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ABSTRACT

Health in a changing climate- a study of Shimla district of Himachal Pradesh situated in the foothills of Himalayas, India.

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Background

Shimla district of Himachal Pradesh is a mountainous district situated in the western Himalayas with a population of 864,000. The objective of this analysis is to assess the affect of global warming on health of the population.

Methods:

The data of diseases, collected from many sources and personal interviews of health functionaries, was analyzed to assess the health situation of the district w.r.t. global warming.

Results: As per the WHO report, ambient temp. has increased by 0.4°C in the Indian sub continent and this is a danger sign as far as tropical diseases are concernedⁱ. Analysis of 29 years of weather data in Shimla district since 1976 shows a rise in average max. temperature by 0.9°C from 19.4°C in 1996-2000 to 20.3°C in 2001-04 and continuous decline in average snowfall from 827.4 cm in 1981-85 to just 77.2 cm in 2001-04. In 2004, prevalence of respiratory diseases was highest among all the diseases with 14.58% followed by acute diarrhoeal diseases, 6.17%. The upper respiratory tract diseases witnessed a sharp increase from 88548 OPD cases in 2003 to 197162 OPD cases in 2004. With the increase in temperature, potent allergens, the pollens from the local *Deodar* trees, find a suitable dry atmosphere to move in yellow waves

from one place to another and cause allergy in widespread habitations. Mosquitoes and flies in Shimla are visible now and diseases like Leishmaniasis and Scrub Typhus are emerging.

Conclusion: Increased prevalence of allergic and other diseases vis-à-vis global warming need further studies. The decline in snowfall due to global warming has created dry weather conditions and falling cash crops, bringing people to poverty and deprivation.

¹. Human health impact from climate variability and climate change in the Hindu Kush- Himalayas Region, WHO, SEARO, Report of inter regional workshop Mukteshwar, India 2005.