



REGIONAL COMMITTEE

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Provisional Agenda item 11

HOME ACCIDENTS IN CEYLON

(Item Proposed by the Government of Ceylon)

No precise picture of the extent of home accidents in this country is yet available, as it has still not been possible to organize a country-wide survey of the entire problem. The current evidence is largely based on cases that are attended to in the General Hospital in the capital city of the country and in the adjacent Children's Hospital, both of which are the largest institutions of their type in the Island, and therefore can be relied upon at least to provide a pattern of the prevalence of home accidents in the country.

The General Hospital, particularly, provides a dependable pointer to the question, since this institution renders attention to a cross-section of the country's population, classes and communities. In the Children's Hospital, too, patients come from all sections and classes of the population.

But a complete picture of the situation is really an uphill task, because, notably, in the rural areas, where these accidents are known to be frequent, the ministrations are not always rendered in government hospitals or dispensaries. Quite a section of the population seek the first ministrations from Ayurvedic practitioners, who invariably maintain no records.

This preliminary paper must therefore only attempt to give a general pattern of home accidents in the country and their common origins, basing its authenticity on records in the two large hospitals mentioned earlier.

The Pattern

The most frequent form of accidents encountered in the home is one of burns. Of the 22 deaths by burns registered in the General Hospital last year, 10 were directly the result of bottle-lamp accidents, and 11 were caused by garments catching fire from open fireplaces, both causes being typical of the rural scene in Ceylon. Of the 297 cases treated for burns, 98 were victims of the bottle lamp and 81 sustained the injuries from the open fireplaces. It is remarkable that of the 118 who were treated for boiling water burns, only one died.

There were 32 cases of burning injuries resulting from explosives - e.g. crackers, home-made hand bombs, fireworks, spirits, acids, petrol - registered at the Premier Hospital, with 5 deaths recorded.

Another prominent cause of home accidents was found to be foreign bodies getting into the throat, nose, eyes and ears. Pins and needles being swallowed, stones in the ear, dentures and hard objects in the throat and broken glass in the eyes are the more familiar types involving foreign bodies, but the degree of fatality is infinitesimal.

In the Children's Hospital, 214 accidents caused by burns were reported with 10 children succumbing to the injuries in 1959. Among children another common type of home accident here is 'poisoning', by swallowing kerosine oil, which claimed 11 deaths out of a reported number of 160 accidents. Poisoning by other substances claimed 6 deaths, while there were two cases of poisoning by analgesic and soporific drugs in both of which the victims died. Also in rural areas, unprotected wells are a perennial danger to adults and children.

#### The Cause: Environment

The underlying cause of home accidents in the country has its roots in the set-up of the home, particularly the rural household, where home accidents are frequently known to occur. The frail economic conditions of the rural people, general backwardness of the rural population and their inability to sense the dangerous conditions that operate in their homes, and a certain measure of carelessness and indifference would seem to be the larger factors behind the home-accident tragedy here.