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GENDER DIFFERENCES IN HEALTH CARE SEEKING BEHAVIOUR AND PRACTICES FOR FEBRILE ILLNESS AMONG CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS IN A RURAL AREA IN SRI LANKA

The higher mortality among females as compared to males reported from South East Asian countries may be a result of discrimination against females in the allocation of food and health care. This study was carried out to investigate gender differences in treatment seeking behaviour of 1001 children and young adults who presented with 1735 episodes of fever in a rural area of Sri Lanka. Information regarding treatment seeking practices was collected using a structured pre-tested questionnaire. There was a significant association between gender and the person accompanying the child to the clinic. There was no gender difference in the mode of transport to the treatment centre or in the number of days of symptoms prior to seeking treatment. The majority of the children/young adults (81%) sought treatment within the first three days of the onset of symptoms. There were no gender differences in the care of children among children under 10 years of age with the mother taking responsibility most of the time (>70% of the time). There was also no significant gender difference in the number of days absent from school ($p=0.736$), in the expenditure incurred for treatment, transport, food and other items ($p=0.139$) or in the loss of wages of either parent ($p=0.957$ for mothers and $p=0.644$ for fathers) during the period of illness. No gender differentials in health care seeking behaviour and practices in children and young adults exist in this rural population.