

SOME DETERMINANTS OF INFANT MORTALITY  
IN SRI LANKA; 1982-1987

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The objectives of this study were to identify the relative importance of some of the demographic and socioeconomic determinants of infant mortality as experienced in recent times.

Retrospective birth histories for the period 1982-87 collected during the Sri Lanka Health and Demographic survey (1987) were utilised for this study. Cox proportional hazard analysis was used to explore the relationships between commonly cited covariates of infant mortality.

Infant mortality for the period under study was 25 per thousand live births, the neonatal component was 18 per thousand and the post-neonatal rate was 9 per thousand live births.

Sex of the infant, history of a previous child death, source of water supply, area of residence and father's educational level were found to be important determinants of neonatal mortality. The environmental variables studied appear to be surrogates for socio-economic status, rather than measures of environmental contamination and exposure to infection. Maternal age and parity which were described to be important determinants of neonatal mortality in earlier studies were no longer found to be key factors.

The factors influencing post-neonatal mortality are the socio-economic variables and a past history of a child death. Both paternal and maternal education were found to be important co-variables; the father's education exercising indirect effects through the proximate determinants. Maternal education appears to act both directly and indirectly. The risk associated with women who have had 6-9 years of schooling were found to be higher than in those who have had 0-5 years of schooling. This effect may be mediated through maternal occupation and availability of appropriate child care facilities and needs further study.

The findings present a dilemma in planning strategies for further reduction of infant mortality. Overall socio-economic improvement seems to be the logical path available. However, researchers have a challenge to address themselves to the problem of identifying micro level family influences which are amenable to change.