

A SURVEY OF KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDES TO EPILEPSY AMONG SRI LANKANS

Amita Ratnaweera, Nimal Senanayake and Palitha Abeykoon
(Faculty of Medicine, Peradeniya.)

This reports the results of a survey of knowledge and attitudes to epilepsy conducted among samples of seven groups of Sri Lankans — Rural and Urban School Children, Medical Students, Nurses, School Teachers, University Students, Army Personnel and persons in Adult Education Programmes — using a pre-tested questionnaire. 1289 persons were surveyed.

The survey also determined the incidence of epilepsy among the respondents and their families, their sources of information and the interest in further information on this disease.

The reliability was determined on the basis of a minimum of 3 inconsistencies out of 8 cross-checks that were built into the questionnaire.

The scores on knowledge of all the groups, while adequate, depicted serious deficiencies in the areas of aetiology, the possible First-aid management, and long-term control of epilepsy. Serious set-backs have resulted to the education of epileptic children in consequence.

The attitude was one of sympathy towards epileptics but all the groups except the medical students and the nurses were not favourably disposed towards permitting epileptics to undertake most of the routine occupations or engage themselves in sports or enter marriage. Epileptics would be able to undertake such tasks with no harm to themselves or to the public.

Over 75% of those surveyed had either seen an epileptic fit or met an epileptic. This is a much higher percentage than those from western studies. The main source of information about the disease in all these groups has been the patients themselves; all the other sources including health professionals being negligible.

The survey demonstrates a need and the areas in which the knowledge of the general population should be systematically improved with respect to their understanding and managing epileptic patients and how they could better relate to such persons.