

Abstract

The importance of environmental inputs in all care giving environments during the first eight years of life has been recognised in the concept of Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD). This strategy has been adopted in Sri Lanka and all preschools and day care centres were to be renamed as ECCD centres and a system of monitoring and evaluation was proposed in 1986. However the quality of more than 10,000 centres has not been scientifically assessed.

Therefore a descriptive cross sectional study was performed in the Dehiwala-Mount Lavinia Municipal council area with the objective of assessing the quality of ECCD centres and to identify factors in caregivers affecting quality of care. The study units were 45 randomly selected ECCD centres. The study included description of structural and administrative characteristics of the centres using an interviewer administered questionnaire and centre quality assessment using the Early Childhood Environment Rating (ECER) scale, which rates centre quality based on non-participatory observations.

The global composite score combines features of the physical environment, health and safety provisions, social experiences, and working conditions for staff. The caregiver characteristics and level of knowledge of ECCD concepts were assessed using a self administered questionnaire.

Only 11% of the centres were rated as good quality with 89% rated as minimal and inadequate quality. Health and safety provisions were of minimal quality in all centres. 13% of the centres were not registered with any authority. 25% of the caregivers were not trained in ECCD and more than 50% had low levels of knowledge of the ECCD concepts.

The centre quality ratings were dependant on caregiver knowledge in ECCD especially the quality of language use and interactions.

Therefore all ECCD centres should be registered and minimal standards of centre quality and caregiver training should be specified. Implementation of these standards should be supported by legislative enactment and minimal levels of quality that has to be specified.

The caregiver training programmes should be standardised and the current caregivers' level of knowledge of ECCD concepts should be improved.