

DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSFORMATION OF AFRO-SRI LANKANS: IN RELATION TO PUTTALAM DISTRICT

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Abstract: *The Afro-Sri Lankan community is small in number but it has its own identity. They are descendants of migrants who arrived from South African countries during the 16th century. Their settlements are concentrated in a few coastal areas in proximity to Puttalam, Negombo and Trincomalee. The major objective of this study is to explore the transformation of the Afro-Sri Lankan community from a demographic perspective. This study will reveal the demographic evolution of Afro-Sri Lankans by using both primary and secondary data sources. The purposive sampling technique is utilized to select the sample. This study further analyzes the fertility, mortality, morbidity and migratory trends and patterns that shaped the demographic transformation of the Afro-Sri Lankan community. The fertility condition within this community is gradually declining. Mortality is higher than the national average and particularly so among the males, as indicated by the CDR. Internal migration is at a moderate level. International migration could also be seen since around 1990. As indicated by their birth and death rates, the Afro-Sri Lankan community is currently in their third phase of demographic transition. Eventually, more research is warranted in order to identify the possible and practical measures to ensure their long term survival and to avoid the possible extinction of the Sri Lankan Afro-Sri Lankan community.*

Keywords: Afro-Sri Lankan, Demographic Transformation, Trends and Patterns in Fertility

Introduction

The Afro-Sri Lankan community is small in number but it has its own identity. Afro-Sri Lankans were brought to Sri Lanka for the purposes of labour and were also used as soldiers to fight with the Sri Lankan kings, most likely in the Sri Lankan-Portuguese wars. The descendants of the freed Afro-Sri Lankan slaves are still a distinctive community and are mainly found in the former occupied territories of the Portuguese colonies, mainly near Puttalam, but also in areas such as Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Negombo.

Afro-Sri Lankan culture is rapidly disappearing and is a direct link back to their distant African past. Afro-Sri Lankans had physical features particular to them, such as a dark complexion, curly hair and protuberant lips. There has been intermarriage with the Tamils and Sinhalese. Children born to Afro-Sri Lankan women by Tamil and Sinhala fathers retain the Afro-Sri Lankan features on a small scale (Angebot et al., 2006). Afro-Sri Lankans can speak Sinhala quite well. Their ancestors spoke

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