

## MENTAL RETARDATION IN BURMA

### Introduction:

According to the total census in 1973 the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma had a population of 28.8 million while it has been estimated recently to be about 32.9 million. About 40.5% of the country's total population are children between the aged of 0 - 14 years and 53.5% are between 15 - 59 years whereas the remaining 6% are those aged 60 years and above.

Concerning mental retardation, the exact prevalence has not been fully estimated as yet. According to a W.H.O. report, surveys of general population show that the prevalence of persistent and socially handicapping mental health problems among children of age group 3 - 15 years in developed countries is about 5 - 15%. More limited data from developing countries suggest roughly similar figure. About 3% of the world's population are found to be mentally retarded. Therefore, it can be roughly estimated that about one million of the population in Burma are mentally retarded. But the problem had not been considered too seriously as the parents or relatives concerned do tolerate and do their best in looking after their retarded children.

### Services for mentally retarded:

There are no separate special services for mentally retarded as yet. The Rangoon Psychiatric Hospital, which is situated in Rangoon and the Psychiatric ward in Mandalay General Hospital which are under the Ministry of Health is responsible for all mentally retarded patients.

### In-patient service for mentally retarded in Rangoon Psychiatric Hospital:

Only when older retarded children and retarded adults become aggressive and impossible to be managed at home, are admitted into Hospital. Some cases are admitted in General wards concerned. Some retarded adults who had committed criminal offences are admitted as criminal patients.

Most of the retarded children are treated as inpatient at the child unit of the Rangoon Psychiatric Hospital. At present there are 11 severely retarded children in the unit. The ward is run by a psychiatrist, a psychiatrically trained nurse and 4 trained attendants.

Some retarded children are picked-up by police when they are found wandering about the town and are brought to the hospital for admission. In some of them their parents could not

be traced and they have to be permanently cared for in the hospital. Some have parents and houses of their own, but have to be admitted as in-patients when they become aggressive and difficult and cannot be cared for at home.

Child Guidance Clinic:

A Child Guidance Clinic was opened in Rangoon in 1962 by Ministry of Health. Since then it is run by a psychiatrist and a psychiatric social worker once a week. Parents, teachers, doctors from clinics and health centres are informed of the existence of this clinic, and children with behaviour problems and emotional problems are referred to the clinic. Many of the children are brought by their parents or guardians. On analysing the cases we found that mental retardation contributed the major problem. Epilepsy and behaviour disorders are usually associated conditions.

Total number of new children attending the Child Guidance Clinic from 3.9.75 to 22.8.81 are 335. Out of which mental retardation constitute 175.

Types of Disorders seen in Children Guidance Clinic:

1. Subnormal presentation only	: 23.3%
2. Epilepsy	: 13.8%
3. Emotional Disorder	: 17.9%
4. Behaviour Disorder including Conduct Disorder	: 23.8%
5. Hyperkinetic Disorder	: 7%
6. Others	: 4.2%

Mental Retardation associated with other conditions such as Epilepsy, behaviour disorder, emotional disorder, and mental retardation alone constituted 52.8%. Therefore, it can be regarded over 50% of the children attending the Child Guidance Clinic are found to be mentally retarded. Boys outnumber the girls. The ratio of boys to girls is 2:1.

Types of Mental Retardation:

1. Mild	: 28.1%
2. Moderate	: 42.8%
3. Severe	: 29.1%

Diagnosis of Mental Retardation is made :

1. From history given by the parents, eg. delay in milestones of development.
  - Inability to be taught at school.
  - Failure in school work.

2. By assessment of Intelligence by Intelligence test and
3. From some associated problems, such as Behaviour Disorder, Brain damage, Epilepsy or maladaptive Social behaviour.

Most of the parents do not realise that their children are mentally retarded and some will not accept the fact that they are retarded, and if they accept the fact, many expect their children to recover. Usually they come to realise the true facts, only when their children cannot follow the lessons at school and failed repeatedly in school examinations and when teachers report about their children's school work and behaviour problems.

#### Causes of Mental Retardation:

Aetiology of mental retardation has not been studied properly and adequately yet as we are short of trained personnel and facilities. However, genetic factors, prenatal and postnatal infections. (Encephalitis, Meningitis) Injury, malnutrition, prematurities, brain-damage are found to be causative factors in some of the cases.

#### Measure given in child guidance Clinic:

The Psychiatrist and Social workers give guidance to the parents in bringing up their retarded children. Case work by social worker and supportive psychotherapy to the emotionally disturbed children and parents, family therapy are carried out.

Anti-epileptic drugs, some major and minor tranquillizers and vitamins are also prescribed whenever necessary.

Some children attending the clinic are severely retarded and some have physical handicaps such as speech and hearing defects. They have to take treatment for these problems at appropriate hospitals. Most of the children are not so severely defective and can attend school for normal children, as there is no special school for the retarded children at the moment. Naturally they remain in the same class for 2 or more years.

#### Residential Care Services:

There are no special residential care services for retarded children. But, very small children or infants are accepted at the residential nursery of social welfare Department.

These children come from broken homes, due to separations of parents or death of parents or if the parents is convicted. Some children are referred from maternity and children hospital because they are abandoned by their mothers. Few of them were later found to be mentally retarded.

Special Schools:

Although there is no special school for mentally retarded children, there are special schools for physically handicapped children and school for the blind and school for the deaf and dumb. The children attending these school have to be of average intelligence. Mentally retarded children are not accepted in these schools, but they are not excluded from ordinary schools and nurseries, unless they have behavioural disturbances.

They are not also excluded from health services and dental care services. School for physically retarded children for 100 students which is under Ministry of Social Welfare is run by a qualified Head-mistress specially trained for disabled children with 2 school teachers in Rangoon. It accepts children age 5 - 16 years as day students. They are provided with morning meals and free transport. Equipments for their disabilities such as braces, clutches, special chairs, toys and other play materials are also provided. There is a teacher student association like other ordinary schools and recreation activities, such as annual concerts and sports are carried out annually.

Recently this school has been accepting some mentally retarded children, including mongols, cerebral palsy moderately retarded and epileptic children.

Some of the students who finish primary school can be transferred to ordinary school for middle and higher classes.

Mentally Retarded people in the community:

As mentioned earlier there are no special care services nor residential home for the care of the mentally retarded person. The family is the basis of care of the mentally retarded in both urban and rural areas.

Mildly retarded people can work as cultivators, farmers and cow boys, etc. in rural areas and they can work as unskilled labourers and domestic help in urban areas. Some of them get married and have children of their own.

Severely retarded people continue to live with their families for life. Only when their parents die and there is no one to look after them and when they tend to become dangerous and unmanageable and impossible to live with their families they are brought to the hospital for admission. Few of the retarded people who have no relatives to depend on become vagrants.

Training in Mental Retardation:

Some of the qualified psychiatrists in Burma has had training abroad and in the course of their training received lectures on care of the mentally handicap. Institute of Medicine I, Rangoon had opened the Department of Psychiatry for post-graduate training in Psychiatry in 1977. Since then post graduate training course of psychiatry has been conducted in Rangoon. In this course, lectures on mental retardation and practical training for care and treatment of mental retardation are included. They have to attend mentally retarded patients who are taking treatment as out-patients and in-patients as well.

Post graduate students of paediatric and internal medicine also receive lectures, demonstrations and seminar on mental retardation. Medical students also get lectures on mental retardation. Both post-graduate and undergraduate nurses are also given theory and practical training in mental retardation.

Prevention of Mental Retardation:

Concerning prevention of Mental Retardation no special programmes have as yet been carried out. But in the country health programmes prevention of infective diseases, environmental sanitation, expanded programme of immunisation, vector borne disease control, and the family health care programme consists of prenatal, perinatal and post natal care of the mothers and supply of vitamins.

Prenatal services include Blood tests for syphilis to detect and treat the disease of the mother and prevent congenital syphilis in the child. There is no special programme to prevent rubella and measles. Cretinism when detected early is treated with Thyroid Extract.

Proper training of the midwives to conduct normal labour and to detect abnormal pregnancies so that such expected mother could be referred to hospital in time to prevent obstetric accidents. To promote care of the mother training programmes for the auxillary midwives have been introduced. They have to serve the mothers in their own villages and towns. They are trained to care for the normal expectant mothers and to refer the case with complications to hospital. Provisions of these services will improve generally health of the population and therefore lower the incidence of mental retardation.

Plan for Future:

1. Ministry of Social Welfare Services is to open special school for mentally retarded children in the very near future. The building has been already constructed in the same compound of the school for physically handicapped children in Rangoon.
2. Another child guidance clinic will be opened for the care of mentally retarded children and children with emotional and behavioural problems.
3. Care of the mentally handicapped people is included in the field of community medicine.
4. To promote and intensify the training of the manpower, including psychiatrists, child psychiatrist, psychologist, social workers special teachers and nurses for mental retardation.
5. Health Education to the health workers.