

Epilepsy in Bangladesh

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Bangladesh is one of the densely populated countries in the world where infectious diseases, malnutrition and many chronic neurological disorders are quite common. Although there is no national statistics yet in our country but there are some hospital based studies that reflect to some extent the situation of epilepsy in Bangladesh. Studies in developed countries shows prevalence rate of about 5 per 1,000 populations whereas in developing countries it is higher. Men are more often affected than female and rural populations are affected more than the urban populations. Based on the prevalence rate of 10 per 1,000 populations, the number of epilepsy patients in Bangladesh is about 1.3 million. The common ages of epileptic patients in Bangladesh are between 16 to 31 years. The etiology varies with age. Birth trauma, birth asphyxia, central nervous system infections are common in neonate and infancy whereas head trauma, brain tumor, stroke, infections are common causes in middle aged and elderly. Vast majority of the people in Bangladesh does have superstitious belief about Epilepsy. This belief usually is a strong barrier for total care of patients with epilepsy. Misunderstanding and negative attitude of the parents, family members and society towards

epilepsy are still prevalent. Thus, many patients with epilepsy are still neglected in diagnosis, treatment, education, rehabilitation and other social needs. The epilepsy patients are often reluctant to seek advice from physicians. Rather they believe epilepsy has no cure and they seek advice from indigenous medicine practitioner 'Kabiraj', snake charmer 'Ojha' and spiritual healers. A report of 130 patients from the epilepsy clinic of BSMMU (a government post-graduate medical center) showed that close to 70% of patients visited indigenous medicine practitioners, exorcists, spiritualists prior to consulting the clinic, only 29% perceived epilepsy as a disease, 50% dropped out from school (58% of whom due to epilepsy), and 52% of patients had to change job because of epilepsy.¹ Appropriate antiepileptic drugs are sometime unavailable in Bangladesh. The BSMMU study showed 23% of patients found it difficult to continue treatment due to financial problem.¹ Financial factor is likely to partly accounts for the treatment gap.

REFERENCE

1. Anwarullah AKM, Khan MRK, Hakim M, Hague A, Mannan MA. Attitude of family and community towards epilepsy. *Neuron* 2004; 4: 14-20.