ABSTRACT

The concept of Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) programme was introduced by World Health Organization in 1970s. For the past thirty years the CBR strategies have been implemented in various developing and under developed countries. In India CBR strategies were introduced in 1985 through District Disability Rehabilitation Centres (DRC) and further adopted by voluntary organizations especially in South India (SPASTN, 2000). The CBR programme is a combination of rural rehabilitation services, outreach services and community development programmes. This programme aims at empowering the Persons With Disabilities (PWD) within the community with locally available resources. Though some studies have reported significant developments through CBR among Persons With Disabilities, others like Vannaste (1997) and Myezwa (1995) view that the children with intellectual disabilities are least advantaged by CBR services. The present study was conducted to ascertain the impact of the programme on children with mental retardation and their caregivers and further to suggest suitable modifications for improvements in the programme. Ramanathapuram is one of the three districts in Tamil Nadu where the National Programme for persons With Disabilities (NPRPD) was initially implemented by the Government of India in 2002-2003. The overall objective of the study is to assess the impact of Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) programme on children with mental retardation and their caregivers in rural areas.

Survey design was chosen for the study and a total of 267 children with mental retardation under the age group of 3 to 15 years were identified from six randomly selected blocks of Ramanathapuram district. An interview schedule with a scale for assessing the adaptive behaviour of children with mental retardation and the perceived problems of the caregivers of these children were used to collect the primary data from the field. Participatory Rural Appraisal method was used for short-listing the problems of CBR personnel to overcome
the difficulties in programme delivery and to elicit their suggestions for improving programme delivery. The CBR programme was implemented in this district through NPRPD scheme in 2002-2003. Totally 350 Community Based Rehabilitation Workers and ten Multipurpose Rehabilitation Workers were working for 10795 Persons With Disabilities. Early intervention activities, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, special education and vocational training are provided to the Persons With Disabilities. Majority of the children with mental retardation were educable and trainable and has been enrolled in regular schools. They belonged to socially and economically disadvantaged families.

The CBR services could positively change the adaptive behaviour of children with mild and moderate mental retardation. The behaviour of children with severe mental retardation could be modified only in selected domains. In overall view the CBR has positive impact on the children with mental retardation. Achievements of the children with mental retardation were marginal. The age group and levels of retardation have significantly influenced the improvement in adaptive behaviour of the children but gender has not influenced their behavioural improvement significantly. On CBR intervention the perceived problems of the caregivers changed significantly. The age group and levels of retardation of the children had significantly influenced the changes in the perceived problems where as the gender of the children had no significant influence.

Lack of transport facilities, non-cooperation of family members, inadequate staff members, limited time for intervention, irregular follow up activities, lack of community support, attitudinal barriers, frequent change/resignation of the staff members, lack of experience and training and lack of coordination were the problems felt by the programme personnel. Suitable measures to improve the programme delivery were suggested.