

THE PREVALENCE OF NEUROTIC SYMPTOMS  
IN A RURAL POPULATION OF SRI LANKA

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Neurotic symptoms amount for upto 10% of morbidity in many societies. Much resources are spent in the treatment of these disorders and loss of efficiency in work has a telling effect on rural economies.

Trained interviewers asked for the presence of somatized neurotic symptoms in a comprehensive house to house survey in Gampola area.

Gampola Project Area had a total population of 38984, with an ethnic breakdown of 69% Sinhala, 23% Moor and 8% Tamil.

Somatized neurotic symptoms were present as shown in the table.

Total Number of Persons with  
Somatized Neurotic Symptoms

	Total No.	Percentage of total population	Percentage of those above 10 yrs.
a. Non-specific aches	1955	5.01%	6.38%
b. Tension headache	2201	5.64%	7.2%
c. Frequent chest, abdominal and backache for which no cause is found	3320	8.51%	10.8%
d. Palpitations	367	0.94%	1.2%
e. Excessive sweating of extremities	799	2.04%	2.6%
f. Burning sensations	786	2.03%	2.5%

746 individuals (1.9%) had sleep difficulties. When considering the reported psychological symptoms only 159 (0.4%) admitted feeling worried or anxious. 253 (0.64%) admitted to feeling depressed and 48 (0.12%) were suicidal. A total of 221 (0.62%) were said to have been possessed by evil spirits and 310 had some traditional occult rituals done for them.

What these figures indicate is a high incidence of somatized neurotic symptoms while only a minority of them report psychological symptoms. The prevalence of neurosis is 8.5% and this corresponds to the figure in the rest of the world. However these individuals fill the hospitals, general practitioners' surgeries and Ayurvedic practitioners' clinics seeking treatment for the somatic symptoms leading to costly investigations and treatments.

In conclusion it may be noted that the prevalence of neurosis in Sri Lanka corresponds to that of the rest of the world but much of it is somatized.

#### *References*

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