

## People with Disabilities and Older Individuals As Consumers of Digital Health Informatics in Sri Lanka

Tennakoon V<sup>1</sup>, Yasawardene S<sup>1</sup>, Peiris-John R<sup>2</sup>, Ameratunga S<sup>2</sup>, Wickremasinghe R<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Medicine, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, University of Auckland, New Zealand

<sup>3</sup>Faculty of Medicine, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka

**Background:** The prevalence of disability in Sri Lanka is estimated to be 8.7%. With increasing life expectancy, the older population (60 years and above) in Sri Lanka is expected to increase from 12.4% in 2012 to 24.8% in 2041. One in four of those aged 60-69 years has a disability in the country. Health systems are often challenged in providing accessible services responsive to the particular needs of disabled and ageing communities. In parallel, independence is a critical issue in the process of achieving well-being for these populations. In today's world, digital technologies have played an important role in diffusion of information. Internet is emerging as a means to propagate healthcare information and facilitate interactions between patients and healthcare delivery process. Health informatics can, at least theoretically, be an important mechanism through which disabled and older individuals can access services that can improve their quality of life while remaining independent in their communities. However, it is important to assess the likelihood of access to digital health informatics in these marginalized populations in a lower middle income country like Sri Lanka.

**Objective:** As part of a larger project exploring transportation safety, this study identifies the socio-demographic details and preferred method of receiving information among people with disabilities and older individuals in Colombo district in Sri Lanka.

**Methods:** A household travel survey was conducted in Divisional Secretary (DS) divisions of Dehiwala, Ratmalana and Kesbewa in Colombo district. Study participants were disabled people (5 years and older) with physical, sensory, learning or mobility impairment, and older people (60 years and above). A total of 180 households were randomly selected from the lists maintained at Divisional Secretariats. Sixty households in each DS division were identified such that 30 households have at least one disabled person and remaining 30 have at least one older person. An interviewer administered questionnaire was completed following informed written consent.

**Results:** The study population consisted of people <60 years with disability (37.2%), people >60 years with disability (52.8%) and people >60 years without disability (10%). Of the study population 55.6% were males and 44.4% were females. Nearly 60% of the sample had no or only primary education. From the participants aged 18 years or older, 28.5% had no means of income, and 45% received a monthly income less than Rs 10,000. Disability profile of the sample showed 26% and 24% had complete/partial visual impairment and learning difficulty respectively. The majority (53%; case percent 93) preferred television as the method of receiving information. Telephone was preferred by 7.2% and internet by 0.7%. Irrespective of the type of disability, category of income or level of education, television was rated as the preferred mode of receiving information by the study population.

**Conclusions:** The findings showed that internet was one of the least preferred methods of receiving information by disabled people and older individuals in the Colombo district. This observation supports the fact that only about 3% of the 60-69 age group is computer literate in Sri Lanka. The study findings are an important consideration given that identifying the user and understanding the differences between subsets of the population are key aspects influencing its effective application of digital health informatics.