

Abstract

BACKGROUND:

The main service provider for childhood immunization in Sri Lanka is the government sector. However, utilization of private sector for childhood immunization is increasing rapidly. Existing national immunization data does not routinely include statistics on private sector immunization delivery adequately.

OBJECTIVE:

To estimate the proportion of children immunized in the private sector; describe socio-demographic characteristics of private sector users and compare these with government sector users.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

A community-based cross-sectional descriptive study was conducted using a pre-tested interviewer-administered structured questionnaire. This was done in the Colombo municipal council area using the WHO 30 cluster methodology. The total number of households in the sample was 553.

RESULTS:

Out of the 5,028 total immunizations reported in the present study, around one-third (2,544) was obtained through the private sector. Nineteen percent (104) of children were exclusively immunized from the private sector. The distribution of usual immunization provider was - government sector 72.3% (400) and private sector 27.7% (153). Significant differences were observed ($P < 0.001$) between private and government sector users with regard to family income, social class, ethnicity, religion and educational level of the mother. The age-appropriate immunization among the 12- to 23-month age group was 92.3% (144) in the government sector, whereas it was 95% (38) in the private sector. Among the 24- to 35-month age group, it was 91.7% (121) and 92.7% (76) respectively. The age-adjusted immunization coverage rates were almost same among the government and private sector users except for the measles vaccine, where the private sector users had significantly ($P = 0.016$) higher coverage.