

Human Impact on Degradation of Coral Resources in the Southern Coastal Area in Sri Lanka

Dayalatha W K V

Department of Geography, University of Ruhuna, Matara
wkvdayalatha@yahoo.com

Coral is a very limited coastal resource in Sri Lanka. About 2 percent of the coastline contains near shore fringing reefs. Some important Coral reefs such as Hikkaduwa, Unawatuna and Polhena are spread in the Southern coastal area. The coastal population in Sri Lanka has grown rapidly, about from 2.1 million to 11.5 million within the period of 1901 to 2012. However, within the last few decades, it faced severe damage due to many human activities. The main objective is to examine the impact of human population and their activities on the degradation of Coral resources in the southern coastal area. The study area spreads from Dondra to Ambalangoda coastal area and it was carried out from January 2013 to January 2014. Ten percent household sample was selected using a cluster random sampling method and a questionnaire, focus group discussions, observations were used for data collection. Quantitative analysis was done in terms of frequencies, cross tabulations and qualitative data analysis was done in terms of thematic analysis. Major findings disclose that the primary human activities causing degradation of coral reefs are mining of coral reefs and the use of destructive fishing methods. Some householders engage coral braking because they do not have any other employment opportunities (37%) and to earn money (33%). Corals always get damaged from boat anchoring (53%). One of the main damaging situation was breaking of corals into little pieces by trampling (55%). Further 16 to 30 persons walk on the coral daily as a recreational activity (38%). One fourth of householders' idea is Glass boat owners have taken 10 people or over several times a day to visit the coral reefs. As of householders' ideas, other human activities affect coral reef degradation: tourism (54.9%), catching fish (45.6%) and ornamental fish collection (48.5%). Other ways, which are from local and foreign people (24%), from fishing boats (20%) and garbage dumping (15.3%) get damage to corals. One third of householders (37%) proposed coral breaking must be prohibited and 31% of households mentioned that the laws should be abided strictly for conserving the corals.

Key words: *Coral reefs, Cluster, Ornamental fish, Quantitative, Tourism*