

Assessing Urban Health Disparities in South Asia: A Comparative Study Using the Urban Health Index

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Abstract : Health is a fundamental human right, and a healthy population is essential for the prosperity and sustainable development of any country. This research is aligned with United Nations' Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being. It aims to assess and rank key health indicators across selected South Asian countries. The study focuses on urban areas in these nations, drawing on data from the World Bank's primary collection of relevant indicators and specific health determinants outlined by the World Health Organization (WHO). These determinants include the physical environment, income and social status, education, social support networks, and personal behavior. To evaluate disparities in urban health across the region, the Urban Health Index (UHI) developed by Georgia State University, USA, is employed, followed by a mapping technique including visualization through a choropleth map to identify the pattern of spatial variations in our key variables, such as socioeconomic indicators across the region. This index serves as a comparative tool to rank health outcomes, where higher UHI values indicate better health conditions. The findings reveal notable disparities across South Asia. Afghanistan, with the lowest UHI score of 0.0423, ranks first, indicating the least favorable urban health conditions. Pakistan follows with a UHI score of 0.1190. Bangladesh and India rank third and fourth with UHI scores of 0.3099 and 0.3250, respectively. The Maldives and Sri Lanka rank fifth and sixth, with UHI scores of 0.3432 and 0.3495. Bhutan is ranked seventh with a score of 0.4750. Nepal, with a UHI score of 0.5012, ranks eighth, indicating the best urban health conditions among the countries studied. The findings of this research are crucial for addressing health disparities, improving living conditions, and enhancing social well-being in the region. These insights can inform policy measures aimed at reducing inequalities and promoting sustainable urban health in South Asia.

Keywords : urban health index, health disparities, sustainable development, South Asia, World Health Organization, United Nations, living conditions, public health

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