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OP 25

The impact of economic crisis on the provision of care for paediatric patients with epilepsy: observations from a tertiary healthcare facility in Sri Lanka

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Introduction and Objectives: 2021 economic crisis in Sri Lanka, affected the free health care system. Children with chronic diseases such as epilepsy requiring daily medication and follow up were vulnerable and this study evaluated the impact of the care given to children with epilepsy during the crisis

Method: A mixed method study was conducted with a qualitative arm conducted with a focus group discussion with 30 caregivers and data analyzed using thematic analysis, together with a quantitative arm conducted with a random sample of 120 caregivers using an interviewer administered questionnaire. The study was undertaken at the Teaching Hospital Kurunegala.

Results: Four major themes were identified. They were financial difficulties faced by the caregivers, unavailability of medications, compliance, and social aspects. However, marked resilience was seen as one parent commented “I have even gone hungry to somehow buy medications that my child needs.” 52% depended only on free health services for treatment. Compliance with clinic visits was 90.5% prior to the crisis. This did not significantly change during the crisis. Compliance with medication was also seen to be good prior to and during the economic crisis (89.5% and 88.4%). Seizure control was seen in almost equal percentages (48% and 42 %) prior to and during the economic crisis. 90% faced problems due to reduced daily wages, lost jobs, and with difficulties in caring for other children.

Conclusions: No significant difference in compliance to medication, clinic visits and occurrence of break-through seizures was seen due to the crisis. Care givers faced significant financial burdens and social issues, but continued care for the child was not significantly compromised.