

Fertility and natural disasters: the case of tsunami disaster in Sri Lanka

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The frequency and magnitude of large-scale disasters in recent years has prompted increased interest in better understanding how major disruptive events alter key demographic processes. Natural, as well as man-made disasters that have occurred in Sri Lanka so far have proved its impact on Sri Lanka's demography. However, the Tsunami disaster which occurred on the 26th of December 2004 had a major impact on the demography of the country, considering its magnitude and large scale influence to the human population. This study aims to examine the fertility implications after the tsunami disaster in Sri Lanka in the worst tsunami hit district in Sri Lanka. The study further attempts to observe and examine changes in relation to fertility among the tsunami affected population in the district by comparing the pre-tsunami situation. Although Sri Lanka has been experiencing gradual changes in mortality and fertility as predicted by demographic transition theory, this natural disaster may have produced some imbalances with regard to both levels and patterns of fertility and mortality in the affected areas. This study used both quantitative and qualitative data gathered from Hikkaduwa DS Division and Galle district. Quantitative data was collected through a survey questionnaire, while qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews. Purposive and simple random sample techniques were used as sample techniques of the study. This investigation suggested that there has been a clear decline in fertility during the immediate post-Tsunami years. This was mainly due to short run economic volatility which had a significant negative impact on fertility as rehabilitation process took place nearly two years later. Therefore, affected families have become more vulnerable with regard to shelter and livelihood. This short-run stability has caused a decline in fertility. It was also found that the fertility desires of the affected community are quite different a couple of years after the disaster, when compared to their desires before the Tsunami disaster. Now they want more children and that is more than the fertility norm in that community, not only to replace the dead children, but also as an insurance measure to face future disaster situations.

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