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.

RESULTS

Sixty-two public buildings were included in this study (25 private buildings and 37 government
Table 1
Basic facilities for the disabled in the buildings surveyed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic facilities</th>
<th>Private building (n=25)</th>
<th>Government building (n=37)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Available (%)</td>
<td>Not available (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheelchair ramps</td>
<td>6 (24.1)</td>
<td>19 (75.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elevators</td>
<td>25 (100)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modified toilets</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>25 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 (Kovintha, 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.

REFERENCES


