Changes in infant and child mortality in Shanghai in the second half of the 20th century

Shanghai mortality project research team

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Short abstract

Many less developed countries have experienced a rapid reduction in mortality in the second half of the 20th century. While WHO and many countries have invested heavily in health related areas and a significant progress has been made in many populations, the process of their health and mortality transition remains poorly understood. The paper, on the basis of our analysis of some 300,000 death certificates collected in Shanghai over the period between 1961 and 2001, and other officially published mortality data, examines changes in infant and child mortality levels, patterns, and major causes of infant and child deaths in Shanghai over the last few decades.

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Rapid fertility and mortality decline has been observed in many less developed countries during the second half of the twentieth century. In some of these countries, fertility has now fallen to below replacement level and life expectancy been very close to those recorded in the developed world. Over the last few decades, a great effort has been made in the investigation of fertility, but the study of mortality remains far behind. As a result, the process of health and mortality transition in most less developed countries is poorly understood.

In order to fill such a gap, we started a research project in 2003 and it has been designed to examine mortality transition in Shanghai over the last 40 years. As in some other large Chinese cities, Shanghai municipal government began registering births and deaths in the urban districts in 1950. Since 1953, death registration became a routine and has been administrated by the Division of Preventive Medicine of Shanghai. The registration was extended to all Shanghai's rural areas in the year 1973. Before 1987, death registration was made for each deceased according to China's National Classification of Diseases. Thereafter, the new death registration form has been used. The information recorded for each deceased individual includes: name, sex, date of birth, date of death, race, home address, educational level, occupation, marital status, age at death, the principle cause of death (classified according to ICD-9), place of death, the highest medical unit that certified the death, major methods of diagnosis (autopsy or biopsy, laboratory test, clinical diagnosis and inference after death).

Through computerizing and analysing death registration data of some 300,000 individuals gathered from seven urban district over last four decades, our project aims at achieving the following objectives: to provide detail information about changes in causes of death especially their trends in China's demographic transition, to gain a better understanding of changing mortality patterns and their relationship with China's socio-economic development its recent reform in particular. The project has been financially supported by a Wellcome Trust Grant and jointly undertaken by researchers from the ANU, Cambridge University, Fudan University, and the Centre of Disease Control and Prevention in Shanghai.

During the last fifty years, infant mortality rate has fallen from about 80 per thousand in the early 1950s to less than 10 per thousand at the beginning of the 21st century in Shanghai. While we have made some progress in studying this change, particularly in comparison with the investigation of adult or old age mortality, many questions about this transition are still poorly understood. The paper, on the basis of our analysis of some 300,000 death certificates collected in Shanghai over the period between 1961 and 2001, and other officially published mortality data, will provide a detailed

examination of changes in infant and child mortality levels, patterns, and major causes of infant and child deaths in Shanghai over the last few decades.