

# THE BURDEN OF DROWNING IN SRI LANKA: 2001 TO 2006 AND 2009

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## Introduction

Drowning is a significant cause of death and injury in Sri Lanka; however until recently, accurate data on fatal drowning incidents were not available, and the extent of the issue, the characteristics of drowning victims and the activities they were undertaking at the time had not been available. In December 2014, the Life Saving Association of Sri Lanka and Life Saving Victoria, with the support of the World Health Organization, published the *Drowning Prevention Report – Sri Lanka*, the first report detailing the extent of the drowning problem across Sri Lanka

## Methods

Data from the inaugural *Drowning Prevention Report - Sri Lanka* were used in this analysis. This report includes unintentional drowning deaths reported in Sri Lanka from 2001–2006 and 2009. Denominator populations by sex and five-year age group were obtained from the Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka for 2001–2006 and 2009.

Results of analysis are presented by age, sex, race and period. Periods have been selected based on availability of data. Drowning data were not available for 2007 and 2008 due to some data being missing after the civil war. These periods are not included in the analysis. during the study period.

## Results

On average, 855 people drowned each year from 2001-2006 and 2009 in Sri Lanka (Figure 1). This was an average fatal drowning rate of 4.4 deaths per 100,000 population. The drowning rate varied between provinces from 6.3 in North Western province to 3.4 in Central province (Figure 2). Males were four times more likely to drown than females, with a fatal drowning rate of 7.2 compared with 1.6 for females. Drowning rates were highest among males aged over 15 (Figure 3). The male to female rate ratio was highest in those aged 15-24 years (7.5).

Adults aged 25-44 years had the highest number of drowning deaths followed by those aged 45-64 years (Figure 4). However, those aged over 65 years had the highest age-specific drowning rate (8.25). The drowning rate for Sri Lanka averaged over three years from 2004-2006 was 4.2 deaths per 100,000, ranking Sri Lanka 12th highest in the comparison of 61 countries (Figure 5). Lakes, wells/open cisterns, and the ocean were the commonest reported drowning locations in Sri Lanka.

## Conclusions

Drowning is a significant cause of death and injury in Sri Lanka. Middle aged males are mainly affected, therefore intervention strategies are needed to target this group. Lakes presented the highest reported drowning risk location, although Sri Lanka is an island.

The report provides evidence-based recommendations for drowning prevention that are aligned to global actions and tailored to Sri Lankan circumstances and should be used by policy makers to address the issue of drowning in Sri Lanka.

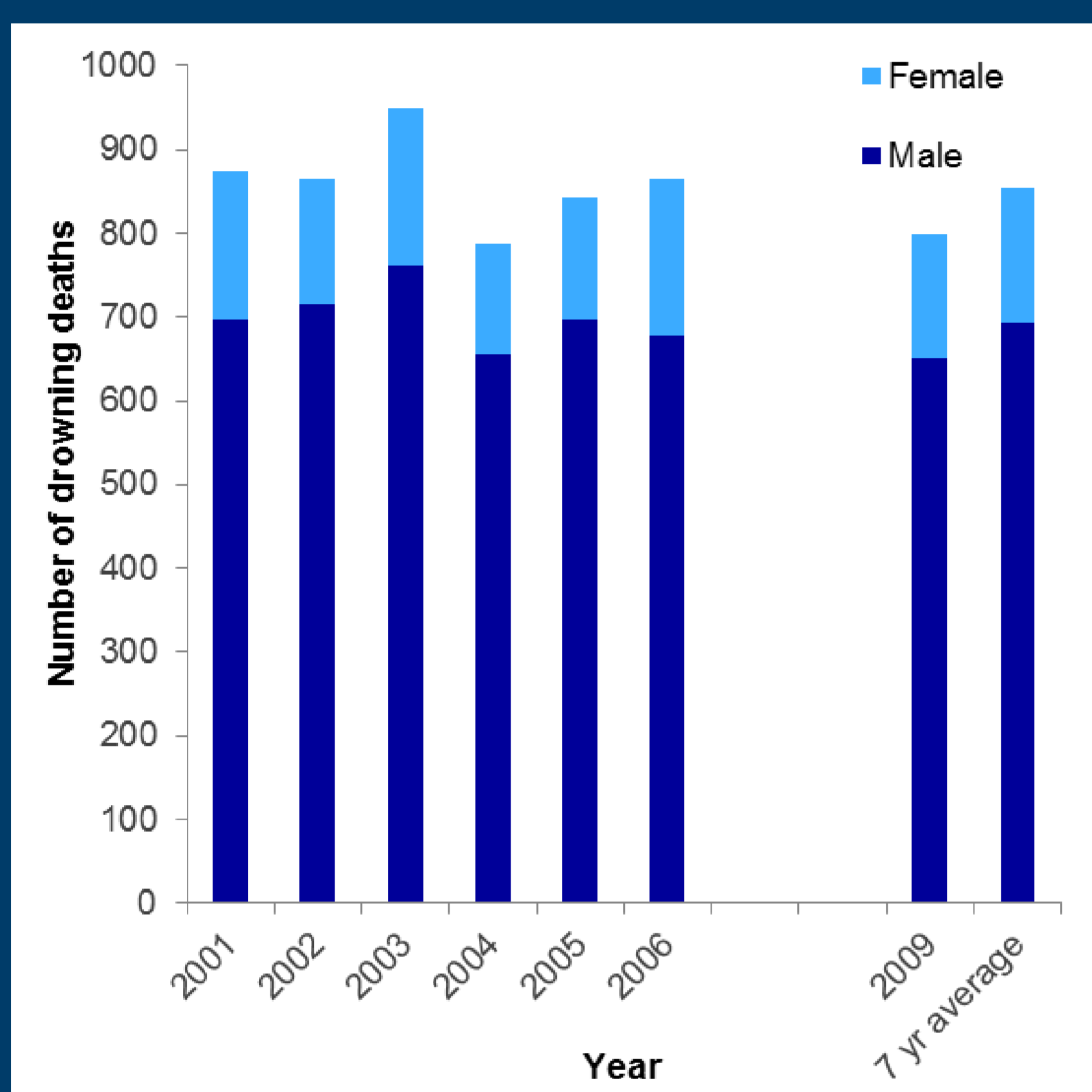


Figure 1 Drowning deaths by sex and year, Sri Lanka, 2001-2006 & 2009

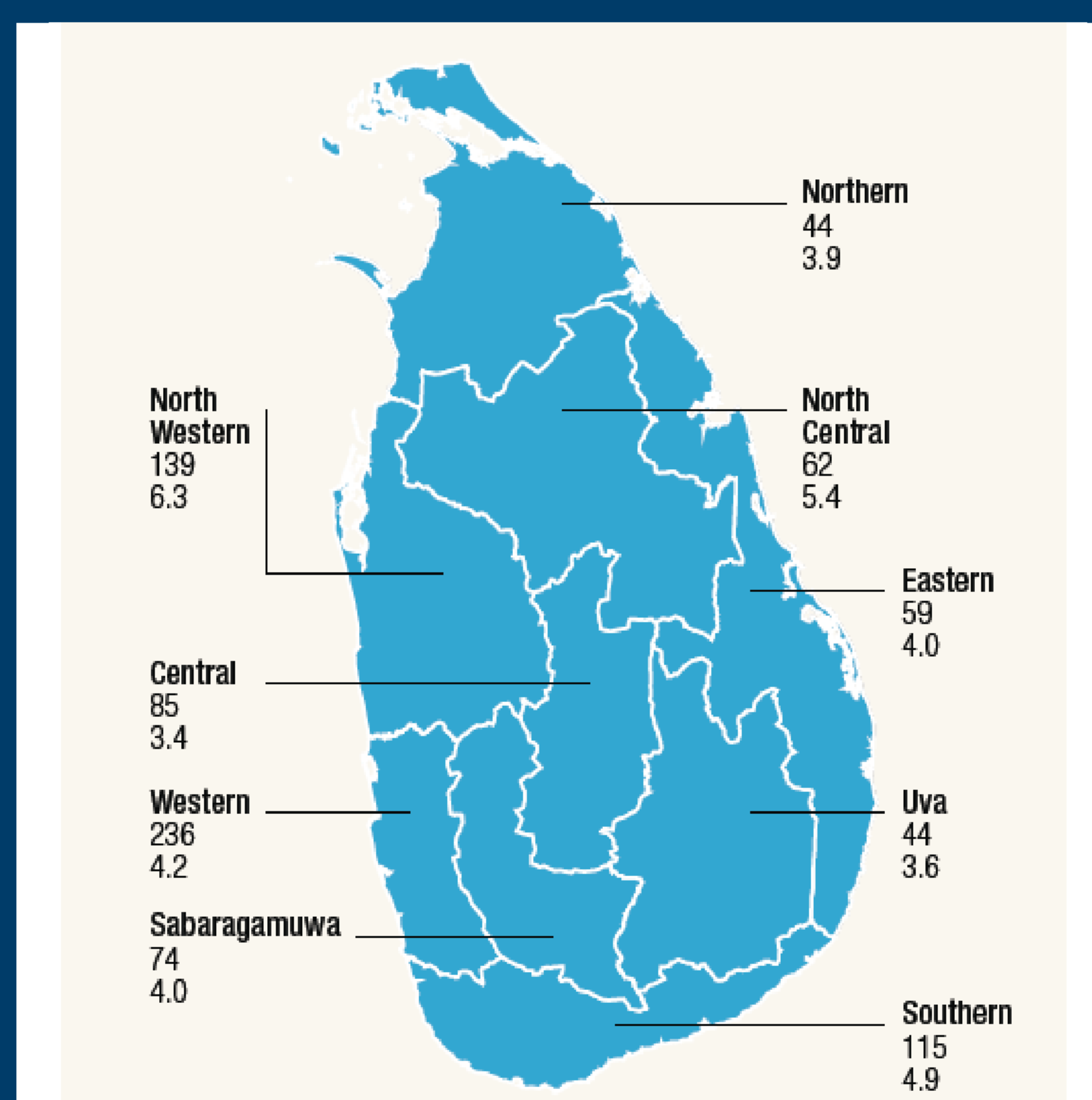


Figure 2 Average drowning deaths by frequency and rate (deaths per 100,000 population) by province, Sri Lanka, 2001-2006 & 2009

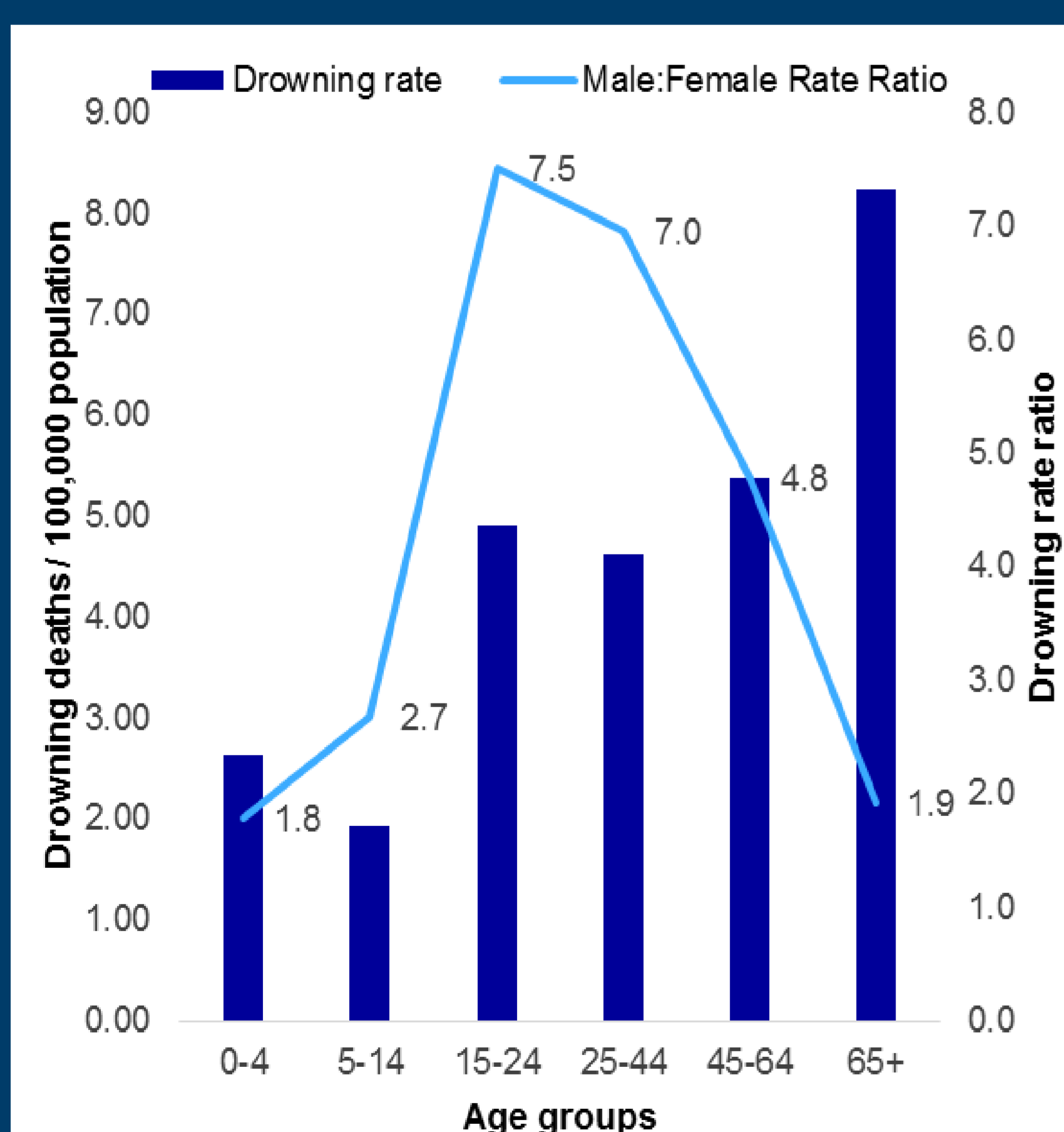


Figure 3 Average drowning rate and male to female rate ratio, by age group, Sri Lanka, 2001-2006 & 2009

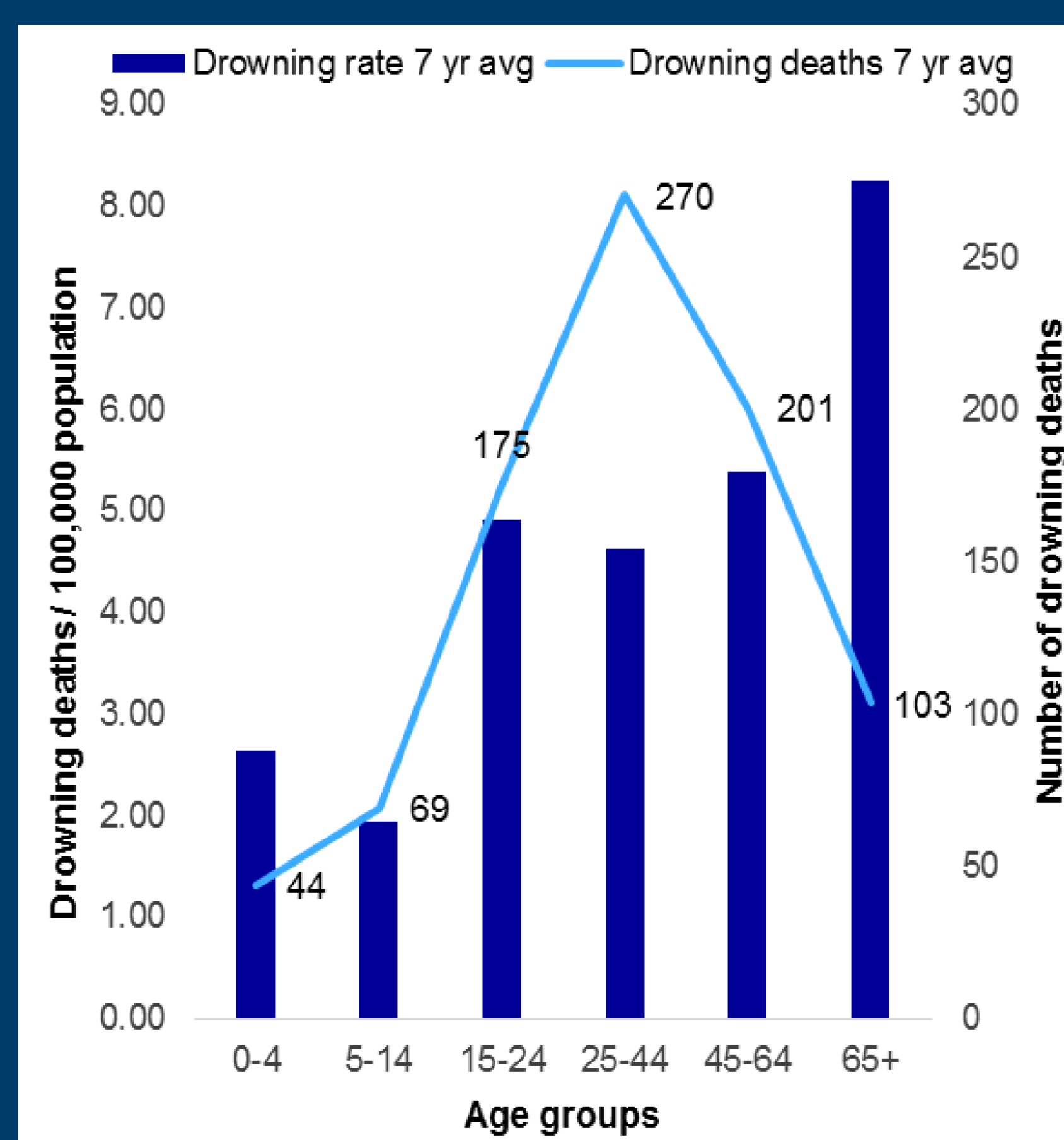


Figure 4 Average number of drowning deaths and drowning rate by age group, Sri Lanka, 2001-2006 & 2009

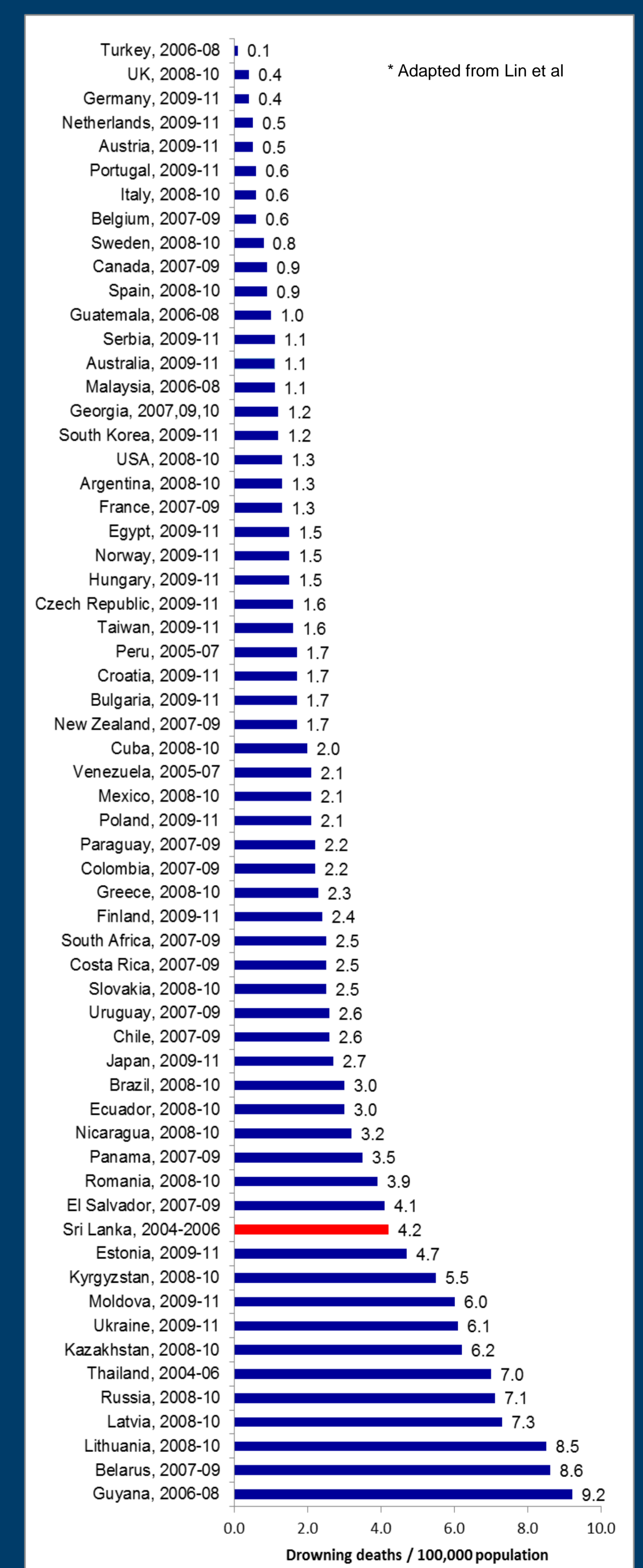


Figure 5 Drowning rate (deaths per 100,000 population) by country, 3 year averages\*

\* Adapted from Lin et al