

## Sudden Death in Sri Lankans

Dr. Ravindra Fernando

In Sri Lanka today, coronary heart disease due to atheroma is the leading cause of death in state hospitals. One third of all sudden natural deaths investigated by the Coroner is also due to coronary heart disease. In a study of 517 consecutive Coroner's autopsies on natural deaths, 177 (34%) were due to coronary heart disease. A detailed retrospective analysis of 50 such sudden deaths showed that 94% of victims were males. The majority of the deaths were in the 60 - 69 year age group. While the oldest victim was 88 years old, the youngest was just 25 years. Only 22% had confirmed previous clinical coronary artery disease although at autopsy 48% showed previous infarcts. An occluding thrombus in a coronary artery was detected in 22% of cases and macroscopic recent infarcts were visible in 30%. 44% of the deaths occurred within 15 minutes of the onset of symptoms, a fact noted in previous epidemiological studies in the West. Further prospective epidemiological studies on coronary heart disease are urgently required to assess the aetiological factors with a view to reduce the rising incidence and mortality in the community.