

Youth Population in Sri Lanka: How Accurately was their Size Projected?

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Population projections are an important input for policy makers for policy formulation, programme implementation and monitoring. Thus, development of accurate population projections for specific age groups especially, youth population is significant as it impacts on future forecasting of human necessities, demographic patterns, budgeting and transportation and also on use of environmental resources. Errors in base year population and incorrect assumptions made in fertility, mortality and migration for the projected period cause inaccurate projections. Researchers have found that small variation in fertility, substantially impacts on population growth in the youngest age group. To evaluate the accuracy of youth population in Sri Lanka, comparison of those forecasts with actually observed figures of population censuses in 2001 and 2012 is used. Only the result of the standard variation which uses the most plausible set of assumptions is taken for the evaluation.

Three population projections published before year 2000 (in 1994, 1997 and 1998) and one in year 2007 by local forecasters are used for comparison purposes. Youth population which is persons in 15-29 age group is estimated to 5.07 million in 2001 mid population. The closest figure to this estimation, 5.09 million is projected by 1994 projection with absolute difference of 18,900 persons and percentage error of 0.37 only. Generally, projected figures are closer to observed figures in short periods than the long period. Thus, projected total population as well as youth population in all 3 projections before 2000 are much deviated from 2012 observed numbers. The projected youth population for year 2012 by 2007 projection is 4.99 million against the observed figure of 4.73 million. It has an overestimation of 264,680 persons with percentage error of 5.6.

Presumably, the over estimation of youth population by 264,680 persons in the projected population of 2012 is primarily due to under estimation of net international migration and underreporting of youth deaths in Sri Lanka. A sizable proportion of deaths and disappearances that occurred during the civil strife were not captured in the civil registration system. Also a sizable number of youth who departed Sri Lanka in irregular manner (including boat people) also contributed to the over estimation of youth in the projected results. Therefore, a more vigorous evaluation of population projection assumption and results, by taking the whole population as well as different segments of it, would facilitate significantly to develop appropriate assumptions for future population projections.

Key words: *Population, Projection, Accuracy, Assumptions, Forecast.*