

COMMUNITY HEALTH IN A RURAL AREA OF SUDAN

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ABSTRACT: A community survey was conducted in Al awayda village, one of eight villages selected for study in the rural Gezira province of Sudan. The objective of the survey was to identify the main health, social and economic problems of people in rural areas and to set priorities as a first phase in a rural development program. The results showed a high illiteracy rate and poor socioeconomic status aggravated by the drought and famine which affected this area of Africa in the years 1983-85. There was an inadequate safe water supply, poor environmental sanitation and inadequate primary health care services. The major disease problems were malaria, diarrheal diseases and schistosomiasis. The implementation of primary health care services with special emphasis on maternal and child health and health education is a clear need. The impact of Sennar Sugar Agricultural Scheme on this village is also discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The World Health organization's message¹ for the governments and peoples of developing countries to extend primary health care services to rural populations who are in great need of them is in the process of being implemented. The Sudan, is adopting the primary health care approach for the solution of its main health problems. An essential step in planning for primary health care services is assessing community needs and resources by collecting baseline information. This can be done in many ways and using a variety of techniques. It is not enough to depend on routine records and statistics from peripheral health units as these are inadequate, incomplete and at times no records exist. A better

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method of obtaining information is the use of a simple community survey.^{2,3} This article demonstrates one way of carrying out a simple comprehensive community survey using medical students as the resource personnel without any additional costs.

Each year medical students of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Gezira, carry out a community survey as the first phase in their field training research and rural development programme.⁴ The second and third phases are concerned with the implementation and evaluation of primary health care services respectively, based on the data collected during the first phase. The main objectives of this community survey are:

To collect basic data: demographic, health, agricultural and socio-economic for a group of selected villages.

To identify the major problems: health service problems, disease problems and community problems, and set priorities through analysis of data.

To suggest and set a plan of action to solve the problems identified through involvement of the people.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

Eight villages located in the area of the Sennar Sugar Scheme were randomly selected from a total of 40 villages in the area. The Sennar Sugar Scheme is an agricultural Scheme established by the government in 1978 to grow sugar cane for the sugar industry. It lies in the Gezira province west of the town of Sennar. From each of these 8 villages a 40% sample of households was randomly selected. This article presents the results of the community survey in one of these villages selected called Al Awayda Village.

The survey was conducted using a structured questionnaire developed by the medical students themselves under the guidance of tutors. The questionnaire was revised and tested before it was finally administered. Students were given instructions for a period of one week at the University Campus. They learned about the socioeconomic life of rural populations, interviewing techniques, questionnaire design and sampling techniques. Six medical students stayed for two weeks in the village to conduct this household survey. In addition to the questionnaire, students used other techniques like discussions with community leaders, focussed group discussions, observations and reviews of records at the health unit.