

Effects of paraplegia caused by spinal cord injuries on functional status and quality of life of individuals and on family economy among patients admitted to two selected hospitals

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Paraplegia results from spinal cord injury at the first thoracic vertebral level and below. It leads to paralysis of lower limbs and possibly also the trunk. This brings sudden and profound life changes causing the person physical disability, emotional disturbances and social isolation. In addition, it has profound effects on the patient's family especially on economic aspects.

Objectives

The study was conducted to assess the effects of paraplegia caused by spinal cord injuries on an individual's functional status, quality of life and family economy.

Methods

This descriptive study was carried out at the National Hospital of Sri Lanka and the Rehabilitation Hospital Ragama with a study sample of 100 traumatic paraplegic patients who were in the age range of 18 to 65 years.

Results

Traumatic paraplegics were mostly men (85%) in the 26-45 years age group (59%). Majority were married (73%) and employed (61%). The major cause for the injury was a fall from a height (63%) and the main lesion was complete transection of the spinal cord (55%). The commonest level was the upper thoracic region i.e. T1- T8 (40%). Functional status of the majority of paraplegics were "minimally assisted" for eating (48%) and grooming (38%) and "moderately assisted" for bathing and dressing, maximally assisted for toileting (37%) and totally assisted for bowel (78%) and bladder (77%) management. Transferring and ambulation also needed total to maximal assistance by the majority. Regarding quality of life, the victims' family component (mean=67.4) and social, economic aspects (mean=63.1) were acceptable when compared to physical (mean=57.32) and emotional (mean=47.06) components. The study revealed that expenditure was significantly high ($p=0.001$) and income significantly less ($p=0.001$) after the injury.

Conclusions

Most of the traumatic paraplegics were physically active young men and the leading cause for the injury was a fall from a height. Their level of functioning was approximately half when compared with healthy individuals. Their quality of life was relatively good on family and social aspects whereas the physical and psychological aspects were somewhat poor. The family economic losses were significantly high and earnings were significantly less after the injury.

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