

## ABSTRACT

The term “health care bypassing” is used to indicate the non-use of proximal facilities. Bypassing primary health care institutions for OPD procedures by patients is a major problem faced by health care systems all over the world. Absence of a proper referral system is a key factor responsible for the problem of bypassing primary health care institutions in Sri Lanka. Due to the gravity of the problem, the Ministry of Health Care and Nutrition has identified the development of a referral system as a research priority in oral health. However, a referral system cannot be developed without proper knowledge of the patterns and reasons of bypassing primary health care institutions to obtain health care at tertiary institutions.

This cross sectional study was conducted to determine some aspects related to the “bypass” of local oral health care institutions by out patient dental clinic attendees at the General Hospital Polonnaruwa. A pre-tested interviewer administered questionnaire was used to collect the data. The study population consisted of patients attending the out patient dental clinic, General Hospital Polonnaruwa. A sample consisting of 422 adult out-patient dental clinic attendees were selected using systematic sampling technique and interviewed during the period between 22/07/2010 to 17/08/2010 by three interviewers.

The results showed that 47.2% of the out patient dental clinic attendees had bypassed the local oral health care institutions. The main reason cited for bypassing was “attended dental clinic while on a visit to Polonnaruwa for some other purpose”. Socio demographic factors such as age, marital status, education and occupation, were associated with bypass.

Moreover further the distance from the place of residence to the nearest oral health care institution, greater the rate of bypass. Type of treatment perceived for oral condition was significantly associated with bypass status.

Increasing the working hours and the working days, improvement of other facilities of the area, improvement of facilities and service of the local hospitals including the dental clinic, conduct of specialised clinics at the local hospitals and the availability of a dental surgeon at all dental clinics in local hospitals were some views cited by patients to improve utilization of local oral health care facilities.

In conclusion, the findings indicate that the bypass rate was high in this group of out patient dental clinic attendees. The findings of the study may be useful for health policy makers to improve oral health care facilities in the district of Polonnaruwa.

**Key words**

- Bypass
- Local Oral Health care institution
- Out patient dental clinic attendees