



## **Emerged challenges against Gender in the context of war: A sociological study on the status of women, their role and encountered challenges during the time of war and further in the post war context in Sri Lanka**

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### **Abstract**

Three decades of protracted conflict was ended eight years ago ushering peace to Sri Lanka also ending brutish terrorism. Nevertheless, it is notable in the present context that the civil community living in the North confronts directly or indirectly the repercussions of the war in this post war epoch. Hence it is obvious that Government's effort to reconstitute the community is a vigorous challenge since the entire population became victims of the war whether they were involved in the battle or not. It is discernible that the community is fragmented being North and South through which the community in the North faces nuisance and harassments which has direct impact on the persistent ardency within the society indicating generalized incidences of criminal actions, rape, drug trafficking etc., Also a visible tendency is there to emerge unrest again during the post war era. The prevailed administrative systems followed effort to use guns and bullets having obscured through ethnic devidence inventing more problems to people in the North than southern people.

The majority of the victims of the conflict were women and children. Also noticeable that far-reaching changes had happened on the lives of civil community and their role. It is clear that women in particular had confronted with varied crisis such as; Loss of husbands, inability to continue enduring livelihoods, affected pregnancies, health problems due to stress and suppression were among several other issues.

However, the question is whether we could learnt lessons through the conflicts. Even now the emerging setbacks are viewed with restrictions of North and South. The best option to resolve the current disparities is to do a sociological assessment to create harmony between communities for which the ideological gap between North and Southern must be lessened through which the separatism and the ethnicity can be eradicated. If, reconciliation to be steered no separate land or Elam

The main objective of this study is to determine the specific role performed by women during the war time and to ascertain their status after the war. In this respect, 151 women were selected randomly as research sample within 10 GN divisions in Thelippalai Police area in the district of Jaffna in Sri Lanka wherein the protracted war continued beyond 30 years. The said 151 women could share information through interviews, filling questionnaires, observations, and focused group discussions and through chain of interviews. The exposed information revealed that 99% of respondent women had been agonized psychologically, via sexual harassments, and to face physical hardships due to pregnancy and menstrual complicacies etc. Including psychical problems, too. It was also discovered that during the post war context too, women were suffering from stress disorders and catastrophic irregularities also divulging that even after 8 years of ending of the war women still live with the war mentality with feelings that they are living with the war even now. The research team desirably felt that it would be appropriate to assist women and children as a specific target group by introducing relevant health programmes, long term actions to address their psycho-social complicacies while inventing supportive environment also with avenues for self-employment etc. by state driven departments as well as non-governmental institutions.

**Keywords:** warfare, post war, victims, affected female

### **1. Introduction**

Despite the fact that Sri Lanka achieved Peace after ending symbolically the ruthless terrorism which continued for 3 decades, it is visible currently that direct or indirect influences are there to pressurize the war affected community in the Northern region even though it is 8 years after the war. It is a greater challenge in front of the Government to uplift the affected community due to the pathetic reasons that those who survived even after fighting in the battle field, turn out to be the victims. Apparently, the communities in the North are affected by indirect nuisance and strained within the

uncovered ardency via the attributed discrimination which has endured a division as North and South and such occurrences have directly influenced the trends of crimes happening currently. Tendency of increased criminal acts during the post war juncture shows generalization of illegal acts and such disparities can raise the scale of criminal acts during the post-war era. The prevailed extremism politics decided solutions for all the problems via blood and bullet while also injecting racialism to the minds of ordinary civilians. A notable consequence of the errant politics was that a large majority of victims affected were from the Northern region in comparison

to the lesser number of those affected in the South.

It was apparent that women and children were a specific segment of those victims affected by the war. The prevailed status and the role of civil communities living in the war affected areas were subjected for changes. It is clear that varied pernicious were inherited for women in particular during the civil war such as; women Headed households, lost livelihoods, ravaged fetuses of pregnant mothers, health hazards caused by traumatic disorders and also by harassments and tortures.

Despite the fact that the war is ended the question remained is whether we could learn anything on it. Correspondingly, even common problems faced by us are still interpreted as northern problems or Southern problems in a categorized manner. Hence, it is a worthwhile action to perform sociological elucidation through which communities can identify their problems. In this respect a social platform be endeavored to eradicate disparities between communities in North and South enabling communities to evade from separatists and ethnicity. It is obvious that to assert a compromised living environment not a separate country is needed which is governed either by Elam or separate ruling system. What is indispensable is a united Sri Lanka in which all citizens must think all are born in one country. Hence, it is anticipated to conduct a sociological exposition to identify unseen profile within the post war era through the ongoing criminal actions and the prevailing social problems.

On the above context, the research team managed to complete the study in a sociological perspective on how the women faced the situation after post war effects within the shape of current sociological problems that affect the community in the North, those who live within the socio-cultural and political as well as economic frame that is surfaced after the post war situation Accordingly, the main objective of this exercise was to propose solutions against social menaces being faced by women followed by sufficient identity through sociological perspectives, during and after the war. The research was commenced in focus of 151 women selected randomly within Thelippalai police division in Jaffna in the North of Sri Lanka. It is natural within a calamitous war situation that women, elderly citizens, disabled persons and children become the victim. Among the said victims women becomes unique mainly due to biological reasons and in particular due to the socio cultural problems confront by women. Research findings analyzed in this study are in particular based on varied hardships faced by women basically in focus of the war related consequences such as night stay after displacement, awkwardness to respond on physical disorders ( Menses, pregnancy related issues and feeding kids etc.) . Data gathered in focus of headships faced by women too, were analyzed in this research.

## 2. Literature Review

Women in war turned regions are victims in many ways. Missing husbands, children and no any information available within authorities is a crucial issue. Groups of women started even fasting in stages just to convince responsible parties to share information on missing persons. As stated by (Research: Crisis group Rep. No 289/819 – July 2017) “.....*As the armed conflict raged, Tamil speaking women in the war-torn*

*north and east braved a powerful military and an authoritarian government to press for truth and accountability, particularly regarding the enforced disappearance of family members. After the war, their campaigning helped bring transitional justice issues onto the domestic and international agenda. At the heart of promised transitional justice processes are these women’s experiences of rape and sexual violence, the deaths of family members, forced recruitment and killings by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) and destruction of homes and communities.”* Reconciliation among communities is one of the most essential achievement expected to be happened in the post war era. Also the women seeks justice and truth for war time violations which had emerged in the UNHCR council in the 2015. The research attended by (Sri Lanka’s Conflict-Affected Women: Dealing with the Legacy of War - Asia Report N°289 | 28 [EN/SI/TA] ...July 2017.) Stated that “.....*Eight years after the end of Sri Lanka’s armed conflict, Tamil speaking women in the island’s north and east are still seeking justice and truth for wartime violations. Bold promises by the government to the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2015 – including a truth commission, a special court and offices to investigate missing persons and provide reparations – have failed to materialize even as the urgent economic and psychosocial needs of all conflict-affected groups remain unmet.*” As mentioned earlier as well, women faced immense hardships during the war among them disabilities were lived experiences as briefed through the research attended by (International Centre for Ethnic studies - (ICES),(2017), stating that “.....*This report, drawing upon disability-inclusive methodologies of co-creation, development and engagement, maps the lived experiences of women with disabilities living within the war-affected areas of Sri Lanka. ‘War affected’ is defined in this work to include women from areas where sustained hostilities took place, that is the Northern and Eastern provinces; women from the ‘border-villages’ of the primary areas where hostilities took place; women from a community expelled from the Northern and Eastern provinces and living in Puttalam, as long-term internally displaced persons;*”

## 3. Research Problem

Merely being female how they had explicitly affected physically, mentally, economically, culturally and socially comparatively to male during the war time? if so, the status of it within Gender behavior, and how far the said state of affairs were changed within the post war settings is the research problem to be studied in this research.

## 4. Objectives of the study

### Key Objective

To study and analyze the problems and challenges being faced by women during the post war era followed by determinations on the status and role of women during the war time.

### Secondary Objectives

To identify common causes affected exclusively for women during the war time. Also to discuss on ways how they faced above causes being war victims to study predicaments experienced by women as results of the war

To search for whether war affected women had reached a standard of living fashion likely the ordinary women.

To propose a programme to secure long term security and wellbeing of women.

**5. Research Methodology**

**5.1 Study area and the sample**

Research Area represents 10 Grama Niladhari (GN) divisions in Thelippalai police division (an area diametrically endangered due to the war) in Jaffna District within the Northern region of Sri Lanka.

**Research Sample**

A team consisted by a random sample of 151 women within the age range from 18 – 65 representing 10 GN Divisions was used to gather information.

**5.2 Data Collection**

The whole process of data gathering was accomplished through Questionnaires, Chain of interviews, group discussions, and through focused group discussions (FGDs). In addition, constant observations attended while also recording case stories.

**5.3 Data Analysis**

Data Analysis was managed through SPSS computer data analysis system. Data in pertinent to Event Recording and Case study assessments were brought under a detailed analytical judgment.

**6. Results based discussion**

**Table 1:** Individual Data

Age limits of interviewees	Number = 151	Percentage
Between 18 - 24	9	(5.96)
Between 25- 34	36	(23.84)
Between 35 - 44	38	(24.50)
Between 45 - 54	34	(22.52)
Between 55 - 64	22	(14.57)
Beyond 65	13	(8.61)
Level Of Education	Number = 151	Percentage
Not attended school	2	(1.32)
Educated from 1 – 5 <sup>th</sup> . grade	12	(7.95)
From 6 <sup>th</sup> . grade – O’level	49	(32.45)
From O’level to Adv.level	26	(17.22)
Succeeded O’ Level	28	(18.54)
Succeeded A’ Level	25	(16.56)
Other	09	(5.96)
Employment / Livelihood	Number = 151	Percentage
Cultivation	7	(4.64)
Casual Labour work	8	(5.30)
Self-employment	18	(11.92)
Livestock farming	5	(3.31)
Government Employed	16	(10.60)
Private sector employed	2	(1.32)
Other	57	(37.75)
Unemployed	38	(25.17)
Marital status	Number = 151	Percentage
Married	102	(67.55)
Un-married	16	(10.60)
Widow	33	(21.85)
Divorced	0	(0.00)

**Table 2:** Description on experience of women ducing the war time

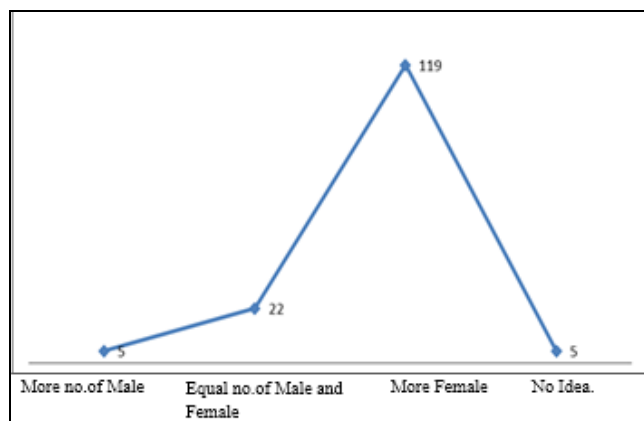
Characteristic of experience	Number = 151	Percentage
Loss of land and property	46	(25.17)
Loss of relatives	8	(11.92)
Got displaced	86	(27.81)
Left-out schools	16	(3.31)
Became disabled	19	(2.65)
Happened to be widowed	33	(21.85)
Other	9	(7.28)
What were the losses incurred due to thewar	Number = 151	Percentage
Loss of relatives	46	(38.66)
Disability	8	(6.72)
Loss of property	86	(72.27)
Caused to vacate the area of residence	16	(13.45)
Exhausted Education	19	(15.97)
Happened to be widows	33	(27.73)
Other	9	(7.56)
Attitudes of the propensity of becoming victims within a war environment		
Interpretation / Opinion	Number = 151	Percentage
More Male	5	(3.31)
Male female equality	22	(14.57)
More women	119	(78.81)
No idea	5	(3.31)

**Table 3:** Facts on the Post War Period.

Whether Govt. subsidies are received	Number = 151	Percentage
Yes	35	(23.18)
No	116	(76.82)
Grades / types of subsidies	Number = 151	Percentage
Samurdhi	22	(62.86)
Assistance for house construction	5	(14.29)
Asistance for Snr. Citizens	4	(11.43)
Other	4	(11.43)
Sepcific problems in Ref. to Gender related disparities faced by Women during war situation		
Disparities encountered with	Number = 119	Percentage
Problems on the days of menses	107	(89.92)
Problems attributed to pregnant	71	(59.66)
Feeding kids	82	(68.91)
Caring and protecting kids	110	(92.44)
Complicacy of health due to vacated residences to move inside forests	119	(100)
Change of clothing / keeping underwear safely	119	(100)
Need to get security having being kept a male	108	(90.76)
Preparation of meals	100	(84.03)
Subjected for sexual harassments	65	(54.62)
Subjected for assaults	42	(35.29)
Death Threat	119	(100)
Health problems	119	(100)
Other	101	(84.87)

**Table 4:** Impediments encountered by women during the post war era

Health Troubles	Number = 151	Percentage
Spreaded communicable diseases	5	(3.31)
Polluted drinking water	32	(21.19)
Inaccessibility to Hospitals	4	(2.65)
Absence of healthcare facilities	11	(7.28)
Increased kidney patience	9	(5.96)
Non existence of problems	79	(59.60)
Social Problems	Number = 151	Percentage
Burglaries	29	(19.21)
Consumption of harmful drugs	22	(14.57)
Gangs	12	(7.95)
Cast differences	10	(6.62)
Land disputes	25	(16.56)
Psychological setbacks	Number = 151	Percentage
Mental agony	25	(16.56)
Stress / tension	11	(7.28)
No hindrances	115	(76.16)
Attitudes on the propensity to become victims within a war atmosphere		
Increased number of male	5	(3.31)
Equal no. of male and female	22	(14.57)
Increased number of female	119	(78.81)
No idea	5	(3.31)



**Fig 1**

Majority of the 151 interviewees those who provided data is within the age range from 35 – 44 = (24.5 %). Data providers of the age ranges of 25-34 and 45 – 54 represented by 23.84% and 22.52 % respectively. 9 Interviewees within the age limits of 18 - 24 represented 5.96%.

When the educational level is concerned, those who studied up to O' Level signifies higher percentage out of the total 151 women. Those who successfully completed Level represented 18.54%. Women got through A' Level indicated as 16.56% while, the number of women studied up to A' Level indicated as 17.22%. It was revealed that those who completed A' Level and the women who could studied between Level and A' Level was depicted in equal percentages. While, a minority faction of 1.32% was identified as those un-attended in school education. Marginal group of Women (6%) exemplified as Degree holders or those following undergraduate courses or else some other certificate courses. Taken as a whole, the data analysis disclosed that majority of women in Thelippalai

police division has undergone education to a certain extent. In line with the revelation of sample survey on employment and Livelihoods, a large majority signifying 25.17% were found to be unemployed. This category of persons were not even self-employed. As revealed, the setback of women to find employment after the war is a critical issue. In spite of varied projects launched by Government to create employments the problem of unemployment remains unresolved. Out of 151 respondents only 52 were determined as employed. Out of the 52 individuals the majority were farmers or casual workers while a lesser number of women involved in Govt. or private sector jobs . Those representing 37.75%, a higher percentage specified as a category of 'other'. This signifies that when the percentage of the category of 'other' is removed from the summary the highest majority of women (11.92%) were self-employed. These self-employed women involved mostly in domestic businesses such as tailoring, making bracelets etc., comparatively, those found Govt. jobs embodied as lowest percentage being 10.6%, were employed in hospitals, schools and administrative institutions. Further, the women employed in cultivation, labour works, and livestock industries represented as 7%, 8% and 5%. Grapes and Paddy cultivation was commonly found as key livelihood measures whereas, another segments of women were employed as casual workers by landlords. Maintaining poultry sheds, goat rearing too were involved by a group of women earning a marginal income. Nevertheless, when the status of living means of women during the post war period is assessed, it was disclosed that altogether 113 were employed though it was identified as 52. This illustrates that an individual involved in several tasks to earn daily living due to the inaccessibility to a regular job.

As per this research, the experience of women on the impact of war had been another strong fact demanding attention. Survey outcomes revealed that women and the majority of their family members had exposed to the impact of the war. Out of 151 respondents, a group of 27.81% had to be displaced. Accordingly, it was a grave problem that women were disintitiled for their land and houses. Thereby, 38 women (25.17%) lost their property. Percentage of those who lost their relatives was 11.92%. Similarly, the percentage of widowed women was 21.85% indicting as a higher percentage. In comparison to the hardships faced by women the number of those lost relatives shows somewhat a low indicator. Also unveiled that the percentage of those faced varied other constraints were 7.28%. Loss of Books, Birth certificates and other important documents including loss of vehicles were considered as 'other constraints'. The lowest obstacle noted as 6.72%, was the disability. Those who faced this catastrophe, is not only the interviewees but can be either family members too.

Provision of subsidies to assist war affected persons was a customary action. Yet it was disclosed that 116 women (76.82%) out of 151 respondents had not received any subsidy. Those who received whatever subsidy was 35, in percentage 23.18%. This indicates that a larger percentage of women in Jaffna had arrived at the current status only by their effort exertion. Apparently the subsidies issued by Govt. were limited. Also made known that out of 35 women who received



subsidy, 22 were Samurdhi recipients (62.86%). Similarly, 5 women (14.57%) had received grants for house construction. As shown through the graph below, equal scales of subsidy for adults with other provisions were received by 4 persons (11.43%).

Also discovered that most of the women were suffering from varied health problems. Respondents claimed that 119 were in trouble due to varied health hazards. 9 women said to be Kidney patients. Apparently, the prevailing health menaces are worsening due to the unresolved problems of water supply, environmental issues. Out of total respondents 110 women were complained that inadequate income is a factor to prolong the health problems.

Although women had the practice of involving in self-employment actions as mentioned earlier, the threatening factor is the escalating prices of raw material, tools and equipment which has direct effect on the profitability of small businesses. Outwardly, low income levels of buyers, debilitated supply of subsidies had directly impacted on the low purchasing capacity of the majority.

Other life-threatening problem being faced by women was the burglary and theft. Due to the fact that women living alone during the day time since their husbands need to be away due to their involvement on casual jobs the level of theft had increased. Other reason was the addiction on drug usage which demands money from whatsoever sources. Certain sources of information reveal that access for Cannabis is straightforward due to the delivery of Cannabis from Kerala, India.

Apart from the above said complexities there are land disputes as well. Still, the cast controversy in the researched area is in prevalence. Youth joined in gangs was a common feature. Mental depression was somewhat a minor problem. 25 women out of 36, found to be affected by psychological depressions whereas, 11 out of 36 women found to be suffered due to mental stress. Altogether 115 women articulated that they are not suffering from mental agonies or worries.

Furthermore, 29 respondents affirmed that current trends of environmental corruption due to the release of chemical in an unprotected manner has spoiled the water resulting varied health problems. It was revealed that the said situation has increased communicable diseases and the number of Kidney patients.

Passivity of Education to some extent too, has affected women to face mental distresses.

When the resolving measures are concerned the study outcomes revealed certain extreme needs such as to provide job opportunities, standardized educational facilities, increased attention of Govt. on communities in the Northern region, improved security processes and to supply safe drinking water. Also disclosed that 14 women out of total respondents could not visualize any external assistance needed by them.

## 7. Conclusions

It is likely to conclude in line with research findings that within a war affected atmosphere when normal life styles of women happened to be disturbed there is a tendency for such

women to suffer lot with deep depression, in comparison to male members. In particular, 25 women within the sample, had to be widows affecting them forcibly to move into a change life style. In addition, on the perspectives of health and physical needs, such as; in the events of menstruation, pregnancy, breast feeding for kids, age of the amenorrhea (end of menstruation) and problems in relation to safe and protection, sexual and other harassments. Despite the fact that war is ended but, the expectancy of normal living pattern of women faces problems due to the existence of some unresolved matters mentioned above.

## 8. Recommendations

1. In an effort to bring forth harmonious life styles of war affected women, Gender Equality be considered.
2. Also it is indispensable to launch a long term action process to ensure that such measures are targeted on the specific problems being faced by women.
3. The said actions must be duly adjusted to match with the biological and socio-cultural needs of women.

## 9. Exclusive thanks

Researcher would like to express our gratitude and thanks to the operational units of Sri Lankan Military forces in Jaffna, police officers including the deputy inspector-general of police of Northern province, the Transport unit of Sri Jayewardenepura University for the provisions made available to meet the cost of this research and the students of special degree course of Sociology for all the supportive measures provided in respect of this research.

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