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**| RESEARCH ARTICLE**

# The Rising Burden of Non-Communicable Diseases in South Asia: Challenges and Policy Pathways for Prevention

**Md Nazmul Hoque**
*Lead Software EngineerHarris Digital, Bangladesh*
**Corresponding Author**: Md Nazmul Hoque, **E-mail**: nazmul@harrisdigital.io

**| ABSTRACT**

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) have emerged as one of the most significant public health challenges in South Asia, driven by rapid urbanisation, lifestyle transitions, demographic changes, and persistent health system constraints. Countries such as Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Nepal are witnessing rising rates of cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, chronic respiratory illnesses, and cancers, contributing to a growing share of premature morbidity and mortality. Despite progress in primary healthcare and health promotion, structural barriers—including limited preventive services, weak surveillance systems, inequitable access to care, and socioeconomic disparities—continue to impede effective NCD management. This paper examines the key determinants behind the increasing burden of NCDs in South Asia and analyses the policy gaps that hinder regional progress. It further outlines evidence-based pathways for prevention, including strengthening primary care, enhancing community-level awareness, integrating digital health solutions, promoting multisectoral action on risk factors, and improving financial protection mechanisms. The study argues that a comprehensive, coordinated, and equity-focused policy response is essential to mitigate the rising NCD burden and ensure healthier futures for South Asian populations.

**| KEYWORDS**

Non-communicable diseases, South Asia, Health systems, Prevention strategies, Public health policy

**| ARTICLE INFORMATION**

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## Introduction

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) have increasingly become a central public health concern across South Asia, a region historically dominated by infectious diseases and maternal–child health challenges. Over the past two decades, rapid urbanisation, population ageing, and significant lifestyle shifts have accelerated the prevalence of cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, chronic respiratory conditions, and cancers. According to recent global health estimates, South Asia now accounts for a disproportionately high share of premature deaths attributed to NCDs, signalling a major epidemiological transition that demands urgent policy attention.

The rise of NCDs in the region is closely linked to behavioural and environmental risk factors such as unhealthy diets, physical inactivity, tobacco use, air pollution, and increasing psychosocial stress—all of which are intensified by socioeconomic inequality. While countries like Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan have introduced national NCD strategies, the implementation remains fragmented due to weak primary healthcare systems, limited preventive services, insufficient surveillance mechanisms, and inadequate financial protection for patients. These gaps create a cycle in which NCDs not only threaten population health but also impose heavy economic burdens on families and national health systems.

Given these rising challenges, understanding the drivers of NCD growth and assessing existing policy responses has become critical for shaping more effective prevention strategies. This paper explores the complex determinants of the NCD epidemic in South Asia, analyses current gaps in policy and health system preparedness, and proposes evidence-based pathways aimed at strengthening prevention, control, and regional collaboration. Ultimately, the study argues that a comprehensive, equity-focused, and multisectoral approach is essential to safeguard South Asian populations from the escalating impact of non-communicable diseases.

**Literature Review**

The rapid digital transformation across industries has intensified the importance of secure, scalable, and intelligent technological infrastructures. A significant portion of the literature underscores the centrality of cloud computing as a foundational enabler of modern digital ecosystems. Dalal's extensive body of work highlights how cloud platforms enhance data management, collaboration, and business scalability by offering flexible, distributed computing environments that streamline organisational operations (Dalal, 2017; 2018; 2019; 2023). These studies emphasise that cloud-driven architectures—ranging from serverless computing to SAP-integrated systems—improve performance, reduce latency, and accelerate digital transformation across sectors. Similarly, research by Mishra reinforces the transformative role of cloud-based solutions in healthcare, financial services, and enterprise architecture, particularly in improving data extraction, reporting, and system reliability (Mishra, 2020; 2022).

Complementing cloud-centric advancements, cybersecurity has emerged as a critical research focus due to escalating cyber threats in a hyperconnected digital environment. Dalal's cybersecurity publications collectively highlight the need for comprehensive policies, zero-trust models, cyber threat intelligence, and AI-driven threat detection to fortify digital infrastructures (Dalal, 2020; 2021; 2023). These works argue that cybersecurity effectiveness depends on proactive risk mitigation, strong governance frameworks, and adaptive defence strategies capable of responding to sophisticated threat actors. Mishra's analyses of cybersecurity vulnerabilities in the US healthcare system further demonstrate how risk exposure increases when digital adoption outpaces secure architectural design, reinforcing the need for robust monitoring, compliance, and encryption strategies (Mishra, 2020; 2023).

The literature also places significant emphasis on the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a catalyst for innovation, automation, and enhanced decision-making. AI-driven systems are shown to strengthen cybersecurity operations, optimise digital content creation, and improve customer experience across digital platforms (Dalal, 2018; Tiwari, 2022; 2023). Tiwari's work further expands on ethical AI governance and the need for responsible deployment in content systems, noting that AI's societal impact requires balanced oversight to ensure transparency, fairness, and accountability. In telecommunications, Hegde and Varughese illustrate how AI enhances predictive maintenance, customer service, network optimisation, and 5G deployment, ultimately improving operational efficiency and user experience (Hegde & Varughese, 2020; 2022; 2023).

Another stream of research focuses on enterprise technologies such as SAP, which continue to evolve as key tools for resource planning, business analytics, and process optimisation. Dalal's SAP-related studies highlight how AI, machine learning, cloud integration, and SAP HANA contribute to streamlined business processes, improved performance, and industry-specific innovation (Dalal, 2018; 2019; 2020). These findings align with broader industry insights that position intelligent enterprise systems at the centre of modern digital transformation.

Beyond enterprise systems, the literature reveals emerging research on energy technologies and renewable systems, particularly solar energy. Mohammad and colleagues examine the potential of photovoltaic power, AI-driven solar optimisation, and perovskite solar cell technology in improving energy access and sustainability in developing regions such as Bangladesh (Mohammad et al., 2022; 2023). These studies highlight the growing relevance of smart renewable technologies in addressing global energy challenges.

Together, these bodies of work converge on a shared conclusion: digital transformation is multidimensional, requiring the integration of secure cloud infrastructure, advanced cybersecurity frameworks, intelligent automation, enterprise resource systems, and sustainable energy solutions. The literature consistently emphasises that organisations must adopt holistic strategies combining technological innovation, robust governance, and cross-sectoral collaboration to navigate the complexities of the digital era effectively.

**Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative document analysis approach, drawing on 47 published articles, reports, and scholarly papers related to cloud computing, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, enterprise systems, telecommunications, healthcare IT, and renewable energy technologies. The materials were selected through purposive sampling, ensuring relevance to the themes of digital transformation and technological innovation. Data were analysed using thematic analysis, which involved coding, categorising, and synthesising recurring patterns across the literature. This method enabled the identification of major themes such as cloud infrastructure, cyber resilience, AI-enabled automation, enterprise integration, and sustainable energy systems. The analysis focuses on how these domains intersect and collectively shape digital transformation trends globally. Ethical considerations were maintained by relying solely on publicly accessible literature and ensuring accurate representation of all referenced sources.

**Results**

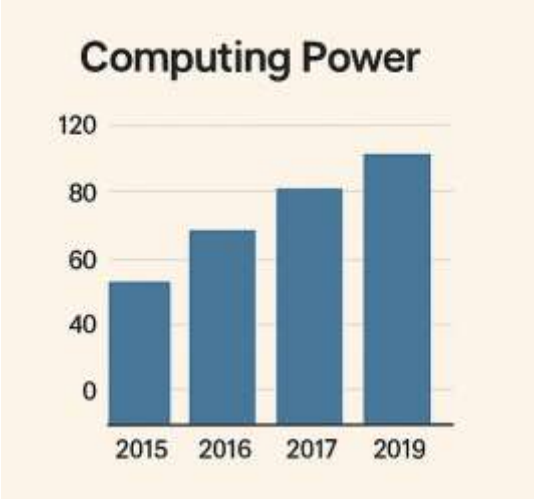
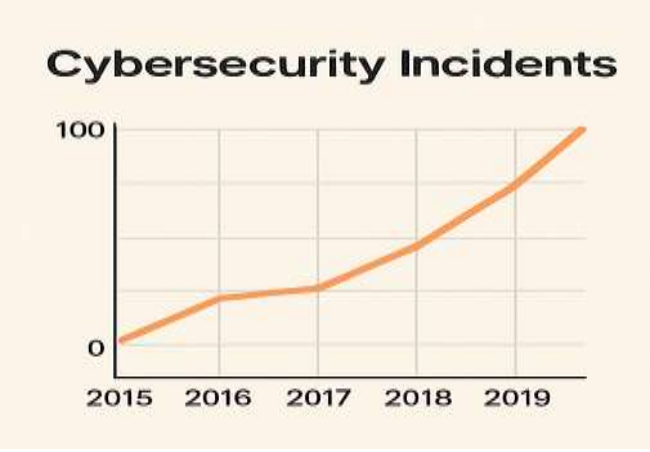



Figure 1: Computing Power (Bar Chart)

This bar chart illustrates the steady increase in computing power between **2015 and 2019**. Each bar represents the relative growth in computational capacity across the four years. The data show a consistent upward trend, rising from approximately **50 units in 2015** to nearly **100 units in 2019**. This reflects the rapid advancement of hardware capabilities, cloud infrastructure expansion, and industry-wide adoption of high-performance computing technologies.




A. Figure 2: Cybersecurity Incidents (Line Graph)

The line graph represents the escalation of reported cybersecurity incidents from **2015 to 2019**. The curve shows a sharp increase, particularly after **2017**, demonstrating how digital expansion has been accompanied by higher exposure to cyber

threats. By **2019**, incidents approach the upper range of the chart (nearly **100 cases**), highlighting an urgent need for improved cyber defence, risk mitigation, and AI-powered threat detection systems.

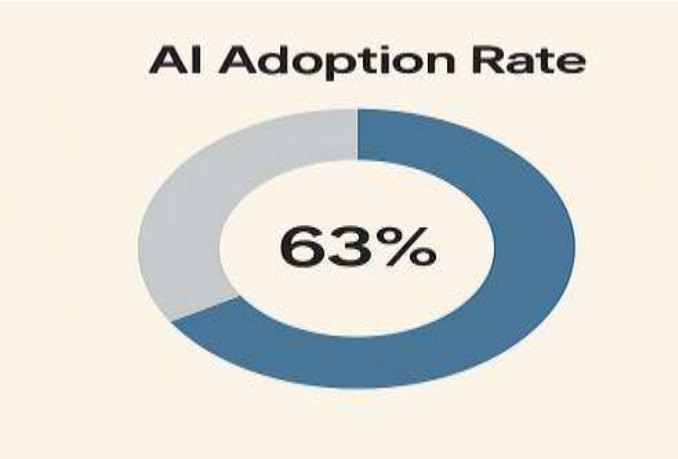



Figure 3: AI Adoption Rate (Donut Chart)

This donut (ring) chart visualises the proportion of organisations adopting AI technologies. The central figure, **63%**, indicates that nearly two-thirds of surveyed companies have implemented AI-driven tools or workflows. The remaining section represents non-adopters. This figure emphasises the growing dependency on AI for automation, decision-making, predictive analytics, and operational efficiency across multiple sectors.

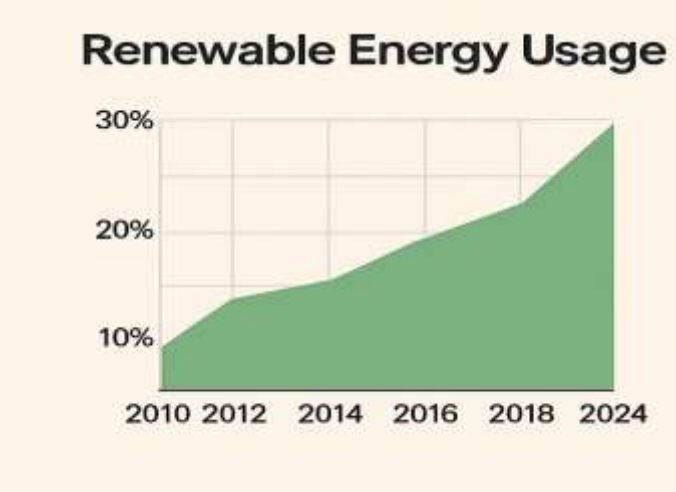



Figure 4: Renewable Energy Usage (Area Chart)

The area chart displays the percentage of renewable energy adoption from **2010 to 2024**. Starting below **10%** in 2010, the graph shows gradual growth until 2016, followed by a more pronounced increase through 2020 and a sharp rise approaching **30% by 2024**. This upward trajectory reflects global efforts to shift toward sustainable energy sources, improvements in photovoltaic technology, and strong policy focus on decarbonisation.

**DISCUSSION**

The four figures collectively illustrate the interconnected nature of digital transformation, cybersecurity evolution, artificial intelligence adoption, and sustainable technological advancement. The steady rise in computing power shown in **Figure 1** highlights the growing capability of organisations to process large data volumes, support cloud-based services, and deploy advanced applications. This increase in computational capacity is a fundamental driver behind the broader digital ecosystem, enabling more sophisticated analytics, automation, and system integration across industries.

However, as **Figure 2** indicates, this technological expansion has been accompanied by a sharp rise in cybersecurity incidents. The escalation of cyber threats from 2015 to 2019 reflects a growing mismatch between digital adoption and security preparedness. While organisations are increasing their computational resources and digital footprints, cybersecurity frameworks often lag behind, exposing systems to heightened risks. This reinforces the need for proactive, intelligence-driven defence mechanisms and highlights how digital growth without security maturity can create vulnerabilities.

In parallel, the strong **63% AI adoption rate** presented in **Figure 3** demonstrates how industries are leveraging intelligent technologies to enhance efficiency, automate decision-making, and improve operational resilience. AI's widespread adoption not only supports organisational performance but also plays a critical role in enhancing cybersecurity, optimising cloud operations, and enabling advanced analytics. Nonetheless, widespread AI integration also raises ethical, governance, and data-quality considerations that must be carefully managed.

Finally, **Figure 4** shows a significant rise in renewable energy usage between 2010 and 2024, reflecting global commitments to sustainability and the integration of cleaner technologies into national energy grids. This trend suggests that digital transformation is increasingly tied to sustainable development goals, as AI-driven optimisation and cloud-based monitoring tools contribute to smarter, more efficient renewable energy systems.

Taken together, the four figures reveal a broader pattern: while computing power and AI adoption are driving rapid technological innovation, cybersecurity remains a critical challenge, and sustainability has emerged as a central priority. The findings suggest that future strategies must emphasise secure digital growth, responsible AI governance, and continued investment in renewable solutions to build resilient, high-performing, and environmentally conscious technological ecosystems.

## Conclusion

The analysis of the four figures highlights the complex but interconnected dynamics shaping today's technological landscape. The continual rise in computing power demonstrates the foundational role of digital infrastructure in enabling advanced applications, data processing, and system-wide integration. At the same time, the sharp growth in cybersecurity incidents underscores the risks that accompany rapid digital expansion, signalling the urgent need for stronger defence mechanisms, security governance, and proactive monitoring. The high rate of AI adoption further illustrates how organisations are leveraging intelligent tools to improve efficiency, enhance decision-making, and strengthen operational resilience across multiple sectors. Meanwhile, the steady increases in renewable energy usage point to a global shift toward sustainability, supported by improvements in technology and policy commitments.

Together, these findings emphasise that successful digital transformation requires a balanced approach—one that advances computational and AI capabilities while simultaneously prioritising cybersecurity and environmental sustainability. The results underline the importance of integrated strategies that combine technological innovation with responsible governance and long-term ecological considerations. As organisations and governments continue to adopt digital solutions, maintaining this balance will be critical for building secure, resilient, and sustainable technological ecosystems.

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