

TRENDS IN SUICIDE RATE FOR SRI LANKA 1950 - 1982.
A NEW EPIDEMIC AMONG THE YOUTH?

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The medical profession has always suspected a continually increasing suicide rate in Sri Lanka. This study was undertaken to study the changing overall pattern of suicide in Sri Lanka and to study the major features of suicides.

Suicide statistics are compiled by the Registrar General's Department. A death is registered as suicide only after a coroner's verdict. It is known that suicides are under-reported by as much as 25% in many countries.

The author obtained all his figures from the Registrar General's Office.

(Tables I, II and III are annexed)

The suicide rate has increased by 522% over a period of 30 years in Sri Lanka. Thus the suicide rate in Sri Lanka is more than 3 times that of countries such as Britain.

This increase has been mainly for the category of poisoning by solids or liquids. This category now accounts for over 80% of all suicides. Suicides by other means has not registered an appreciable increase in relation to total death rate. The poisons that are mainly responsible are agricultural and poisons such as pesticides. In 1982, 3254 instances of suicides were due to agricultural poisons which amounted to 64.1% of all suicides.

Other major finding is that the youth make a major contribution to suicide eg. 45% of all suicides in 1980 were in the 15-25 age group. Suicide has become the commonest cause of death in the age group 15-25 years eg. 36% of all deaths in 15-25 age group in 1980 being due to suicide.

These findings support the conclusion that the majority of suicides in Sri Lanka today are the youth who attempt suicide without intending to die but use lethal agents.

This study shows that the trends in suicide, first described by Dissanayake and de Silva have continued upto 1982 in Sri Lanka. There is a case for legislation to restrict the present unrestricted use of pesticides and for a concerted effort to prevent these unnecessary deaths.

References

1. Adelstein A. & Mardon C. (1975) Suicides 1961-74
In Population Trends No. 2, London HMSO.
2. Dissanayake S.A.W. & de Silva W.P. Ceylon
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Table I

Changing Suicide Rate In Sri Lanka

Year	1950	1955	1960	1965	1970	1975	1982
Suicide/million	64.7	69.2	96.8	136	191	195.3	334

Table II

Changing Patterns in the Methods of Suicide

	1950	1955	1960	1965	1980
Suicide by solid or liquid poisonings (% of all suicides)	116 (23.3%)	168 (27.8%)	400 (42.7%)	1309 (78.1%)	3482 (81.5%)
Suicide by other means i.e. Hanging, jumping from high places	381 (76.7%)	436 (72.2%)	536 (57.3%)	217 (11.9%)	790 (18.5%)

Table III

Trends in Suicide Rates in the
15 - 24 yrs age group

	1950	1955	1960	1965	1970	1975	1980
Youth suicide No.	142	190	320	522	947	1076	1910
Percentage of total suicides	28.6%	31.5%	34.2%	34.2%	39.6%	40.8%	44.7%
Contribution of youth suicide to all deaths in (15-24) groups as a %	3.3%	5.8%	10.5%	15%	20.9%	21%	36.4%