

# A B S T R A C T

A community based study to describe factors influencing the utilization of health care services by elderly in Divisional Secretariat area of Beruwala in Sri Lanka was done. Four hundred and twenty six, 60 years and over in age were interviewed.

Respondents between the age of 60 - 69 years of age and 80 and above years were 61% and 7% respectively. Males who were 40.1% had a significantly higher educational level than females.

Eighty percent had financial difficulties and 56.8% were looked after by their children. Nearly three fourth (74.4%) were independent in all six Activities of Daily Living (ADL) and 62.4% independent in Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADL).

Severe mental illness (4.9%), urinary incontinence (1.6%) and faecal incontinence (0.5%) were found. Visual and hearing impaired were 46.5% and 5.2% respectively.

Of 53.8% who were on regular medication, 44.1% utilized free government services, the main reason being the cost (52.9%). More than one third (38.2%) preferred private clinics for acute illnesses because 40.7% underwent no undue delay. Reducing delay will enhance utilization of services. Indigenous systems accounted for 12.7%. Vistis by health personnel were welcomed by 43.4% and other needs included financial assistance and relief of symptoms.

Characteristics of the elders who used Government Allopathic treatment were comparatively young age group, secondary level education, lower economic status and a higher physical and mental health status. Private Allopathic facilities allowed those with a poor physical and mental health status to utilize them.