletal diseases also increased with the advancing age of the flat dwellers. They preferred western health practitioners for their general illnesses, 62% in case of children and 75% for adults. 60% of adults used self medication as a method of treatment for minor illness.

There was overall good health status in Soysapura may be due to high education level even though there were some negative factors for health like over crowding, low per capita income and mosquito menace. Future research should be based on lesser number of independent variables and should be compared with a single unit housing scheme in the urban sector. Vulnerable groups and specific diseases should be explored in depth.