

**“Changes in Death and Disease Patterns in Sri Lanka”, 5th Asia Pacific Social Science and Medicine Conference, Kandy, Sri Lanka, September 24-28, 2000.**

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**Abstract:**

This paper attempts to discuss the changes in disease and death patterns in Sri Lanka by placing them in the context of the epidemiologic transition theory and examine how this transition is expected to affect present and future demographic and social patterns in the country. If Sri Lanka expects to attain the level of mortality that exists in the developed world today, it demands a proper understanding of the complex changes in patterns of health and disease including the timing of such changes in those countries. The epidemiologic transition theory presented by Omran (1971) focuses on the complex changes in patterns of health and disease and their demographic, socio-economic and eco-biologic determinants and consequences in various population sub-groups. In this theory, the age of degenerative and man-made diseases typically commences when mortality continues to decline and ultimately move towards stability at a comparatively low level. The average life expectancy at birth mounts gradually until it surpasses 70 years (Omran, 1971). The study suggests that the period starting from the mid 1970s resembles this phase as crude death rate has continued to decline from the beginning of that period and then stabilizing around 6 deaths per 1000 population from the beginning of the 1980 decade. During this stage, it appears that heart diseases, cancer, stroke and diabetes become increasingly prominent gradually displacing pandemics of infection as causes of morbidity and mortality. In Sri Lanka, morbidity data is only available for patients seeking treatment as inpatients in government hospitals. A substantial increase in hospitalization was observed for injury and poisoning during the period from 1980 to 2000. There were 1,732 cases per 100,000 population in 1980 but it amounted to 3,346 in 2000. This was a 93 percent increase during a 20 year time period. The parasitic and infectious diseases as well as respiratory diseases show a marked decline during that period.