

# ABSTRACT

Health needs assessment is a systematic method of identifying unmet health and health care needs of a population and making changes to meet these unmet needs. It has become a new method of describing, planning and commissioning health services of the population under study.

The objective of this descriptive study was to determine the health care needs of prisoners in Sri Lanka. The health facilities available to the prisoners were assessed and the health needs as perceived by the prisoners elicited to achieve the objectives of this study. A stratified random sample of 462 convicted prisoners from the three maximum security prisons were selected and were interviewed by three Assistant Medical Officers.

The average educational level of the prisoners were below that of the general population. Prisoners subjectively felt that their health status was good (75%). It was found that forty three per cent of the prisoners who were serving short term sentences and forty four per cent were unmarried.

Tuberculosis (1.8%) and diarrhoeal diseases (10.4%) were detected among prison population compared to general population it was one hundred times and ten times respectively. A high

prevalence of scabies (43%), varicella (11%) and visual defects (30.2%) was detected. Also drug addiction (43%), smoking (76.2%) and chewing of betel (30.6%) were common habits among the prison population.

Prisoners had an inadequate water supply for bathing (41.5%), washing (37.5%) and toilet ablutions (32%) which is a basic requirement of primary health care.

Even though there are prison hospitals within the prison premises, prisoners were not satisfied with the services rendered to them. In prisons, free and easy accessibility to health care facilities at all times was not available. The delay in seeing the doctor after reporting an illness was sometimes more than a day.

Provision of an effective rehabilitation programme for 93% of drug offenders who are willing to give up the addiction should be considered. There should be a close link between the Ministry of Health and the Department of Prison. Restructuring of the prison health care services for delivering primitive, preventive, curative and rehabilitative health care is recommended to meet the needs of the users.