BOOK REVIEW

Health Statistics from the Americas, 1998 Edition

Publisher: Pan American Health Organization
Scientific Publication No. 567
Washington D.C., 1998, 476 pp.
ISBN 92-75-31567-1

Estimates of mortality are of great importance as social indicators widely used in the implementation of public policies and also for the calculation of population projection. As social indicators, these estimates have a more informative characteristic as they are desegregated not only by sex and age but principally by mortality causes.

Health Statistics from the Americas, 1998 is the fourth edition of a series that was launched in 1991 by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) with the aim to obtain estimates of mortality desegregated by sex, age and causes of mortality in the American countries. Initially conceived as an annual series, *Health Statistics from the Americas* is currently published every two years.

This edition is the first to include a special section, devoted to the topic "Health during Childhood", which makes up the first chapter of this book. Divided into three parts, this chapter is, in fact, very enriching. The first part describes the population dynamics in the 0-4 years group. Although the emphasis is on the transition of the mortality rate in infancy, the text clearly shows the decline of fecundity which has been occurring in a marked manner among the developing countries in this region.

In the second part, mortality rates are presented for eight major groups of death causes, recently proposed by PAHO, in several periods of childhood (perinatal, early neonatal, late neonatal, postneonatal and 1-4 years). This new classification of mortalities in 30 specific cases and eight major groups is being presented by PAHO as being more adequate for the study of the mortalities during the first years of life. The use of sub-intervals of ages is due to the fact that the prevalence of each of the major causes associated with the first five years of life varies according to each one of the periods considered. These indices were calculated for the periods elapsed between 1960-1964 and 1990-1994.

The third part presents statistics on the duration of partial and exclusive breast feeding and also on the nutritional status of children younger than five years; extremely important subjects to health in infancy. This information was obtained from several sources, specially the case studies and research of the Demographic and Health Survey. Death due to respiratory infection, diarrhea, malnutrition, meningitis, septicemia, vaccine preventable diseases, malaria, Aids and accidents are also presented. Besides the death rates due to common childhood diseases, there are also shown death rates due to cancer among children of 0-4 years of age. This is due to the fact that even though death due to cancer is low, the amount of money used for its treatment is large, representing an important part of all the money destined for child health.

Chapter II is divided in two parts. The first one deals with the number of deaths, with age intervals for the first five years, for the 30 specific causes of the eight major groups of causes determined by PAHO. The statistics are presented for two years: 1980 and the most recent year in which the necessary information, in order to calculate the death rate in age groups, was available at the moment of tabulating the data. The second part presents the total deaths according to six major groups of causes, making use of previous publications, for three five-year period groups immediately after childhood (5-9, 10-14 and 15-19). This information allows a comparison with the previously presented data, even though this is the first time that the 5-19 age group has been desegregated. This break down is very important because it enables the analysis of the information referring to the health of adolescents.

Chapter III gives continuity to the previous publications, by issuing the total deaths for the six major groups of causes, as well as for the 61 specific causes belonging to them. The totals have been calculated by sex and age for the data that was available after the publication of the previous edition.

It is important to emphasize that this edition is a valuable source of information. However the estimates must be very carefully used because sometimes they are not comparable. In order to make this information adequate, it is important to read the technical notes, which give the methodology used and the problems encountered in the data analysis.

Iúri da Costa Leite
Escola Nacional de Saúde Pública
Fiocruz