

ABSTRACT

Lay interpretations on illness in the Gonnoruwa Grama Sevaka division were reviewed in the light of existing concepts of illness behaviour. It appears that although the cosmopolitan medicine is believed to be more useful, Ayurvedic medicine is also commonly used in the community. The influence of stars and planets and the imbalance of three humors are believed to be primary causes of illness and for some prolonged chronic illnesses, people seem to relate them with their 'karma'. It is emphasized that 'hot' and 'cold' conceptual framework plays a greater role in the traditional health care system and a wide range of health behaviour is influenced by hot and cold reasoning. Surprisingly enough, majority of the people in Gonnoruwa are in a good position to identify germs as the major disease agent. As regards children's health, common cold and fever, whooping cough, diarrhoea and phlegm diseases are the commonest diseases during the childhood in the area and from native perceptions, the dirtiness is the primary cause for these disease.

This study also explores popular Sinhalese perceptions of convulsion (valippuva) and related health care behaviour. Majority of the respondents rightly identified the high fever as the immediate cause of convulsion but the seriousness of this disease is largely misunderstood by many people. About 75% of the respondents viewed that convulsion is a fatal disease and their immediate reaction is after all determined by the perceived seriousness of the disease. The mysteriousness and the perhaps the perceived fatality of this disease seem to have led many people to abstain even from talking about it openly. The need to more closely integrate health education programme is suggested.