

EFFECTS OF HEART DISEASE AMONG CHILDREN - A SOCIAL WORK PERSPECTIVE

S.Rachel

Assistant Professor

P.G.Department of Social Work (SF)

Madras School of Social Work

Chennai

M. Thendral

Assistant Professor

Department of Social Work (SFS)

Madras Christian College

Chennai

ABSTRACT

Every year, World Heart Day is celebrated on 29th September focusing on different themes highlighting the importance of cardiac health as cardiovascular diseases (CVDs) remains the biggest cause of Death worldwide. World Health organization report alarms that more than 17 million people died from CVDs in 2008. More than 3 million of these deaths have occurred before the age of 60 which could have been prevented to greater extent. The percentage of premature deaths from CVDs varies from 4% in high-income countries to 42% in low-income countries, leading to increase in inequalities in the incidence and outcome of CVDs between many countries and populations. (Source: WHO report 2011). Dr. Rajiv Sethi had mentioned that the children are equally susceptible to cardiovascular diseases with more exposure to unhealthy eating habits, lack of exercise and smoking that can lead to heart disease early in life. This paper focuses on the burden of heart disease among children globally and in India. It explains the impact on the Children's future. This paper will enable the health care professionals to pay more attention on Children.

Key words: Non communicable diseases, Cardio vascular disease, children, burden, distress

INTRODUCTION

Non communicable disease is the no.1 cause of death in the world. Non communicable diseases (NCDs), such as stroke, cardiac disease, cancer, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes, are the leading cause of mortality globally. This invisible epidemic is an under-appreciated reason of poverty and blocks the economic development of many countries.

Cardiovascular disease is caused by disorders in the heart and blood vessels, and also includes cerebra vascular disease (stroke), coronary heart disease (heart attacks), peripheral artery disease, raised blood pressure (hypertension), heart failure, congenital heart disease and rheumatic heart disease. The main causes of cardiovascular disease are lack of physical inactivity, usage of tobacco, an unhealthy diet and alcohol consumption.

The total non-communicable diseases deaths are projected to increase to 52 million in 2030. While annual infectious disease deaths are expected to decline by around 7 million over the next 20 years, every year cardiovascular disease deaths are projected to incline by 6 million and yearly cancer deaths by 4 million. In low income countries and middle-income countries like India, NCDs will be responsible for 3 times as many (DALYs) as disability adjusted life years and almost 5 times as many deaths as communicable diseases by 2030.

GLOBAL BURDEN

The global burden of disease is changing from communicable diseases to non-communicable diseases, with chronic conditions such as stroke and heart disease now being the major causes of death globally, according to WHO report published in 2008. The shifting of health trends point out that the leading infectious diseases diarrhea, HIV/AIDS, neonatal infections, tuberculosis and malaria will become less significant causes of death worldwide over the next 20 years.

HEART DISEASES AMONG CHILDREN

There are 2 major types of heart problems in children (1) congenital and (2) acquired. Congenital heart defect develops before birth when the baby's heart is in forming stage. The cause and prevention of most of these problems is not known. On the average, for every 1000 births, 6 to 8 babies have congenital heart defects. Several mild defects require no treatment. Other defects, explained as from moderate to severe, should be treated.

The second type of heart problem that are seen in children is acquired heart disease. This problem becomes visible after birth. Generally it is the result of damage done to the heart by a disease, a virus or bacteria.

The most common acquired cardiac problem among Children in India is Kawasaki Disease and Rheumatic Heart Disease caused by rheumatic fever Kawasaki Disease. In some children with acquired heart disease, a reason cannot be found. (Source: <http://www.chp.edu/CHP/Heart+Disease+in+Children>)

Healthcare continues to pose a main challenge for developing countries. The successes of individual health programmes remain outdone by the problems which the developing nations face in this century.

Assuming that a child is any individual below the age of eighteen let us look at the demographic state of children in India. The total Population of India as recorded by UNICEF in 2008 is 1181412000 (1.18 Billion). Out of which Children population of 5-18 years old totally is (320.318 Million) in rural (92.89 Million) and in urban area (227.43 Million). Annually there are around 60,000 to 90,000 children attracting heart diseases in the country and only 15,000 to 20,000 are cured

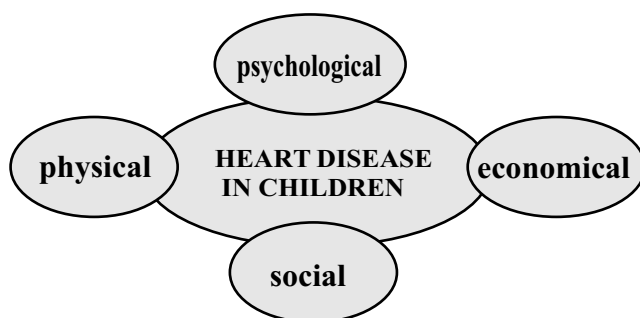
CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO THE HEART DISEASE

Children are susceptible to cardiovascular diseases with the exposure to unhealthy eating habits, lack of exercise, smoking, family history of cardiovascular disease and Alcohol intake.

EFFECTS OF HEART DISEASE ON CHILDREN

When a child is affected with heart ailment, the whole family is distorted. There are many challenges the family had to face under various dimensions such as psychologically, physically, economically and socially (Refer diagram No.1). The same is discussed below.

Diagram No.1 Dimensions of Effects of heart disease on Children



PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS

Major physical illnesses usually have a negative impact on the psychological well-being of any individual. An illness with early onset requiring frequent medical interventions can negatively affect the emotional balance and behavioral adaptation of children and adolescents. Psychological implications in a child and the family can affect prognosis and outcome.

Different emotions may be experienced by the family members and the child with a heart problem requiring special care. Comparatively, younger children may have difficulty in understanding their illness and may not understand the reasons for tests and medical procedures; than the older ones. Children feel angry, fearful, resentful, or withdrawn due to constant treatment procedures. A child's emotions can be affected by the way his / her family members cope with the illness.

PHYSICALEFFECTS

Physical image: Physical symptoms, wounds after surgery often make a child think different from others, and can affect their self-esteem (Fredriksen et al 2004) in their study have reported that Children and adolescents with congenital cardiac diseases have considerably more behavioural problems when compared to reference population and girls have lesser behavioural problems compared to boys. When particularly children with heart disease are restricted from doing exercise, they are emotionally affected. The study also reports that fear of death among the children with heart disease will affect their quality of life.

ECONOMICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL EFFECTS

Finances, work, and economic problems the family may face, will not only affect the caregivers but also affects the child.

Children and their parents do mention concerns about receiving special treatment. Due to their illness and treatment, children may refrain themselves from actively socializing which may even make them feel isolated.

ROLE OF MEDICAL SOCIAL WORKER

- Anita Saxena (2005); Mukul Misra et al., (2009) ,Wanni KA (2014) Bhardwaj R et al., (2015) in their studies have clearly pointed one major responsibility on the health care providers i.e., to create awareness which in turn will help in identifying the heart disease at very early stage thus paving way for early treatment. Hence it is imperative for Social worker who is always at the reach of the community people to create awareness through all possible Medias.
- As Anshula Tandon et al ., (2010) in their study on Risk Factors for Congenital Heart Disease (CHD) in Vellore, India have indicated, it is very crucial aspect that counseling is very much needed at all stage of life particularly for a women, as teenage pregnancy or old age pregnancy can be a risk factor for congenital heart disease among children.
- Education on hygiene at a primary level is mandate as unhygienic environmental conditions indirectly contributes in acquiring rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease reports a study by Krishna Kumar K and Tandon R (2013).
- Health check up has now become an essential component in any individual. It is the role of the medical social worker to educate the importance of regular health check up. As stated by Surjit Singh (2009) in his study “Kawasaki Disease An Indian Perspective”, that Coronary Artery Disease among the young may be an untreated Kawasaki Disease in Childhood.
- It is also essential for the social workers to concentrate on the impact of the illness on the children on various dimensions such as physical, psychological, social and economical factors and help them to cope with illness.

Noting the basic four rights of any child that he/she has the right to survive, right to be protected, right to participate and right to development, as Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child says that children have the right to good quality health care, the medical social workers responsibility

mainly revolves around counseling to the caregivers and giving them more information to stay healthy. Social workers should help the children and caregivers to handle stressful situations because of the illness. Medical Social Workers should equip them through emotional support to surpass negative emotions thus strengthening their mind towards survival.

CONCLUSION

Rather than concentrating on the intervention, it is always wise to be pro-active. One-third of our population constitutes children and there is absolute need for more attention towards our country's development. Government of India has several schemes for children's improvement on all aspects. But the lacunae should be bridged by health care workers in perfect implementation of all the policies and regular supervision of the same. When preventive measures are in full swing, children can enjoy all the benefits and could be fruitful to the country instead of becoming victims of diseases and suffer at realms of life.

Health care professionals should focus on the prevention involving the control of risk factors that promote the development of the disease along with medical therapy, health education and counseling, Educating youngsters to lead a healthy lifestyle to eat nutritious and healthy food and to go for regular health checkups and to abstain from addictions is very essential at this point of time to achieve the well being state for all.

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