

FACILITIES FOR THE DISABLED IN THE COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS OF BANGKOK – ARE THEY ADEQUATE?

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Abstract. Equal rights for the disabled are widely accepted, at least in principle. Basic public facilities for these people are minimum requirements. We performed a cross-sectional descriptive survey of three basic facilities (wheelchair ramps, elevators and modified toilet) in public buildings, of more than 5 floors in the Silom and Siam business areas of Bangkok. Of a total of 62 buildings surveyed, no building had all three facilities. The slope ramps, elevators and modified toilets were found in 26, 49, and 1 buildings respectively. Facilities for the disabled in this area of Bangkok were inadequate. All public buildings should provide appropriate facilities: special legislation may be warranted.

INTRODUCTION

Disabled people comprise a large group of underprivileged patients. Due to their physical disabilities, they may find their range of activities restricted. However, they want high quality, affordable medical care. Also, they want to be seen as real people, as a part of society, and not as people to be hidden away or pitied or given charity. Millions of people suffer from disability all over the world (Wade, 1997; Mayer, 1998).

It has been shown that the restriction in self-determination is directly related to the severity of disability, such restriction of self determination arises in particular from dependence on personal care, wheelchair dependence, financial difficulties, and institutionalization. A greater level of awareness and acceptance on the part of the non-disabled is vital, as is the will for a positive partnership with the disabled (Fritsch, 1981).

Disability Rights for the disabled are generally accepted, at least in principle. In the USA, a lot is happening at the federal level with legislation and regulations that affects the lives of disabled people (Beaulaurier and Taylor, 2001). Social workers and other healthcare professionals especially those in rehabilitation systems, must consider practice changes necessitated by recent legislation and the growing activism of disability rights groups. Disability Rights include education rights, information rights and voting rights.

Architectural barriers are also the important impediments to disabled people: freedom of movement. Basic public facilities for this population are minimum requirements. In Thailand, there is only one report about the facilities for the disabled (Kovinthha, 2000). This is the second survey of the business areas in central Bangkok.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

We performed a cross-sectional descriptive survey of basic facilities in public buildings of more than 5 floors, in the Silom and Siam business areas of Bangkok. Three basic facilities as wheelchair ramps, elevators and modified toilets were studied. This survey was performed during April 2001.

All public buildings that matched the selection criteria in the study areas were surveyed. According to our study, the standard wheelchair ramps means a sloped path without front barrier. The standard elevator means an elevator with buttons marked with Bell's alphabet or with voice indication of level. Elevators ought to be at least 1.0 x 1.2 m² with a door width of at least 0.85 m. the standard modified toilet means a toilet with handrail and back support; the door is of the slide-slip door or push-pull with an opening to at least 90 degrees (Kovinthha, 2000).

All recorded data were analyzed by descriptive statistical analysis and expressed as percentages. Differences between the proportions were tested by proportional test; statistical significance was accorded to a p of 0.05.

RESULTS

Sixty-two public buildings were included in this study (25 private buildings and 37 government

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Table 1
Basic facilities for the disabled in the buildings surveyed.

Basic facilities	Private building (n=25)		Government building (n=37)	
	Available (%)	Not available (%)	Available (%)	Not available (%)
Wheelchair ramps	6 (24.1)	19 (75.9)	20 (54)	17 (46)
Elevators	25 (100)	0 (0)	24 (69.9)	13 (30.1)
Modified toilets	0 (0)	25 (100)	1 (2.7)	36 (97.3)

buildings). Of the 62 surveyed buildings, no building had all three facilities. The wheelchair ramps, elevators and modified toilets were found in 26, 49, and 1 buildings respectively (Table 1).

In the private buildings, the rates of wheelchair ramps, elevators and modified toilets were 24.1%, 100%, and 0% respectively. In the government buildings, the rates of wheelchair ramps, elevators and modified toilets were 54.1%, 64.9%, and 2.7% respectively.

DISCUSSION

In comparison with a recent study in Chiang Mai (Kovinha, 2000), Bangkok has fewer facilities for the disabled. Interestingly, fewer wheelchair ramps but more elevators, were found. One possible explanation is that our setting is a business area, in which land is very costly and therefore wheelchair ramps may have been overlooked. The higher number of elevators was expected: the elevators are necessary for the business buildings, which were usually planned to accommodate a great number of workers. Surprisingly, only one modified toilet was found. This might be due to the fact that modified toilets are relatively new and therefore overlooked.

By type of building, significantly more standard

elevators ($p < 0.05$) were found in private buildings. As already mentioned, the government buildings might not set the standard elevator to serve the customers as the private ones. However, no significant difference in rates of modified toilets was observed. In conclusion, the facilities for the disabled in the study areas are inadequate. All public buildings should provide appropriate facilities for the disabled. Also, there is a need for special legislation.

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