

OP-34: A survey on the presentation of adolescents to a specialised child and adolescent psychiatry unit in the Colombo district

D. M. A. Dahanayake, T. H. R. Samanmalee

Department of Psychiatry, Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

Introduction: In Sri Lanka, there is only one specialised psychiatry in-patient unit for adolescents, with most out-patient services provided by general adult psychiatrists. There is a lack of data on adolescents within mental health services, impeding resource allocation. This study aimed to describe the socio-demographic factors, clinical factors and management practices relating to adolescents presenting to psychiatry services.

Methods: A survey of clinic records of adolescents (10-19-year-olds) presenting to the University Psychiatry Unit, Lady Ridgeway Hospital for Children, Colombo, during the year 2020 was conducted, using a specifically designed data collection sheet.

Results: Total new patient presentations in 2020 were 114 and 52.7% were boys. The mean age was 12.3 years with 88.5% aged 14 years or younger. Most (49.8%) were residents of Colombo District, with adolescents presenting from all provinces except the Northern and Eastern Provinces. All were enrolled at schools, four in special education. Thirty-eight (33.3%) were referred from the hospital out-patient department, 32.5% from wards, and 25.4% from specialised clinics such as paediatric neurology and rheumatology. Most (28%) were referred due to behavioural problems, 23.7% due to medically unexplained somatic symptoms and 19.3% due to poor school performance. Psychiatric disorders were diagnosed in 79 (69.3%) with 46.8% of them meeting the criteria for mental retardation. Regarding management, 52.6% were offered psychological management (with or without medication); medication was offered to 38.6%. Multidisciplinary care was offered, with most referrals made to psychology (12.3%). Referrals were also made to occupational therapy, social work, speech and language therapy and physiotherapy. Liaison with paediatric neurology, rheumatology and general paediatric units occurred in 21.9%. Follow-up was arranged for 87 (76.3%) with only 54% attending the appointment.

Conclusions: Multidisciplinary input, psychological therapy, pharmacotherapy and follow-up plans have been offered but only half had attended follow-up. However, further studies are needed as this was a single-centre study in a tertiary care setting.

Keywords: adolescence, adolescent mental health, mental health services