

ABSTRACT

Effects of the Bangladesh Civil War on Birth and Death Rates in Matlab

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Registration of all births and deaths in the Matlab VTS since 1966 has established reliable fertility and mortality rates. During the five years immediately preceding the Bangladesh civil war (March 1971 through December 1971), the crude death rate was remarkably stable at 15.0/1000. The crude birth rate was also relatively stable at an average of 45.7/1000, but a slight downward trend was noted during the same period of time.

During the war, when Matlab was subjected to the same general disruption of communication and distribution of commodities, the death rate increased 40%. All categories of age-specific mortality rates reflected the increase in mortality except the stillbirth ratio and the neonatal portion of infant mortality which reflect biological rather than environmental parameters primarily. The crude birth rate did not change during this time since births reflected conceptions which occurred nine months earlier. Post-neonatal and early childhood mortality increased dramatically compared to other age-groups. Acute diarrheal diseases and other gastrointestinal diseases (most of which were other chronic diarrheas) accounted for the majority of excess deaths.

Following the war there was a decrease in the birth rate which rebounded to pre-war levels the next year. The cause of this significant decrease in fertility is unknown, but it could have been related to involuntary separation factors as a consequence of the social disruption, a decrease in fertility secondary to a decreased nutritional state of married women, or other unknown factors.

These data illuminate the exquisite sensitivity of mortality rates to document and quantitate disasters. In particular, certain vulnerable age-groups and causes of death are notable examples of areas in which surveillance of disaster could be conducted.

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