

Morbidity Among Children Reared in Purdah System in Ibadan—A Preliminary Study

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Summary

Oyemade, A. and Adeleye, I. (1975). *Nigerian Journal of Paediatrics*, 2 (1), 15. **Morbidity Among Children Reared in Purdah System in Ibadan—A Preliminary Study.** The pattern of morbidity among 256 and 266 Ibadan children reared in purdah system and in non-purdah system respectively is reported. The study has revealed that malaria, respiratory infections, malnutrition and diarrhoea are the most common diseases in both groups of children. Malaria and respiratory infections occurred more frequently amongst children not reared under purdah system, while malnutrition, skin infections, measles and whooping cough featured more among those reared in purdah. Diarrhoea occurred with almost the same frequency in both groups and rickets was relatively uncommon.

Introduction

IN Nigeria, purdah system has for long existed as a divine social institution among moslems. Under this system, legal wives are protected from the outside world by being allowed out only at night or during the day heavily veiled. Confined to their homes most of the day, these women are denied the opportunity of making use of the available medical facilities for themselves and their children. With rapid social changes in the Western State of Nigeria, this system is gradually undergoing some changes for although most women in purdah still stay indoors during the day, a few bring to the hospitals their children who are usually carried on their mothers' backs under heavy veils. The present study was undertaken in order to examine the morbidity among children reared under this peculiar social system.

Materials and Methods

Every child known to have been reared within the purdah system and who attended the General Out Patient Department (GOPD) of the University College Hospital (UCH), Ibadan, between June and December 1973 was included in the study. These children numbering 256 will be referred to as the study group. The control group consists of 266 children also selected from those who attended the GOPD during the same period but who were not reared in purdah. They were matched for age with the study group. Every child in the two groups was examined by the authors and diagnosis was based mainly on symptoms and signs. Information was also collected on the occupation of the parents.

Results

Age and Sex Distribution

The age and sex distribution of the study group and the control group is shown in Tables I and II respectively. Of the 256 children in the study group, 136 (53.2 percent) were males

and 120 (46.8 percent) females, whilst in the control group, 145 (54.5 percent) were males and 121 (45.5 percent) females. All the children in both groups were within the age range 0 to 10 years; more than 60 percent of the children in each group were under two years of age.

TABLE I
Age and Sex Distribution of 256 Children in the Study Group

<i>Age (Months)</i>	<i>Sex</i>		<i>Total</i>	<i>Percent of Total</i>
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>		
0-12	38	48	86	33.6
13-24	42	35	77	30.1
25-36	17	18	35	13.7
37-48	15	3	18	7.1
49-60	13	1	14	5.5
61-72	7	6	13	5.1
73-84	0	5	5	2.0
85-96	3	3	6	2.3
97-108	1	0	1	0.3
109-120	0	1	1	0.3
Total	136	120	256	100

TABLE II
Age and Sex Distribution of 266 Children in the Control Group

<i>Age (Months)</i>	<i>Sex</i>		<i>Total</i>	<i>Percent of Total</i>
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>		
1-12	47	46	93	35.0
13-24	44	34	78	29.3
25-36	24	11	35	13.2
37-48	10	8	18	6.8
49-60	8	8	16	6.0
61-72	5	8	13	4.9
73-84	3	2	5	1.9
85-96	3	3	6	2.3
97-108	1	0	1	0.3
109-120	0	1	1	0.3
Total	145	121	266	100

Socio-economic background

The occupations of the fathers in both groups are shown in Table III. A comparison of the occupations within the various occupational groups and their annual incomes in the Western State of Nigeria (Table IV) shows that most of the fathers in the study and control groups come from the low income class of the population. Although 86 (33.6 percent) of the fathers of children in the study group have been classified as 'professionals', most of them were in fact low grade teachers who taught basic Islamic religion to children under ten years of age. The 12 (4.5 percent) fathers of the control group

classified as professionals were mostly primary school teachers. Only 3 (1.1 percent) fathers in the study group and 21 (7.9 percent) in the control group were farmers, whilst a large proportion in both groups were craftsmen, petty traders and clerks. Finally, those classified as 'others' were mostly 'taxi' or lorry drivers.

The occupations of the mothers (Table V) show that the women in purdah were mostly cloth weavers, an occupation that kept them within their living quarters. The mothers of those in the control group were mostly engaged in petty trading within or outside their home environments. It is also to be noted that 56

TABLE III
Occupations of the Fathers in both the Study and the Control Groups

Occupation	Study Group	Control Group
Farmers	3 (1.1 percent)	21 (7.9 percent)
Craftsmen	63 (24.6 percent)	78 (29.3 percent)
Trading and Clerical	73 (28.5 percent)	79 (29.7 percent)
Low grade 'professionals'	86 (33.6 percent)	12 (4.5 percent)
Others	29 (11.4 percent)	73 (27.4 percent)
Unemployed	2 (0.8 percent)	3 (1.2 percent)
Total	256 (100.0 percent)	266 (100.0 percent)

TABLE IV
Average Annual Income of Various Occupational Groups in the Western State 1968/1969

Occupational Group	Average Income
Farmers	N102.00 (£51)
Salary/wage Earner including low grade professionals and administrators.	N268.00 (£134)
Craftsmen	N112.00 (£56)
Traders and Clerical	N258.00 (£129)
Other Occupations	N108.00 (£54)

Source: Statistical Division, Ministry of Economic Planning and Social Services, Western State.

TABLE V
Occupations of the Mothers in both the Study and the Control Group

Group	Occupation of Mothers					Total
	Housewife	Petty Trader	"Pap Seller"	Cloth Weaver	Others	
Study	48 (18.8 percent)	70 (27.3 percent)	56 (21.9 percent)	76 (29.7 percent)	6 (2.3 percent)	256 (100 percent)
Control	35 (13.1 percent)	196 (73.5 percent)	10 (3.8 percent)	5 (1.9 percent)	20 (7.6 percent)	266 (100 percent)

TABLE VI
MORBIDITY PATTERN OF THE STUDY GROUP
DISEASE

Age (Months)	Malaria	Respiratory infections	Malnutrition	Diarrhoea	Staphylococcal skin infection	Measles	Whooping Cough	Mumps	Bow legs and rickets	Others	Total	Percent of Total
0-12	14	20	8	20	9	7	1	1	-	6	86	33.6
13-24	22	17	16	8	2	3	1	1	1	6	77	30.1
25-36	7	6	6	5	2	3	2	-	1	3	35	13.7
37-48	4	4	3	2	1	-	1	-	2	1	18	7.1
49-60	7	4	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	14	5.5
61-72	4	2	2	-	2	-	1	1	-	1	13	5.1
73-84	-	-	-	-	4	-	-	-	-	1	5	2.0
85-96	3	-	-	-	1	-	2	-	-	-	6	2.3
97-108	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	0.3
109-120	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	0.3
Total	61(23.8)*	53(20.7)	38(14.8)	35(13.7)	21(8.2)	13(5.1)	8(3.1)	3(1.2)	4(1.6)	20(7.8)	256(100)	100.0

* The percentages of children with specified illnesses are in parenthesis.

TABLE VII
MORBIDITY PATTERN OF THE CONTROL GROUP
DISEASE

Age (Months)	Malaria	Respiratory infection	Malnutrition	Diarrhoea	Staphylococcal skin infection	Measles	Whooping cough	Mumps	Bow legs and rickets	Others	Total	Percent of Total
0-12	30	28	6	16	7	1	-	-	-	5	93	35.0
13-24	21	23	14	16	1	1	-	-	-	2	78	29.3
25-36	12	6	7	3	1	1	1	-	1	3	35	13.2
37-48	5	4	2	1	-	-	-	-	1	5	18	6.8
49-60	9	1	3	1	-	-	-	1	-	1	16	6.0
61-72	7	2	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	2	13	4.9
73-84	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	5	1.9
85-96	2	-	-	-	1	-	1	1	-	2	6	2.3
97-108	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.3
109-120	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	0.3
Total	86(32.3)*	66(24.8)	33(12.4)	37(13.9)	10(3.8)	3(1.1)	1(0.4)	4(1.5)	2(0.8)	24(9.0)	266(100)	100.0

* The percentages of children with the specified illnesses are in parenthesis.

(21.9 percent) of the women in purdah were engaged in the selling of 'pap', a gruel-like maize paste consisting mainly of carbohydrates. In contrast, there were only 10 (3.8 percent) of the mothers of the control group who sold 'pap'. Those classified as 'others' were mostly native hairdressers.

Morbidity pattern of the two groups

The pattern of diseases in the study and control groups is shown in Tables VI and VII respectively. The percentages of children in each group with the specified illnesses are derived from the primary diagnosis as most of the children presented with more than one disease process. The prevalence rates of the common diseases are compared statistically, using X^2 test and the results are shown in Table VIII. Four major conditions, namely: malaria, respiratory infections, malnutrition and diarrhoea occurred most frequently in the children. Comparison between the two groups however, shows that the control group had a significantly higher

prevalence rate for malaria ($0.05 > P > 0.025$). Respiratory infections occurred in 20.7 percent and 24.8 percent of the study and control groups respectively, and there was no significant difference ($P > 0.1$) between the two groups. The percentages of children with malnutrition in both groups were not significantly different ($P > 0.5$), and similarly the prevalence rates for diarrhoea in both groups did not vary significantly ($P > 0.5$). There was no statistical significance in the difference between the prevalence rates of both groups for other diseases except that for measles and whooping cough the study group had significantly higher rates.

Among the children aged two to four years, there were four (1.6 percent) in the study group and two (0.8 percent) in the control group who had bow legs. Of these, X-rays of the wrist bones showed active rickets in two patients in the study group and in one patient in the control group. There was no radiological evidence of rickets in two patients, and no radiological examination was undertaken in the sixth child.

TABLE VIII

Percentages of Children with Specified Illnesses in the Study Group and the Control Group

Specified Illnesses	Percentages of Children with the Specified Illnesses		Statistical Significance of differences	Comments
	Study Group	Control Group		
Malaria	23.8	32.3	$X^2 = 4.25; 0.05 > P > 0.025$	Control group significantly higher.
Respiratory infection	20.7	24.8	$X^2 = 1.51; P > 0.1$	No significant difference between the two groups.
Malnutrition	14.8	12.4	$X^2 = 0.66; P > 0.5$	No significant difference between the two groups.
Diarrhoea	13.7	13.9	$X^2 = 0.01; P > 0.5$	No significant difference between the two groups.
Staphylococcal skin infection	8.2	3.8	$X^2 = 3.85; P > 0.05$	No significant difference between the two groups.
Measles	5.1	1.1	$X^2 = 5.59; 0.025 > P > 0.01$	Study group significantly higher.
Whooping cough	3.1	0.4	$X^2 = 4.31; 0.05 > P > 0.025$	Study group significantly higher.
Rickets	1.6	0.8	$X^2 = 0.21; P > 0.5$	No significant difference between the two groups.

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