

SUMMARY

The present study was undertaken in 1995/96 to assess the impact of out-reach programmes and other related aspects of school dental service on the prevention and treatment of dental caries and periodontal disease among school children of Ratnapura district.

In addition the study assessed the current oral health status in school children in the Ratnapura administrative district. Further, the study makes an attempt to compare and contrast this data with those of the national oral health survey of 1983/84. This could highlight the changing pattern in disease prevalence over the past twelve years and could attempt to evaluate the nation's progress towards achieving oral health goals set for year 2000.

A total of 1258 school children comprising of 622 six year old students and 636 twelve year old students and a total of 364 school teachers from 24 schools constituted the sample. Stratified random sampling technique was adopted to ensure the best possible representation.

The present study was conducted using two study instruments, a clinical examination and a survey based on a questionnaire. The clinical examiner aimed at assessing the oral health status, the oral hygiene, treatment already received and the remaining treatment needs of the school children. Standard indices recommended by WHO was adopted. The data was recorded in the WHO standard form (simplified 1986) with the addition of a recording of plaque index. The interviewer administered questionnaire for students intended to gather information on their knowledge, attitude and practices on oral health. The self administered

questionnaire for teachers assessed their knowledge on oral health services in addition to the above mentioned information.

The results confirmed a greatly enhanced coverage of the target population. There is an encouraging trend towards achieving the objective of the minimum 50 per cent coverage of the target population by year 2000. It also indicated an overall reduction in the prevalence of dental caries in both deciduous and permanent teeth. The mean DMFT for both age groups has reduced over the period, hence keeping in line with the goal of maintaining the levels recorded in 1983/84.

Out-reach programmes had substantially reduced the volume of untreated dental caries when compared to the control group but continues to remain alarmingly high. The treatment needs exhibited a marginal overall reduction with better scope to practice restorative dentistry in preference to extractions.

The new concept of treating deciduous teeth only "on demand" has had a profound adverse effect. An obvious neglect of the deciduous dentition by the service was evident.

Periodontal disease among 12 year old students demonstrated an increase in its prevalence. However, the severity of periodontal disease has reduced markedly and consequently the amount of students free of calculus has risen substantially.

There appears to be have an enthusiasm to perform out-reach programmes at the expense of the base clinic population. Although there is evidence to suggest the School Dental Therapists [SDTT] work with greater enthusiasm during out-reach activities, these programmes also have become traditional treatment centers and seldom provide dental health education to students and teachers. It also

revealed the inadequacy of providing only sporadic out-reach activities to improve the oral health of a community.

The study highlights the need for reappraisal of the out-reach programmes to counter the large volume of untreated dental caries.

The out-reach concept could be improved by incorporating appropriate modifications to its configurations to ensure optimal performance keeping in line with its' prime objectives.

Although the results of the present study cannot be extrapolated on a national scale one could with reasonable confidence state that a favourable trend has been created to achieve at least some of the oral health goals identified for year 2000.