

Social Factors Affecting Health Seeking Behaviour (HSB) of Elders with Physical Disabilities (EWPDP)

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Since ageing has become an alarming issue in the Sri Lankan population, elders' wellbeing is being challenged in many domains. Among them, physical disability increases the degree of elders' vulnerability. In this milieu, this study identified HSB of EWPDP as a significant research area. Study attempted to identify the availability of supportive services and individual determinants that impact the HSB of EWPDP. Primary qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews from purposively selected 20 EWPDPs. Study was conducted in 205-A GN division of Ja-ela DS division located in the industrial zone. Data was analysed using thematic analysis method. The elected area had the necessary public and private infrastructural facilities. It was found that EWPDP prefer private facilities over public ones due to unspecific reasons. Considering individual determinants, it was revealed that financial capacity has a great impact on individual's HSB. Those who have savings, receive pensions, or possess other financial capacity are independent in making decisions with regards to their health expenses. When caregiving is performed by family, it becomes an influencing factor of HSB. Intimate relationships are a push factor to be self-conscious about the wellbeing of EWPDP. Conflictual primary relationships discourage the HSB further increasing health vulnerability. In addition, cultural beliefs and practices play a significant role in governing HSB. Specially, disability is interpreted in terms of religious beliefs. Instead of professional medical support, they mostly seek complementary or alternative medical support. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the financial self-sufficiency leading to affordability of health and other supportive facilities empowers EWPDP to make decisions on HSB Despite physical impairments. The nature of their primary relationships plays a decisive role in HSB of EWPDP. Finally, socio-cultural constructions on ageing and disability too determine HSB although other factors contribute positively. Overall, HSB of EWPDP is primarily influenced by individual factors, not socio-economic factors such as the availability and accessibility of health services.

Keywords: Health seeking behaviour, Elderly, Physical disability, Complementary medicine, Alternative medicine