A medical-sociological study on accessibility of health care services for the war-disabled in Kilinochchi District

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The prolonged civil war in Sri Lanka caused serious public health and social issues. This medical-sociological community based study was conducted in all four Divisional Secretariat Divisions in the Kilinochchi District. The prime objective of this study was to assess the accessibility of health care services for the war-disabled in the Kilinochchi District. This research study employed the mixed method. Based on the stratified random sampling method, 316 people with war-related disabilities were selected for the questionnaire survey. Qualitative data were also collected through the case study method, the direct observation method, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and the participatory research methods.

There were 13 848 people with disabilities (PWDs) and among them 5260 were war-disabled from the Northern Province of Sri Lanka. The prevalence of war related disabilities was high in the Mullaitivu District (65.4%) and Kilinochchi District (60%). The study revealed that 93.4 per cent of the PWDs in the study area stated that they were not able to access adequate health-care services during the last phase of the war. The overall findings of this research revealed that the war-disabled in the Kilinochchi District faced enormous difficulties in accessing health care services. Survey results revealed that war was the primary cause for amputation which constituted 76 percent of the PWDs. Spinal cord injury was the second major form of the war-related disability among the study sample. Results revealed that 99.7 per cent of PWDs sought medical assistance from the government health care institutions. Nearly 46.5 per cent of the PWDs are dissatisfied with the available health-care services while 3.2 per cent of PWDs are totally dissatisfied with the available health-care services. Adequate health facilities were not available for the PWDs at government's hospitals and clinics or private clinics in the Kilinochchi District. The study also indicated that lack of transport, distance from the health care institution, the poor condition of accessible facilities in the hospitals and other health care institutions, lack of medical experts, poverty and poor coordination among the health care service providing institutions were key barriers for accessing health care services for PWDs in the Kilinochchi District. Although more than two thousand PWDs lived in the Kilinochchi District, no dedicated health services such as mobile clinics and community based medical rehabilitation services were available to PWDs in the government hospitals and clinics. In view of the limitation of health care professionals or consultant services in the Kilinochchi District, PWDs sought medical assistance from the Teaching Hospital, Jaffna or District General Hospital, Vavuniya. The government health services were not geared with inclusive health care services such as medical rehabilitation services, disability care and accessibility facilities for the PWDs at health care institutions in the war affected villages in the Kilinochchi District. The Ministry of health with the Government of Sri Lanka should develop and improve the accessibility of health care services such as accessible facilities in the hospital setting and the community based medical rehabilitation services for PWDs to promote their well-being and quality of life.