

Key words: Suicide mortality; Sri Lanka; self-poisoning; agrochemicals.

# Suicide in a northern town of Sri Lanka

T. Ganesvaran, S. Subramaniam  
and K. Mahadevan

Sub-department of Psychiatry in the Department of Medicine (Head: Dr. N. Sreeharan), Faculty of Medicine University of Jaffna, Jaffna, Sri Lanka

---

**ABSTRACT** – Suicide mortality in a northern town of Sri Lanka for the year 1982 is examined. The rate was 53.5 per 100,000 general population and shows an increasing trend amongst the 15–34 age group. The commonest method was self-poisoning by agrochemicals and insecticides of organophosphorus type. Psychiatric diagnosis, social, economic and political factors are presented. Easy availability of dangerous agrochemicals and rapid social and political changes appear to be of equal importance in producing a high rate of suicide.

*Received September 9, 1983;*

*accepted for publication November 23, 1983*

---

Sri Lanka is one of the developing countries with a satisfactory system of registration of births and deaths. A rapid rise in the suicide rate for Sri Lanka during the last two decades has been observed (1). There has been no change in the criteria for suicide verdict in the above period. Despite this observation, studies on suicides in Sri Lanka have been notably few (2, 3).

Dissanayake & De Silva (2) examined the Registrar General's annual reports from 1951 to 1971 and found a steep increase in the suicide rate from 9.9 in 1961 to 19.2 per 100,000 population in 1970. Age-specific suicide rates were available for 7 years and these showed a high rate for the 15–34 age group, a lower rate for

the 35–44 age group, followed by an upward trend after 60 years. Self-poisoning became the commonest method of suicide in 1960, and the insecticides of the organophosphorus type began to displace acetic acid, the popular poison of earlier years.

The present paper is an attempt to study the problem in the northern town and suburbs of Jaffna in Sri Lanka, under the jurisdiction of the Magistrate Courts of Jaffna.

## Method

Jaffna is the capital city of the northern province of Sri Lanka. The inhabitants