

**MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS AMONG 14 AND 15 YEAR
ADOLESCENT SCHOOL CHILDREN, DISTRICT OF JAFFNA:
PREVALENCE AND SELECTED CORRELATES**

P. Arumaithurai

*Counselling Division, Ministry of Social Services, Sri Lanka
parumaithurai@yahoo.com*

Much of the international studies indicate that rates of prevalence of mental health problems among children and adolescents attending school to range between 12 – 22.5%. A survey conducted by the UNICEF in Sri Lanka found that psychological problems increased during the middle (14%) to late (21%) adolescence (UNICEF, 2004). A recent Sri Lankan study showed that 14.7% of children had emotional problems, 12% had conduct problems, 9.8% had hyperactivity, 28.2% had peer problems, and 5.6% had abnormal pro social behaviour (Jayasinghe, 2010). The literature indicates that mental health problems among children and adolescents were highly prevalent in war stricken environments (Somasundaram, 2002; Lukumar, 2005). This study was designed to determine the prevalence and to identify correlations of mental health problems among adolescents aged 14 and 15 years in the District of Jaffna using the Tamil version of the Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ).

A study group was randomly selected from 208 boys and girls from the district of Jaffna. Two study instruments were used for the collection of data. Instrument-1, A questionnaire to identify correlations which have an impact on adolescent mental health problems was specifically developed for this study. Instrument-2, The Tamil version of validated SDQ self report was also used for this survey. The SDQ is a brief mental health problem screening instrument for children and adolescents. The SDQ consists of emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity, peer relationship problems, pro social behaviour. Of the 208 adolescents participated, 22.1% showed mental health problems. Prevalence of mental health problems by gender 25% of boys and 19.2% of girls had mental health problems. Prevalence of mental health problems by age 21.2% of 14 years adolescents and 23.1% of 15 years adolescents had mental health problems. Prevalence of adolescents individual mental health problems were conduct problem 26%, hyperactivity 9.6%, emotional problem 24%, peer problem 27.4%, abnormal prosocial behaviour 8.7%. Lukumar (2005) reported that the prevalence of mental health problems among 14 and 15 year-old adolescents in the Jaffna district is 30%. In comparison, the present study results of mental health problems among adolescents (22.1%) in the Jaffna district is lower in 2013. It is probable that the change in the status of the conflict stricken areas of the North and East may have influenced the prevalence rates among the present and Lukumar (2005) study. The correlates of mental health problems such as school absence, physical abuse by peer and peer rejection were significant.

There is a high prevalence of mental health problems among 14 and 15 year-old adolescents in the Jaffna district. The study also found a difference in the correlates of mental health problems among the two age groups of adolescents.