



Feeding Challenges in children with Cerebral Palsy in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania

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INTRODUCTION

Cerebral Palsy (CP) is the most common cause of childhood disability affecting around 2-2.5 per 1000 children globally. Feeding a child with disability is associated with many challenges and if not appropriately addressed can lead to aspiration, wasting and stunting. Few studies have been done in low- and middle-income countries to describe the challenges of feeding in children with CP.

MAIN OBJECTIVE

To determine feeding challenges in children with CP attending Paediatric Neurology clinic in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A prospective descriptive hospital-based study was conducted at a tertiary national referral hospital in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania. A structured caregiver interview was used to assess feeding. The assessment included the type, duration, and frequency of the feeds as well as whether regurgitation, vomiting, choking, swallowing difficulty, tongue bite/thrust occurred during feeding. The severity of feeding challenges was determined using the Eating and Drinking Ability Classification System (EDACS)

RESULTS

Three hundred children were enrolled into the study, out of these 196(65%) were males and the median age of the study population was 4 years (IQR 2-14). Swallowing difficulty occurred in 124(41.3%), choking during feeds in 109(36.3%) and 178(59.3%) were fully dependent on the caregiver for feeding. Choking was observed more in children with Dyskinetic CP 22(47.8%) compared to Spastic CP 82(37.6%), p-value 0.001. Regurgitation after feeds occurred more in children with Dyskinetic CP 14(30.4%) compared to children with Spastic CP 38(17.4%) p-value 0.003. Choking occurred in 83(56%) of children with EDACS level IV-V and 104(51.4%) in children with Gross Motor Function Classification System (GMFCS) IV-V.

CONCLUSIONS

Feeding challenges are common in children with CP in Tanzania. Children with dyskinetic CP, EDACS level IV-V and GMFCS level IV-V are mostly at risk for choking with eventual aspiration.

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