



Research Article

Mental health prevalence, healthcare use and access between 2018 and 2022 in Sri Lanka: an analysis of survey data

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Plain language summary

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Background

Sri Lanka has suffered four decades of violent conflict, a tsunami, terrorist attacks, and economic problems. It is unknown how much these events may have had an impact on the mental health of Sri Lankans. People living with mental health issues may experience several different barriers to seeking help. These barriers may include stigma, lack of knowledge, denial, fear of what society might think, language, lack of family support, availability of medication, lack of transport, and lack of money to pay for care. It is possible that several of these barriers may have affected Sri Lankans during the challenging time period when this study took place.

What were the questions?

How common were mental health conditions among adults in Sri Lanka between 2018 and 2022? Did this change during this time period? Did people's usage of and access to healthcare change?

What did we do?

We analysed data from a national survey of 4030 people to measure whether the existence of mental health conditions and the amount of healthcare used and accessed changed among adults in Sri Lanka between 2018 and 2022. This covered a period of crisis and unrest, inclusive of the Easter Sunday attacks in 2019, anti-Muslim riots, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the current economic crisis that started in late 2021.

What did we find?

We found that 2.9% of Sri Lankans experienced a high amount of mental health difficulties during 2018–19. This increased to 6.1% in 2021–22. This rise was much higher amongst older adults, poorer people, and those not from a minority ethnic group. People with milder mental health issues used healthcare less than those suffering with the worst mental health.

What's next for future studies?

Using lessons from this study, it would be beneficial for future studies to investigate how best to measure mental health in different settings using different tools.