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'Road accidents common cause of spinal injuries'

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NEW DELHI: Road accidents and falling from a height account for the largest number of spinal cord injuries and associated disabilities in the country, reveals a new epidemiological study conducted at the Indian Spinal Injuries Centre (ISIC) here.

As part of the study, records of 1,138 patients treated at ISIC over the past decade were examined and it was found that road traffic accidents and fall from height are the two most common causes of spinal injuries accounting for 43.5 per cent and 38.04 per cent of the total cases respectively.

Comparisons were also made between the collected data and similar studies undertaken in developed countries. The analysis revealed that road traffic accidents are the most common cause of spinal injuries even in the West. However, "fall from height" was not as prominent a reason as in India. Sports injuries and violence were found to be more important causes of spinal cord injury

in the U.S.

"These results will help us develop better prevention and treatment methods in India. It is very crucial to keep an eye on injury patterns as these can provide a hint for devising solutions like specialised treatment, and setting up speciality centres according to the local needs," says Dr. H. S. Chhabra of the Indian Spinal Injuries Centre. The study also showed that spinal injuries in India result more often in paraplegia (paralysis of the two limbs below the torso). Also 65 per cent of Indian patients turn paraplegic as opposed to 46.2 per cent in the U.S. This may reflect a better situation for the Indian patient since it is easier to manage a paraplegic patient.

The male-female ratio (5.6:1) of Indian spinal injuries patients is also seen to be much higher as compared to that in other studies from across the globe (3.8:1). This is probably due to the fact that most Indian women are housewives and not predisposed to injury. Also a significantly higher percentage of Indian injured patients were

married at the time of injury as compared to statistics available from the U.S. This probably reflects a lower age at which most Indians get married.

The study also reveals that the age distribution of patients was more or less the same as that of developed countries except for the fact that the proportion of elderly patients (aged more than 60) was significantly lower.

"The importance of such studies in planning prevention strategies is well established. It is also well known that epidemiology of a particular ailment varies from region to region since it is linked to social, environmental, cultural and biological issues. However, despite its importance, there are hardly any proper epidemiological studies from developing countries. Thus countries like India have information only from a few hospital-based pilot studies which has varied in different studies depending on the region and the rural/urban population catered by the hospital," notes a release issued by the Centre.