

# IMPACT OF SRI LANKA'S ECONOMIC CRISIS ON THE PUBLIC HEALTHCARE SYSTEM: CASE STUDIES IN SELECTED TOWNS IN SRI LANKA

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Sri Lanka's public health sector has achieved significant progress, particularly in reducing infant and maternal mortality, child malnutrition and increasing life expectancy, positioning it favorably among developing nations regarding health outcomes. However, the economic recession precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2022), followed by a prolonged financial crisis since 2022, has severely strained the healthcare system. The resultant reduction in government healthcare spending has intensified preexisting vulnerabilities and restricted access to essential services, placing considerable pressure on Sri Lanka's healthcare infrastructure. As a result, Sri Lanka's healthcare system is now under substantial pressure. In this context, an important research question arises: to what extent has the economic crisis affected Sri Lanka's healthcare sector? This study investigates the impact of the financial crisis on healthcare delivery, specifically focusing on the availability of medical resources and the challenges faced by healthcare providers and patients. The study was conducted in selected towns in Sri Lanka, categorized by healthcare facility levels: Colombo and Kandy (high), Puttalam and Galle (moderate), and Nuwara Eliya (lower). Using qualitative methods, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 75 individuals through snowball sampling and 26 Key Informant Interviews were conducted with healthcare professionals. Data were transcribed, coded, and thematically analyzed to elucidate the relationship between the economic crisis and healthcare delivery. The findings reveal five key areas of healthcare disruption due to the economic crisis: shortages of essential medicines and equipment, forcing patients to seek private options; compromised care quality and treatment delays from resource limitations; decreased public healthcare utilization, imposing financial strain on low-income families; reduced access to specialized services, affecting marginalized populations; and widening healthcare disparities, especially for those unable to afford private care. Immediate interventions are necessary to reinforce the healthcare system, secure essential services, and promote public-private partnerships and international collaborations.

**Keywords:** Economic crisis, public health sector, healthcare disparities

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