Socio-demographic characteristics and principal cooking fuel type in Sri Lanka: Comparison of data from two Demographic and Health Surveys

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Introduction

Indoor air pollution is a growing public health concern due to its well documented ill effects. Biomass- cooking fuel is the main source of indoor air pollution in the majority of households in the developing world.

Objectives

To determine the trends of cooking fuel pattern and associated factors in Sri Lanka.

Methods

Determinants and the use of cooking fuel in households in Sri Lanka were abstracted from data collected by the Demographic Health Surveys (DHS) of 2000 and 2007. The DHS was based on a representative sample (multi-stage stratified probability sample) of the whole country except the provinces afflicted by the war. The results are based on a sample of 8,169 households in 2000 and 19,862 households in 2007.

Results

Firewood was the principal type of cooking fuel in 78.3%(n=6397) and 78.5%(n=15592) of households in years 2000 and 2007, respectively. In 2007, 96.3%(n=897) of estate sector households used firewood as compared to 84.2%(n=13850) in the rural and 34.6%(n=859) in the urban sector. Similar trends were seen in year 2000 as well. Electricity was the main source of lighting in 68%(n=5571) of households in year 2000 and the corresponding figure for year 2007,was 80%(n=15890).

In year 2000, 25.9%(n=1442) of the houses having electricity used clean fuel (electricity/ LP gas) for cooking and the rest relied on biomass or kerosene. The higher the educational level of the respondent, the more likely the household will use a clean fuel (Chi square for trend: $p<0.001$).

Conclusion

The shift from firewood to cleaner fuels in Sri Lanka is negligible from 2000 to 2007. Improving the quality of life of the population does not necessarily predict a shift towards the use of cleaner cooking fuels in Sri Lanka.