# Breakup of Community Social Structures in the War-Affected Northern and Eastern Provinces in Sri Lanka

## Dhammika Herath

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## Background Paper 3

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# Acknowledgments

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# List of Abbreviations

CBO          Community Based Organization

CRPO        Child Rights Protection Officer

DO           Development Officers

DS           Divisional Secretary

FGD         Focus Group Discussion

GBV         Gender-based Violence

GN           Grama Niladari

IDP          Internally Displaced Person

KII           Key Informant Interview

LTTE        Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam

MOMH     Medical Officer of health

NGO         Non-governmental Organization

NISD        National Institute of Social Development

RDS         Rural Development Society

UN           United Nations

WHH        Women-headed Households

WDO        Women's Development Officer

WRDS      Women's Rural Development Society

# Executive Summary

This paper examines a significant social consequence of the 26 years of conflict in Sri Lanka, namely, the breakup of the community social structures that is visible in the Northern and Eastern Sri Lanka. In our previous research, we revealed this issue with regard to certain limited areas of the North. Immediately after the end of the war in 2009, Heath and Silva (2012) documented what they considered 'community breakup' in the North of Sri Lanka. In this paper, I re-examine the same issue (albeit more broadly) five years after the original study, with a more comprehensive research approach covering all of the districts in the North and East. Essentially, community breakup involves a crucial transformation in the social structure of a community, specifically with regard to statuses and roles, functioning of the social institutions, procedures, norms and values. This present study focuses on the institutions of marriage and family to illustrate the community breakup, as these two institutions can be considered pivotal to the functioning and survival of society. Through interviews and FGDs, the study uncovers extraordinary levels of extra-marital sexual relations, the sexual exploitation of certain categories of women, a high prevalence of teenage pregnancies, and the abandonment of spouses. This paper is not an attempt to quantify the prevalence of these issues either in relation to other parts of the country or a specific period in history. Rather, it sheds anthropological light on a set of issues, which are seen to affect the smooth functioning of ordinary life and bring about a discussion, generating interest in possible remedial action. The study also finds a secondary set of issues intricately connected with the first: significant prevalence of household violence in families and high levels of alcohol consumption.

The most significant cause of this structural transformation, as this paper argues, is a cultural transformation engendered by sudden social disruptions and changes associated with the end of a 26-year war in Sri Lanka in 2009. I argue that the norms and values, which constituted the pre-war society, became irrelevant and less forceful in a post-war situation, bringing in a situation of 'anomie'. However, this paper additionally documents a host of other material conditions, which contribute to aggravating this cultural change.

This study finds evidence of community breakup in the North and East of Sri Lanka, but finds that marital instability is more pronounced in the North than in the East. I have looked at this from a structuralist perspective to explicate the drastic social changes, which have taken place. Years of violence in this society had debilitating impacts on the social structure, severely impacting family as the bedrock of society as well as the associated set of institutionalized relationships. Therefore, this spectrum of social transformation has led to community breakup, which, inevitably, creates other sets of social issues such as domestic violence and alcoholism.

What remedial actions are possible? The community breakup in the North and East requires multi-faceted social interventions. Addressing a number of issues (extra-marital relations, sexual exploitation, the abandonment of spouses, and violence within the family) requires effective intervention by government and non-government institutions. Better and more accessible counseling services, especially family counseling, can play a significant role in ameliorating community breakup. It is necessary to counter and challenge cultural inhibitions against the remarriage of widows and abandoned women. Empowering women to fight against sexual exploitation, harassment, abandonment and household violence through strengthening women's organizations and CBOs is a particularly important need. This will not only reform social networks, but it will also build bridges between service providers and service seekers. Affected women need legal and other forms of assistance in the short term in some cases. While improving access to services, there need to be a program to encourage women to use the services available. Increased support from civil and civic organizations may be required to carry out social mobilization, awareness, and livelihood projects; projects which support people at the grassroot level. The key issue of alcoholism also requires both conventional and innovative approaches to prevent addiction, as well as rehabilitate current addicts.

I place significant emphasis on support for livelihood development, in urban areas as well as at the grassroot level, in order to combat many causes of the community breakup. This paper highlights the need for livelihood support, especially for women and youth. Women require various kinds of support, including: mobilization out of seclusion and giving them motivation, helping them to identify suitable self-

employment opportunities, training and grants or loans to support self-employment, as well as help with marketing until they are in control of their lives.

Distortions in the social structure demand social interventions by the government, as well as by grassroot organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Addressing social disequilibrium that we find in the North and East is prerequisite for the development of the areas. Ultimately, livelihood support and development assistance which disregard the social problems I have noted are highly likely to fail, as people who are not emotionally and psychologically healthy may find it extremely difficult to effectively manage any potential development assistance.

# Introduction

This paper on the breakup of community social structures, referred to as 'community breakup,' aims to discuss the structural damage to the social structure of the war affected communities in the North and East. Structural damage in this respect includes drastic social and cultural transformations, which threaten the stability of a community's social system. In this particular study, I mainly examine the transformations, which have occurred in the institutions of marriage and family. I also delve into two other significant issues that are connected with the family, namely, severe alcoholism and household violence, which hinder the effective functioning of the family. Although the community breakup is a long-term effect, sometimes lasting years, it should not be thought of as unchangeable; as I show in this paper, there is significant space for human agency, which can come from individuals, the civil society, and the government, in addressing the community breakup. The institution of family is given special emphasis in this study given the central role it plays within broader social structures. Notably, there are other components of social structure as well that are essentially linked and mutually dependent.

The concept of social structure was fundamental to many works of pioneering sociologists such as Emile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons, as well as anthropologists such as Radcliffe Brown. Durkheim argued that the modern society is a system consisting of many components, which are organically linked to each other and hence interdependent. If even a single part becomes dysfunctional, then the whole system can be destabilized. Further, the overarching system is able to control social institutions and the members, which constitute these institutions (Durkheim, 1933).[2] Talcott Parsons considered social structures as essentially normative; social behavior conforms to norms, values, and rules that direct behavior in society in different situations. These norms define different roles that each member is expected to play. For example, being a husband/father or wife/mother is a role (Parsons, 1951). Both Durkheim and Parsons showed that human behavior is, to a significant extent, externally influenced by what constitutes social structure. People

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[2] In sociology, patterned social interactions—that is, the behavior that people are used to and what is considered 'normal'—are termed as social institutions. Thus, family, marriage, religion, etc. are considered social institutions.

live in social groups, and although people are members in them, these social groups exist over and above the individuals as supra-individual forces (Durkheim, 1931; Parsons, 1951). Therefore, norms, values and practices create an order in human society (Wilterdink and Willian, 2017). According to these pioneers of sociology, even the dysfunction of one component of the social structure can destabilize an entire society. In this paper, I highlight the dysfunctioning of the most central social institution—family—and how that can be characterized as a breakup of the social structure in the Northern and Eastern Provinces.

This paper starts with an introduction where the community breakup is defined, along with a brief discussion of other essential concepts. The sections following describe methodology and previous research on extra-marital relations before moving on to present the main empirical findings on marital instability and other family issues. Then, two remaining sections present findings on household violence and alcoholism. The final section summarizes the conclusions.

## Methodology

This paper results from a study conducted in the North and East by a group of researchers mentioned in the acknowledgement and I benefit from the data gathered by the whole team. The present study covers the entire North and East in order to investigate the extent to which community breakup has occurred in the two provinces, and to find out whether community breakup has been reversed to a healthy equilibrium. To do this, the team of researchers used a qualitative array of methods consisting of observations, 120 key informant and in-depth interviews, and 38 focus group discussions. The research team interviewed key informants in each district after an initial review of existing literature. We conducted interviews with government officials, civil society organizations, and village leaders, as well as FGDs with various stakeholders in society. Often, the district secretary, director/deputy director of planning, divisional secretary (in some divisions), social service officer, child rights promotion officer, women's development officer, statistical officer, counselor, and Grama Niladari (at the grassroot level) were among the officials we interviewed. In some cases, the research team also interviewed parliamentarians, provincial councillors, and Pradeshiya Saba members wherever it was possible.

Additionally, the research group interviewed religious leaders, representatives from NGOs, trade organizations, women's organizations and successful entrepreneurs. The FGDs aimed to elicit information from several categories of respondents, including recently resettled people, youth, Indian returnees, ex-combatants, selected livelihood groups, and selected social groups. Data collection occurred from March to June 2017.

## Extra-marital Sexual Relationships and Marital Instability

"Healing the Wounds," a collection of essays by Herath and Silva (2012), was among the first to document the social impact of the last phase of Sri Lanka's protracted war. According to this study, one of the most significant repercussions associated with violence is 'the breakup of the community social structures,' which they found in two research locations—namely, Manthai West in Mannar district, and Nedunkeeni in Vavuniya district (bordering Mullaitivu). Their research study, spanning two years from 2010 to 2011, included observations, meetings with officials, FGDs and in-depth interviews in the said locations. They found the community social structure had undergone unprecedented and dramatic distortions; the nature of marital and sexual relations, loss of faith in religion (particularly among the Hindus), increased suicides, and increased alcoholism were the most important manifestations of community breakup. The institution of family had suffered significant structural damages. The status and role within the family had changed much beyond what one could have anticipated. Herath and Silva argued that the extreme violence that people had gone through and the militaristic society, engendered by long years of violence, was responsible for these transformations (Herath and Silva 2012). Other scholars who have studied the conflict and gender relations also have documented the significant cultural impact of violence. For instance, the publication of 'Broken Palmyra,' a collection of scholarly papers, discussed how violence had impacted the people in the North and East (Hoole, et al. 1992). The use of 'palmyra,' the palm tree that is ubiquitous in the North and East of Sri Lanka, symbolises the cultural transformation in the entrenched social system. The palmyra tree, in many ways, is an identity marker of the Northeast society, given not only its familiarity in the landscape but also its utility in the Tamil culture. The breakup of the 'palmyra'

symbolizes the breakup of traditional culture. Derges (2013) examines the spreading of the ritual of 'thukkukavadi,' a form of religious self-hurting and argues that this ritual represents not only devotional spirit but also a response to social oppression and violence in general. He notes that it may be transformative and healing for the victims of violence who are otherwise silenced by the oppressive circumstances in which they live.

At the time of their study, Herath and Silva (2012) noted that the marital instability had become a serious social problem in the study locations, Vavuniya and Mannar. The violence, especially in the last phase of the war (from about 2006 to 2009), resulted in many men dying, both combatants and civilians. By the time they began their study in 2010, they found distorted sex ratios, with a considerably higher number of women relative to men (Herath and Silva, 2012). Furthermore, there were many widows, due to both natural and conflict-induced reasons. The issue of distorted sex ratios and the increased number of widows appeared to be related to extra-marital relations. Herath and Silva (2012) brought out many illustrative cases to show how, post-conflict, extra-marital relations had become much more common in society, despite previous strong sanctions against out of wedlock relations between men and women. Authors concluded that the situation at the time could be described as an 'anomie' condition, a concept developed by one of the founding fathers of sociology, Emile Durkheim. In times of dramatic social changes, according to Durkheim, society loses its moral foundations. In a completely new context, the existing norms and values become irrelevant and powerless to govern human behavior. This leads to a situation of 'anomie,' a condition of normlessness, which Durkheim believed caused high rates of suicide and social chaos (Durkheim, 1951 originally published in 1897 as 'The Suicide' in French; Jones, 1986).

## Persistence of Community Breakup in the North and East

Empirical data from this study confirms our previous research findings in Vavuniya and Mannar (Herath and Silva, 2012). Hence, our earlier findings continue to be of relevance and applicable to all other districts in the North and East. The major issue of marital and family instability is more pronounced in the North than it is in the East, while other issues are important for both provinces. Qualitative data from

interviews with key government officials, civil society representatives, and ordinary people as well as from the FGDs clearly show that certain post-war developments (such as internal labor migration within the northeast) and certain loopholes in reconstruction projects (such as delays in the construction of replacement houses, absence of financial or material compensation for diseased relatives, insufficient attention on employment generation, and inadequate attention on social services for restoring family) contribute to this community breakup. Our informants spoke about delays in construction of houses, lack of compensation, unemployment among various age strata, and weak service provision from relevant government agencies. The interviews and KIIs find that marital instability is a serious issue in the North and to some extent in the East.[3] The study finds that extra-marital relations, the abandonment of spouses, and teenage sexual relations feature the community breakup of the North and East. A family counselor that I interviewed was of the opinion that around 15% of families have serious problems with regard to marital relations. She pointed out that after the war, some spouses are still in detention, and this leaves some families without male breadwinners. According to the counselor, in some cases, sexual needs are also a factor in extramarital relations, but she stressed that having extra-marital relations could also be a coping strategy for economic problems that women experience. A female Grama Niladari (GN) remarked, "In my two divisions there are 260 and 160 families respectively. There are 70 households where there are marital problems. There are 75 households where alcoholism is a problem."

Here, the GN also confirms that around 17% of the families in her GN division (Nedunkeeni) have serious marital issues, while a similar number experience alcoholism within the family. Another male GN further pointed out that:

> *There are women registered as WHH [women-headed households], but then new babies come[...][laughter in the room][...]There are teenage*

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*pregnancies in such families. Last month there were 15 girls who had become pregnant [reported to Vavuniya hospital]. Some girls engage in sex without having much knowledge, while family members including father, grandfather, uncles or neighbors, etc. force some others into sex [rape and incest].*

The second (female) informant, a counseling assistant attached to a base hospital, reported that 15 cases of teenage pregnancies were recorded at the hospital. She also points to possible rape and incest, in addition to extra-marital relations, teenage pregnancies and unwanted children. As said before, this paper does not try to quantify these issues and speak about percentage of the population, which suffers from a particular problem; rather I take these statements from grassroots officers as evidence illustrative of a persistent problem.

I find that widows are at risk of sexual exploitation and are intricately connected with the issue of marital instability. Several of our informants expressed that at the village level, widows face unsolicited sexual advances from men in the village, who know very well that the widows are vulnerable in many ways. A Women's Development Officer in a District Secretariat told us about a case in which a widow faced sexual advances by a man connected with her family and, unable to bear it, the woman moved to an abandoned house along with her children. This man and other men in the village found it easier to influence her as she was then living in a single house with her children. Ultimately, she had to leave her village and move to a different area. The Divisional Secretary explained:

*There have been cases where laborers from the Eastern Province pretend to be single and marry local women. After one or two years they leave. Once a week a case about marital problems is reported. Even after childbirth some men leave their [unmarried] wives. Young women working in garment factories also face problems.*

The informant above brings to our attention the fact that not all of the widows' sexual relationships are out of force or coercion. There are cases where widows, as well

as young unmarried women, develop relationships with men in hopes of making a new family. In many places in the North, there are migrant workers, mainly Tamils, from the Eastern Province. Several of our informants from the districts in the North mentioned cases where migrant workers had relationships with widows as well as young unmarried girls for several years—even had children—but ultimately abandoned the women with their new-borns. I was able to interview one family, which had this experience. Two other informants mentioned that marriage registration was weak among the widows in his GN division in Kilinochchi, with many people opting not to register or simply considering it non-essential. This could also be a reason for temporary relationships. It is possible that rural areas may have relatively less attention to marriage registration than the urban places, although I cannot confirm it. When asked if there were extra-marital relations that get reported to him, a GN in Kilinochchi answered:

> *Yes, compared to the war period, extra-marital relationships have increased. People do not care to register their marriages. There are 30 couples without legal marriage registration in this village. I organized a program to register marriages. Only 12 couples came for registration. So, when a woman has been abandoned, she cannot make a complaint.*

This relative lack of attention to registration of marriages possibly aggravates the issue of abandonment of spouses. Sociologically, marriage is one of the most important social institutions and the local culture places high emphasis on it. Hence, many unregistered marriages point to a deep and profound cultural chasm. Deeply entrenched vulnerabilities arise as this problem occurs mainly among the widows, who face cultural and practical constraints in the 'marriage market.' Cohabitation between a mutually consenting woman and a man, thus, becomes an option irrespective of the insecurities and cultural censure it entails. There is also an element of exploitation when men abandon these women, leaving absolutely no room for legal redress because cohabitation is not legally accepted under Sri Lankan marriage law.

According to the data the research team gathered in interviews and FGDs, some young women (including widows and unmarried women) started extramarital or premarital sexual relationships with men in the work place—particularly, in

garment factories. Informants considered this a source of cultural change. In one of the interviews the research team conducted with an elderly woman in Vavuniya, it was revealed that her young daughter went to another location in order to work in a garment factory. There, she started a love affair with a local man. They even started living together without informing their families. It should be noted that living together is extremely rare in the Northeast, as well as in most of Sri Lanka; hence, living together reflects significant a cultural change in the Northeast. This young woman had a child in due course. The mother described:

> *My daughter got pregnant without my knowledge. I only heard of it from a friend who was in [redacted]. When my son got to know about it, he did not allow me to go and see her [...] After the childbirth I managed to get her back to this house. Only at that stage I got to know about the previous marriage of her 'husband'.*

The individual described here is a 22-year-old woman from a resettlement village. She had not known, until she was pregnant, that her partner had a legally constituted marriage from which he also had children. She decided that she would give up this partner, who had allegiance to another family. Neither this young woman nor her family members resorted to legal action or even sought compensation, as both the victim and her mother felt it was socially disadvantageous for their own family to complain to the police and, by doing so, make the whole episode known to many. The mother of this young woman said that her daughter's suffering resulted from her own failure to look after her daughter well enough. She had feelings of guilt and said she accepted responsibility for what had happened to her daughter. It is evident that, although the family came forward to help this young woman by way of giving her shelter, the local culture exerted constraints on her choices for legal redress as the family thought hiding the issue was the best available option. They lived in a temporary shelter, indicating poverty, and also mentioned they had suffered multiple displacements. These existing multi-layered vulnerabilities make this young woman even more at risk, perhaps, to further sexual exploitation in the future.

The legacies of past violence are also responsible for some of the marital instability in the North and East. As described in the literature, the LTTE made it compulsory for each family to submit at least one family member to the movement, or pay fines otherwise (Alison, 2004; Becker, 2006; Becker, 2010, Hoole, 2009). One Divisional Secretary from the East reported, "During the time of the LTTE, many young girls got married in order to avoid forced conscription. They married without having sufficient understanding of their partners. There have been many cases of separation or divorce in such marriages." Other key informant interviewees as well as previous literature corroborated this practice of early marriage, at times, even before reaching the legal marriageable age of 18 years (Alison, 2004; Becker, 2006; Becker, 2010, Herath, 2012; Hoole, 2009).[4]

Several key informants and participants of two FGDs of this study mentioned what the Divisional Secretary had touched on—that is, in a fight against time to avoid conscription, marriages were arranged suddenly in some cases, not allowing the young people time to think about whether their partners would be a good match. Amidst the relative peace of the post-conflict environment, incompatibilities between these young couples have begun to surface, challenging the stability of their marriages. Many people realized their haphazardly-arranged marriages served the immediate purpose of avoiding conscription but would not be sufficient for achieving their long-term family goals. Through the interviews, I also found that this problem was related to partner abandonment, predominantly husbands abandoning wives. This put abandoned women at risk for sexual exploitation.

Moreover, in the past, the Hindu culture has involved strong sexual mores, which had decisive influence in controlling the behavior of Hindu societies (McGilvray, 1988; De Mel. 2001). A local academic interviewed in this study mentioned that these strict sexual mores are traced to the Manu-Dharma-Shastra, which is an ancient Sanskrit legal text in India. While there are many versions of the Dharma-Shastra, the Manu-Dharma-Shastra is fundamental to the norms and values underpinning family and marriage in Hindu culture in Sri Lanka as well. Further, the Thesavalamai law also

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[4]  Our interviewees indicated this strategy proved useful in the beginning, although it was claimed that the LTTE eventually forced even newly married youth to join the movement when their numbers rapidly dwindled during the last phase of extensive fighting.

speaks about the institutions of family and marriage (Jeeweshwara-Rasenon, 2017). Thus, scholarly sources generally confer that local Hindu culture historically had very strong sanctions against sexual relations outside the institution of marriage and, from a vantage point of time, the present crisis in the institution of marriage can be considered a breakup of the established social structure.

It should be noted that extra-marital relations are not limited to widows or abandoned wives. There is no way this research can quantify and compare a clandestine phenomenon such as sexual extra-marital behavior. Nonetheless, according the perceptions of many of our interviewees, among married people there is also a 'higher than usual' incidence of out of wedlock sexual relationships. As already mentioned, the Tamil culture in the North and East is known for strict sexual mores, yet, the anomie situation brought on by the sudden transformations in the North and East appears to have challenged the influence of such mores; it seems this anomie is an important factor in the prevalence of extra-marital relationships. However, there are also other material conditions, which induce such behaviour. The distorted sex ratios in the North and East, for example, may also be a factor as widows and separated/abandoned women have to compete for partners in the marriage market. This new phenomenon, coupled with the presence of labor migrants and relative weaknesses in marriage registration highlighted earlier in this chapter, serve to further exacerbate this issue of extra-marital relations.

There are other social institutions, too, which additionally complicate the institution of marriage. For example, dowry serves as a severe constraint for women in finding marriage partners. Dowry is a secondary social institution, not only among Tamils, but also among Muslims and (to a lesser extent) among the Sinhalese (De Munck, 1998; Wickramasinghe, 2005). Because it has become mandatory to give a dowry at the marriage, it can appropriately be considered a social institution. Participants in several FGDs commented that although a dowry may not affect a second marriage as much as it affects the first marriage, the parents of women—especially those from lower economic backgrounds—find it difficult to raise sufficient dowries to support the marriages of their daughters.

Furthermore, as mentioned by some of the interviewees of this study, there are cultural inhibitions against the remarriage of widows. According to 'traditional'

values, widows are not socially respected and are considered a bad omen. As one young female in Jaffna put it, "it is difficult for women to re-marry if their husbands have abandoned them. Women do re-marry but the society does not accept it. Some people criticize re-marriage." This statement, from a FGD, illustrates how the local Tamil-Hindu culture has strong negative sanctions against remarriage, especially of widows, which continues to exert social pressure on women and society. Women whose husbands are deceased are typically considered inauspicious. For example, after the local temple festivals, they typically cannot enter the house before another family member has already entered. I found situations where widows were willing to remarry, but their society frowns upon the prospect of remarriage. This inherently deprives women not just materially but biologically and socially and puts them at risk of sexual exploitation. A young widow from a youth FGD in Jaffna explained:

> *If you want young women to re-marry you should talk to our parents and grandparents. They are the barrier; they think our culture does not allow re-marriage. The other thing is when I resettled in this village, our children were small. Now they are older. They know they don't have a father. So how can I re-marry?*

Thus, parents and grandparents become a barrier to the remarriage. This particular woman even felt that social interventions should target the older generation, as the younger generation already wants to challenge these inhibiting norms. This woman also revealed an important cultural aspect in relation to re-marriage: women do not want their children to know that they have remarried. Many respondents of this FGD believed that if they re-marry while children are too small to notice the incoming of a step-father, children will grow up believing that their step father is their real biological father. The older the children are, the stronger are the psychological inhibitions, informed by cultural sanctions, against remarriage of women.

Another issue reported from our interviews was teenage pregnancies, although I am in not in a position to express how common this is. Yet, the incidence of female teenage pregnancies provides a possible entry point to understand the drastic cultural changes that have taken place in the North. "In the year of 2003 alone, there were 7 teenage marriages that occurred in the [redacted] IDP camp in the [redacted] village in [redacted]," one Women's Development Officer commented.

The informant described how life in IDP camps presented certain cultural shocks to the Tamil community there. Several of our informants spoke about cases of teenage pregnancies in many other places at present. For example, a divisional secretary from the district of Mullaitivu mentioned: "...the other problem is teenage pregnancies. Every month, two or three cases are reported in Mullaitivu district." Although this study cannot present confirmed statistics, reported occurrence of two or three cases in just one divisional secretary division in such a sparsely populated district such as Mullativu is indicative of a high prevalence of teenage pregnancies. In the overall context of extra-marital sexual relationships, the teenage pregnancies point to the community breakup.

## 'Abandonment of Spouses'

The abandonment of spouses, especially husbands abandoning wives, emerged as an important aspect of community breakup in the North and to some extent in the East. "In the same way I throw away broken plastic bucket as garbage, males are treating the women. If the going is not good or if a conflict arises, instead of trying to patch up the differences, he selects another partner and starts life with that person," an FGD respondent in Mallaitivu poignantly described. For the purposes of this study, I was not able to systematically collect statistics on spouse abandonment, as no government agency keeps data on abandonment. However, the FGD informant suggests that abandonment is a cultural issue, in that cultural inhibitions against the abandonment of wives by husbands have purportedly weakened. The informant further believed that when conflicts occur in families, unlike in the past when people attempted to resolve them, there is now a tendency to immediately seek divorce or abandon the spouse. In some cases, someone finds a new partner without going through the formal process of divorce. While changes in material conditions may have facilitated increased abandonment, equal emphasis needs to be placed on the possible cultural transformation. Some of our informants in the interviews lamented that social norms, parental advice, and community pressures fail to guide the younger generation as much as they did for the older generation. Further, informants from interviews and FGDs usually compare the current cultural deterioration against a supposedly strong cultural atmosphere that prevailed during the time of the LTTE. Some informants mentioned that the LTTE resorted to strong punitive action

against those who violated social norms: "Now that the LTTE is not there, there are no sanctions against neglect of women," one woman from Mullativu said.

It is important to note that the North and East suffered from drastic social and cultural changes, which may have led to a situation of anomie. Hence, it is unlikely that the mere absence of the LTTE created a vacuum within which social problems gave way. Many of our informants in interviews and FGDs spoke about harsh punishments in the case of rape, murder, alcohol production etc. There is scholarly evidence to suggest that LTTE maintained strong control and carried out punitive actions when they were in control of many areas of the North and East (De Mel, 2002; De Mel, 2007; Chalk, 1999; Gunaratna, 2000; Terpstra, and Frerks, 2017; Thiranagama, 2011). The demise of the LTTE undermined the strong punitive regime and the return of the 'functionalist' equilibrium takes times, at times, years, thus creating a situation of 'anomie.'

The Divisional Secretary offices also do not have a database on abandonment. Hence, the evidence presented here can only be taken as a broad illustration of the existing situation. A Grama Niladari said that in his division there were 25 women whose husbands have abandoned them; a figure which is quite high for one GN division. He went on to describe the conditions underpinning the issue of abandonment:

> *It was not the case before the war. Some men and women died in the war. Their spouses may remarry but do not register their marriages. I think they cannot register marriages without a legal divorce or legal recognition of widowhood. So, when a spouse has abandoned his/her partner, it is difficult for the other partner to go to court as they were not party to a legal marriage.*

As the GN explains, the lack of clarity surrounding divorce laws, especially whether one requires a legal divorce when the spouse is dead or has disappeared, deserves attention. A lack of marriage registrations, either due to ignorance or the misunderstanding of laws, makes women highly vulnerable as they often find it difficult to challenge abandonment in a court of law.

Further, I asked a group of men that the research team interviewed in an FGD in Mullaitivu to describe the most important social problems that affect their village. The first problem they mentioned was the abandonment of wives by their husbands.

Another GN had a different explanation for abandonment: "There are 21 abandoned women among 61 WHHs. They have been abandoned due to family disputes, extra-marital relationships, and also due to relationships made while living in [redacted] (IDP) camp." This GN attributed some abandonment issues to IDP camps, which provided shelter—in highly congested conditions—to thousands of IDPs immediately after the war. As described in some of the interviews, living in an IDP camp exposed people to a different culture; it espoused a cultural shock in a time of dramatic social change, which sociologists consider a cause of anomie (Durkheim, 1951).

Abandonment has a direct impact on not only the affected person but also his/her children. I asked the program director of a local NGO in Mullativu to weigh in on the status of children affected by the war:

> *I can tell you about one case to describe the situation of children. There was this mother with two kids. Her husband had already separated from her. She went to a nearby household and requested a woman there to look after the kids until she returns from a short outing to a shop. She never returned. The elder child is four and half years and the young one is one and half years.*

The abandonment of a parent or parents affects children significantly. In this case, first the husband abandoned the wife, and then his wife abandoned their children. The mother of the children left them in a neighbor's house. Finally, a woman in the neighboring house had to accept responsibility for these children. For accepting the children of another family, the latter woman's husband abused her. The entire chain of incidents illustrates the community breakup in the North and East of the country.

Marital instability, extra-marital relations, and abandonment has sometimes led to to extreme forms of violence. A family counselor in a Northern district described a case that illustrates this point: a woman, pregnant out of wedlock, gave birth in her home because delivery in a hospital clinic was not socially acceptable; then,

"after birth, the woman burnt the new-born with some foliage in the garden and threw body into the bushes in the adjoining garden after wrapping it up with some cloths. Her elder daughter was a witness to the scene and unfolded the story to her school teacher." While incidents like this one are extremely rare and therefore do not represent the general social climate, the case does illustrate the potential for violence in the current social climate.

## Do We Need to Worry about Marital Instability, and if so, What Can be Done?

In his classic work on the Structure of Social Actions, Talcott Parsons (1951) postulated a theory of social equilibrium. Parsons believed that society always maintains equilibrium and asserted that when the social equilibrium is broken, it has a tendency to move back to a new equilibrium at some point. By Parsons' logic, marriage is a stable social institution in society, and marital instability is a status of disequilibrium. Society will move to a new equilibrium, although it might not be the same as before. Does this mean there is no need to intervene? I believe social intervention is a must. For one thing, I do not know how many years it will take for the new equilibrium to emerge. Secondly, society will continue to experience serious repercussions until some social intervention is made. Thirdly, family is the bedrock of society and interventions aimed at resuscitating the North and East economies are highly likely to fail so long as the social issues concerning the family are left unaddressed.

Nevertheless, marital instability, as I have highlighted in this chapter, is a complex social problem linked to many other issues. A complex problem requires complex solutions. As Silva et al. (2018) show, there are thousands of widows in the North and East. Some became widows when their spouses died in the war, as combatants or civilians, while there are others whose spouses died due to natural causes. Widows require safe social spaces to live in, not least due to the various kinds of vulnerabilities they face. Previous studies have shed light on social stigma, marginalization and hardships faced by the widows in the North and East (Pannilage et al, 2016; Ruwanpura and Humphries, 2004; Somasundaram, 2007). Based on the interviews and FGDs the research team conducted, it can be said that currently, the

local culture fails to provide emotional, social and legal support to widows. These women face social stigma and, at times, are ostracized, making them vulnerable to poverty as well as sexual exploitation. This calls for various safety nets, including safe houses, livelihoods support, counseling and legal support. For instance, some studies show that cash for work programs have been helpful in rebuilding livelihoods in the Northeast (Razaak, 2012). While it is not pragmatic or desirable to expect that every widow receives cash transfers from the government, appropriate livelihood training and opportunities for widows to be economically independent is possible and should be pursued (see Silva et al., 2018).

Given the severity of these issues, there is need for emotional support, such as through counselors, befrienders, and social service workers.[5] There is a severe shortage of these officers in the entirety of the North and East. As one District Secretary noted, "There are development officers (DOs), but they do not like to work. They have no job description. At the same time there are only 4 counselors for the whole district. There is no program to train counselors."

Although, there is a severe shortage of counselors for the entire North and East, based on our interviews with government officials, there is reportedly excess cadre in other officer categories, such as the Development Officers (DOs) (Silva et al., 2018). DOs are recently recruited young university graduates from state universities, mostly, with training in social science or humanities. Therefore, there is a concrete opportunity to significantly increase the number of counselors within one year by training DOs in the basic skills of counseling. I recognize that they would not become expert counselors within just one year of predominantly in-class training. However, the few counselors I met in our study all began work after obtaining their one-year diplomas. Evidently, one year is enough time for fundamental training, and from there officers are set to learn by field experience. Thus, training new officers in the field of counseling and the retraining of existing officers to handle the post-war demands remain highly viable options to mitigate psychosocial issues that affect the family. As elucidated in the interviews and FGDs, after all, there are significant numbers

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[5]    Befrienders are not professional counselor  but ideally have some basic training in counseling which enables them to identify when someone possesses emotional problems. They are trained to become close to such persons, engage in active listening, and refer them to more professional services if necessary.

of families suffering from marital instability, abandonment, extra-marital sexual relations and other issues. Thus, existing officers are likely overwhelmed as they do not have the capacity to manage the number of cases post-war. Affected persons need personalized care and attention, which require counselors at the grassroot level on the lookout for people with emotional problems, talking to them and if necessary, referring them to specialized care at the higher levels. As mentioned earlier, there are government officers at the village level, including the DOs who already have the required social science or humanities training. Mustering these officials to attend to the social needs of their communities, after providing them with professional and 'on the job' training in counseling, will be the most efficient and cost-effective mechanism to handle family problems in the short-term.

Interventions that address social problems affecting family and marriage must be sensitive to the local culture. There is a degree of secrecy and taboo attached to these problems, and local culture may encourage hiding emotional and psychological trauma. Many people do not seek services from the government, such as police, GBV desks or hospitals. Paradoxically, neighbors—and even GNs—are aware of family problems. Yet, village citizens are less likely to complain to the GN about things like marital issues given the image of the GN as an administrative officer. However, DOs and some Samurdhi animators may be perceived differently.[6] Currently, when the GN receives a report, he or she may bring it to the attention of Women's Development Officer (WDO), the Child Rights Protection Officer (CRPO), or counselor, who, depending on availability and distance to the village, may make a visit. This does not, however, result in a sustained and dedicated service to get people out of trouble. Hence, the gravity of the issues demand officers to be available at the grassroot level; constituents need better access to their services.

Further, future psychosocial interventions must be cognizant of certain cultural attributes of the North and East. Our interviews, along with previous research, suggest that there is significant reluctance among the people to seek the services of professional counsellors (Herath, 2012). For example, one program officer of a local

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[6] Samurdhi is the foremost poverty alleviation program of the Government of Sri Lanka. A Samurdhi animator is a grassroots officer at the GN level, responsible for the implementation of the program.

NGO in Mullativu explained, "If I go as counselors, they do not accept us. They think counselors are there to help mentally sick people." The officer also suggested that counselors should strategically handle the cases to make counseling more acceptable to the local population. Overall, our interviews suggested that counselors have to act as though they provide other general services, not overt mental health help, in order to gain acceptance. In addition to professional counselors, religious leaders play a role. Among the Buddhists and Tamil Christians, religion opens up a path for counseling in a non-threatening way. Nobody faces stigma for meeting the priest and sharing his or her emotional disturbances. In fact, it is not uncommon for Buddhists and Tamil Christians in the North and East to share their woes with priests. This active listening is a form of highly acceptable therapy, therefore, training religious leaders, especially among the Christians and Buddhists, could be a strategy to make counseling more accessible.

As we found in our previous research, the Tamil Christian community appeared to have a relatively higher degree of social solidarity among themselves than the Tamil Hindus, a product of the former's more organized religious practices (Herath and Silva, 2012). The Christian community usually attends church services on every Sunday, providing them an opportunity to create a dense network of relations and a space for discussing their problems. It also generates a sense of community belonging. Additionally, they rally around the church for various festivals and maintain close interaction with their priests, who often act as advisers and intermediaries when dealing with police and other government institutions.

However, Hindus and Muslims, and in particular, Muslim women, do not show a tendency of approaching religious leaders to find solace amidst emotional problems. For Tamil Hindus or Muslims, training grassroot counseling assistants, as done at the Vavuniya and Mannar hospitals, would be better strategy. The consultant psychiatrist in Vavuniya has innovatively approached the absence of counselors in the two hospitals. Currently, there is no approved cadre for counselors under the Ministry of Health and therefore, the consultant has recruited 8 young women under the laborers cadre and trained them as counseling assistants. They are in charge of certain grassroot level locations. One of these assistants reported success in

identifying people with emotional disturbances and directing them to the hospital. I recommend this be extended further.

In terms of marriage, increasing the social space for the remarriage of widows is important in combatting marital instability, as well as sexual exploitation and violence. As I have mentioned, there are cultural inhibitions against the remarriage of widows. Affecting attitudinal change among adults requires significant efforts. It seems less practical to think that sanctions against re-marriage will change soon without sustained social interventions at the grassroot level. Any intervention in this realm should also focus on empowering the young widowed women to seek marriage partners and to challenge the negative sanctions imposed on them. This is where not only the state officials, but also NGOs and grassroot CBOs can play a catalytic role. The Rural Development Society (RDS) and Women's Rural Development Society (WRDS), as well as other women's associations at the grassroots, are best positioned to undertake micro-interventions to empower women socially and economically.[7] Giving them a sense of power is also vital to overcome the present cultural inhibitions against remarriage. These women can create a solidarity network of widows in the same position facing the same issues; there is strength in numbers. Collectively, they can be an important voice in changing attitudes: first among themselves, and then among others. There are also pragmatic inhibitions, which can be tackled through development assistance at the grassroot level. For example, the RDS and WRDS are responsible for grassroot development and are registered as community-based organizations under the divisional secretaries (DS). At times, the two organizations receive government funding and training for undertaking village level initiatives, and studies have supported their effectiveness in development projects (Asian Development Bank, 2009). Thus, RDS and WRDS the potential to mobilize women and men, connecting them with officials at the DS and other government institutions. Proper functioning of these community-based organizations (CBOs) will contribute to improving livelihoods and the economic independence of widows.

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[7] RDS and WRDS are grassroots voluntary organizations created by the government to undertake small-scale development work in the villages. They are registered at the Divisional Secretary level and are legally eligible to take government contracts. If guided properly, they can become vehicles for participatory grassroots development.

Addressing the issue of abandonment requires a broad approach. It is important to create a discourse on this issue at the grassroot level and this can best be done through the involvement of NGOs and CBOs, including development-oriented organizations. It is difficult to attract people to CBOs, which only aim to create awareness. A developmental approach would thus be a more effective strategy to mobilize people and encourage discussion regarding the abandonment and sexual exploitation as well as its social and legal consequences.

Within the districts, employment opportunities in the private sector can go a long way to help combat marital instability as well. In an FGD with women from the Ampara district, participants clearly stated that if they had independent income, they would be better protected against domestic abuse. Our informants here expressed that women are hesitant to travel long distances for employment, and they feel that having work opportunities available closer to home would increase women's mobility and safety, thereby decreasing their vulnerability.

## Household Violence

Academia has paid much attention to incidences of violence, especially those which concern women in the northeast. Coomaraswamy (1997), specifically, drew attention to transformed role of women combatants and argued that women carders as combatants contradicted the traditional image of the woman in the Tamil culture. There are other studies, as well, which examine conflict related violence and hardships that women have experienced in the North and East (Pannilage et al, 2016; Ruwanpura, 2004) The International Crisis Group (2011) documented women's insecurity in the North and East of Sri Lanka as having many interconnected aspects, including physical, emotional, social and economic insecurities. Further, Catani et al. (2008) spoke about domestic violence in Sri Lanka and Afghanistan in a comparative study. Through both our interviews and FGDs, I also encountered domestic violence affecting primarily women, as well as children to some extent. "'I don't eat your food. You eat my food. If you can't live as I tell you to do, leave the house.' This is how husbands treat us," one woman in an FGD in Ampara explained. I treat this high level of household violence as a manifestation of the community breakup in the North

and East engendered by the condition of 'anomie' and years of experience of armed conflict in a militarized society. FGD participants—especially women—mentioned that in most households, men commit violence against women, but women do not report this to anybody. "When wife is unemployed, she stays at home, get beaten and do as the husband say," one woman remarked. They expressed that unemployed women find themselves at the mercy of her husband for her living, and such women suffer violence more than employed women. They further criticized the police for victim blaming if a woman complains against her husband. The respondents mentioned that they do not usually reveal household violence to anyone because if and when their husbands hear that they have made complaints, women often suffer more due to revenge violence. In this particular case, I asked whether they can make complaints to the GBV desk in the local Divisional Secretary office. The respondents highlighted the fact that officers in this particular Divisional Secretariat in Ampara do not speak Sinhala, and so they need to accompany a translator to communicate with officials in Tamil. These pragmatic barriers, possibility for revenge violence, and culturally informed resistance together ensure victims remain silent. In Ampara, women claimed that in 90% of families, men hit their wives after drinking. Although I do not have data to verify the frequency of incidence, our informants clearly believe domestic violence is quite high in their community. Abuse is believed to be the rule rather the exception, and if only exceptional problems are worthy of complaints then violence will continue to face no repercussions.

Affected women are not the only ones aware of the issue, and some of them do speak out. A GN that I interviewed in the North also confirmed a high incidence of domestic violence in his district, "Within the last year, 35 cases [of domestic violence] were reported to me. This is among 420 families. Double that amount goes unreported." When asked what the 35 cases of domestic violence included, he detailed "Physical beating of wife and children. Women come and complain to me." This GN, from Vavuniya, is aware that many cases of household violence go unreported. I learned of more unreported cases in another district as well.

What makes household violence particularly more serious is the absence of support services for the victims. As described in the FGDs, although the GBV desks are available in the police stations and hospitals, women are often unaware of their

presence. If they are aware, women may be hesitant to use the services due to cultural and social reservations, including attitudes towards government officials.

A woman from Ampara told us that she and her husband both engage in labor jobs and work the same number of hours. Yet, she must ensure that food is ready when her husband returns home after an alcohol stint, so that she can keep him quiet. Any attempt to change her husband's behavior would result in a volley of violence against her. She further mentioned that there is nothing she can do to stop it. Even the last resort option of a divorce is not available for these women, as they feel that they will be destitute and have nowhere to turn for help in the absence of a shelter and economic support. Hence, they live a life of suffering with no end to abuse in the foreseeable future. GNs should be trained to combat domestic violence, and even to take the culprits to police stations. In extreme situations, where violence cannot be stopped even after police warnings and advice, safe houses are needed for victims.

I find that former female combatants are particularly vulnerable to domestic violence and marginalization. According to our interview data, ex-combatants are no longer seen as heroes in the North and the East, but rather as security risks and social outcasts. After being asked why ex-combatants are not accepted, one Director of Planning responded,

> *It is a sensitive question...you know they have unnecessary troubles. They are being watched and followed still. It is uncomfortable...Families also do not accept them. Society also does not accept them. People do not like to get close to ex combatants.*

According to him, because military intelligence continues to monitor the ex-combatants, others are compelled to stay away from them. For example, some informants described military intelligence conducting household visits as a way of monitoring. Out of fear of drawing unnecessary attention on themselves, other villagers keep away. Informants further suggested that for the female combatants, the issue takes a profoundly cultural dimension as social stigma affects them more so than their male counterparts. The issue of women combatants has drawn the attention of researchers. Some hold that the enlisting of women into LTTE's fighting gave women leadership positions and broke traditional barriers against women's

mobility; yet this position has been challenged (Jordan and Denov, 2007; Wang, 2011). Radhika Coomaraswamy (1997), the former UN Special Rapporteur on Women, rejects the thesis that the LTTE liberated women by recruiting them: "...I do not believe that inducting women into a force is a step towards empowerment and equality...[it] signals the militarization of civil society—a militarization which in itself is inimical to anyone who believes in human rights." Within cultural context, the female combatants are considered non-cultural beings, devoid of the norms and values. Thus, the female ex-combatant is not the traditional woman who is feminine, innocent and tolerant, and acts as the guardian of culture; instead, an alternative image of a masculine and violent woman is constructed. Female ex-combatants may find themselves less desired in the marriage market, adding yet another hurdle on top of dowry.

The image of the 'violent ex-combatant' affects women in the family sphere too. I found situations in which married ex-combatants were discriminated against due to their previous history in the LTTE. When these women try to resist domestic violence, their resistance is interpreted as remnants of the violence that comes from having been a member of the LTTE. Household members are likely to believe that previous violent habits prompted the woman to challenge her husband.

## What Can be Done to Address Household Violence against Women?

According to the information the research team has gathered throughout this study, it seems clear that interventions to provide safety and security for widows can help the most vulnerable among them. The interviews and FGDs revealed that currently, there are 'gender-based violence' desks at the police stations and hospitals, but in many places women are not accessing these centres due to lack of awareness and mistrust. Informants also believed that there is lacklustre performance by the law enforcement to investigate and do justice to cases of GBV. While the local culture does not encourage women to make formal complaints against their husbands, even when such complaints do reach the police, informants claimed officials often ask women to settle the matter within the household.

The cultural notion that women should tolerate violence is not limited to the North and East. All over the country, often it is assumed that the grudges between wives

and husbands last 'only until the rice is cooked' (Kodikara, 2012).'. Yet, I found household violence is much more pervasive, going far beyond 'only until the rice is cooked'. Based on our data, I feel that the relevant professional personnel, within the police force as well as hospital employees, require further training on handling GBV. This would allow for better provision of appropriate social and legal support for affected persons, and for cases to be handled more efficiently and confidentially.

I also found that many women are simply not aware of the GBV desks. This is where the Grama Niladaris, Samurdhi animators and development officers (DOs), as government officials at the grassroot level, can render crucial support. These officials have the potential to educate women, direct them to the GBV desks, and proactively bring cases into legal scrutiny. Nevertheless, our data suggest relevant state officials need motivation, as well as the appropriate incentives, to perform these services. The financial allocation for WDOs, CRPOs and social service officers for travelling is reportedly meagre. Moreover, officers also do not seem to be properly predisposed to fieldwork. Hence, both higher allowances and retraining may be required to better equip and encourage them to undertake more field-based service.

Creating awareness on violence against women and the various means to combat it is necessary, but this alone is insufficient to address this social problem. In particular, men addicted to alcohol need proper rehabilitation, while others need to be engaged through CBOs and reminded violence is unacceptable and legally punishable. Farmer societies, RDSs, and other associations with male members should be utilized to bring men in the community to the conversation, rather than creating new CBOs for that purpose. According to the interviews with medical officers and civil society, there is a shortage of rehabilitation facilities for alcohol addicts. However, it is important to support victims of household violence. Based on our fieldwork, as of now, there is little awareness of where they can state their grievances and where they can find a safe-house to escape violence if necessary. There needs to be much more coordination between government institutions to support victims. This includes officials at the divisional secretary office, the hospital, the police, and even the probation department when children are involved. Again, as mentioned by our informants in KIIs, there is a climate in which even the small number of complaints received is not properly investigated, reportedly because officials believe that it is

better for women to prioritize the *stability* of their family rather than punishing their husbands. Informants also note that officials believe that punishing fathers will destabilize families further, thus affecting the children. There is an element of truth in this; if women and children are dependent on men for their economic survival, they will be adversely affected if men are prosecuted for any wrongdoing. However, rather than taking economic dependence as a given and shying away from punitive measures, economic dependence itself should be dismantled.

The strengthening of women's organizations at the grassroot level is important not only to improve livelihoods, but also to combat domestic violence as they help foster economic independence. Scholars have established the utility of social capital for economic and social development, as well as the role of organizations in fostering social capital (Herath 2008; Herath, 2018; Putnam, 1993; Uphoff and Wijaratna, 2000). I found that women's organizations are very useful for providing a platform for GBV education, while also providing them with training and assistance for self-employment. Informants I met through interviews mentioned that members of organizations were much more vocal than non-members about violence and showed more awareness of possible solutions. Women's organizations often encourage women to engage in self-employment by mediating and coordinating externally funded training and assistance. Women who are members of organizations also get the opportunity to build a social network in working with state officials and members of other NGOs. Women's associations are a platform by which victims of violence can be empowered to resist violence and to make formal complaints.

## Alcohol Addiction

> *"Every family... If the father is not drinking, then there is a son who is drinking."—A Woman from Mullaitivu*

In their study, Herath and Silva (2012) found a high level of alcohol consumption in research sites in Mannar and Vavuniya throughout 2010-2011. They found the death of family members, injuries, and the loss of both property and livelihoods contributed to emotional disturbances, which then correlated with high alcohol consumption as a coping strategy. In this present study, I further examine the role

of alcohol use. I argue that although conflict-induced reasons cannot entirely be blamed for the increased alcohol dependence, excessive alcohol consumption is both a symptom of and a contributing factor for community breakup in the North and East. An FGD with youth in Jaffna generated the following insights on the current status of alcohol abuse.

> *Interviewer: Can you tell us about the situation with regard to alcohol use?*
>
> *Informant (a young woman from Jaffna): It is very high. It causes domestic violence. It is also related with divorce and affects children's education. One reason for alcohol usage is the availability of locally brewed alcohol. Further, people do not have jobs. They do not know how to spend their time. They drink even during the day and also Sundays. Even Advanced Level (AL) students drink.*

The informant above, as well as others in interviews and FGDs, mentioned that alcohol usage has reached very high levels in most parts of the North and East. It is notable that children as young as 15 years have begun to experiment with alcohol in some places. Additionally, there appears to be some prevalence of addiction among adult men. The district of Jaffna has a very high number of approved taverns and bars, but in many places fresh toddy and illicit moonshine have become even more common than legally brewed arrack. Informants mentioned that the recent tax increases on legal alcohol have placed legal booze beyond the reach of poor people, forcing many to consume toddy and moonshine to get their fix. While I am unable to comment on the health impact with any degree of certainty, it is likely that illicit moonshine has a more negative impact as compared to licit alcohol due to the rudimentary process used and issues of hygiene. I also find that illicit alcohol has important social consequences. One young girl wrote in a letter to her principal, "Please save me. My mother forces me to sell moonshine." The representative of a local NGO in Mullativu reported this incident to us. I do not know the reasons why this mother resorted to selling illicit liquor and forced her own daughter to take part; it is possible that extreme poverty may have prompted her behavior. Nevertheless, the use of a child for selling illicit alcohol is indicative of the community breakup that I establish in this chapter.

"Why do people drink heavily? Due to family disputes and also due to the nature of employment. I work six months on paddy and the rest of the six months I do masonry, labor jobs, carpentry and so on. So there is time to drink in the off season," one farmer from Mullaitivu explained. While he also stated that experiences of violence have been an important factor in the increased alcohol consumption in the North and East, he underlines the nature of seasonal employment and of their social engagement. The latter provides space for alcohol consumption, indicating how drinking has become habitual.

The scholarship on the relationship between violent experience and alcohol consumption is not new (Herath and Silva, 2012; Jayatilaka, Amirthalingam, and Gunasekara, 2015). Our informants also pointed out that family disputes as well as certain occupations further lure men to drinking alcohol. A priest that I interviewed in Mannar was under the impression that Christian fishing communities have a higher tendency to consume alcohol, as their work is very strenuous. The priest also believed that the seasonality of fishing promotes drinking habits. I additionally found evidence in Mannar of fishing boat owners asking their fishermen to come to the local bar to receive their daily wages. I do not know if the boat owners have a profitable connection with the bar owners but having to go to the bar to receive wages evidently increases the probability that fishermen will buy more alcohol. In yet another instance, a Catholic priest in Mannar described:

> *Six months they have fishing and earn. The other six months they cannot earn as much. That is why new technology is important to keep them employed all year round. They need new fishing gear....fishermen work for big bosses. The bosses do not give the wage on the seaside but ask fishermen to come to the local bar in late afternoon...sometimes the landlords gives laborers 1000.00 rupees and two beer cans as payment.*

While the priest draws our attention to important facets of fishing as a livelihood in his story of laborers paid partially in beer rather than the full amount in rupees, community cultures may also play a role in encouraging the consumption of alcohol. For example, our FGD in Mannar Island did not find alcohol usage among the Muslim fishermen, who more or less have the same working conditions and seasonality as the

Christian fishermen. Alcohol is considered 'haram' within this Muslim community and there is considerable social pressure against its use. A Muslim informant from in Mannar said, 'there is no one that consumes alcohol in our village. If someone takes it, then other people will ostracize him. He will lose all the community support.' It is, however, important to note that an FGD in Erukkalampitty found the use of drugs to be on the rise among the Muslim youth in that community. When I requested the participants to rate the level of drug abuse out of 100, they said about 25 people out of 100 (25%) take drugs in secret. They mentioned a powdered drug and another that is chewed in the mouth—possibly heroin and Kerala ganja respectively.

Clearly, there is a social change in which more men are consuming alcohol as a pastime. The relative inadequacy of recreational facilities for young men is an important issue in the North and East. It was reported in some FGDs that children who finish ordinary level examination also use alcohol recreationally. Hence, there needs to be a concerted effort to provide appropriate recreation for young people, especially focusing on sports, which can provide space to express their energy.

There is a debate on the effectiveness of education programs for alcohol prevention. Siriwardhane (2013) argue that asking adults who already take alcohol not to consume it is pointless and that educators should explore the utility of 'social drinking,' whereby people who consume alcohol are educated to drink small quantities in order to socialize, instead of consuming large amounts. A team of sociologists and medical scholars (which included Siriwardhane) from the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka experimented with 'social drinking' through a community-based approach to combat excessive alcohol use in Kandy. They claimed that this method contributes to significantly reducing alcohol abuse among adult men. Their approach involved a range of methods, from one-on-one and group meetings, to more innovative means, including posters and—a drama put on by people from the community (Ibid). I would highly recommend further exploration of the possibilities of using this approach, as it may be applicable and effective in the North and East, where, according to our informants, alcohol intake is very high among adult men.

Even in the case of alcohol consumption, I would recommend a strong role for CBOs. Adult men can be effectively accessed via the organizations where they are members,

or at least where their friends and neighbors are members. Fishing cooperatives, farmer societies, RDSs, WRDSs, Samurdhi society, etc. can be effective platforms for creating a counter discourse regarding alcoholism and what can be done about it. These platforms can also be used to invite people for alcohol rehabilitation, if such programs (such as the Centre for the Rehabilitation of Alcoholics and Drug Addicts [CRADA]) exist. Alcohol rehabilitation may also be possible in government hospitals by allocating additional resources to their mental health units.

While the provision of infrastructure and avenues for recreation is important, one has to be aware that multiple factors can drive people towards alcohol consumption, and, hence, prevention or minimization requires a concerted and sensitive effort. A priest from Mannar mentioned that alcohol consumption among the youth reflects social change, "We have enough infrastructure and instruments for sports. Every village has sports clubs. But modern trend is not that. People play with phones and computers." As the priest opines, and our FGDs with youth confirmed, drinking is what it takes to be fashionable and 'cool'—a modern euphemism for being popular within a peer group. With social change, including increased access to smart phones and the internet, youth culture also changes. Although this in no way undermines the utility of sports and other recreation at the grassroot level, one needs to look at the problem of alcohol from a holistic perspective. In our study, I found that most villages do not have proper venues for sports and instruments, and I could observe in some places that wherever avenues and instruments were available, youth did gather at such places in the late afternoons for sports. Thus, the key message deduced is that in some places the issue of alcohol is not merely a reflection of the absence of recreation, yet, having recreation provides an opportunity for young people to engage in some meaningful activity, which can be important to stem alcohol addiction.

CRADA, as a local NGO, has adopted both grassroots and formal methods to create awareness of the harm that alcohol addiction can cause. At the formal level, they conduct workshops in schools, and at the grassroots level they conduct awareness through films, songs and speeches. They have also organized a march against alcohol in Mannar town, with the participation of school children. This is the only institution that undertakes the systematic rehabilitation of alcohol addicts in the district; the next closest rehabilitation center is in Polonnaruwa district, in the North-central

province. However, the government of Sri Lanka and international donors do not currently provide CRADA with financial support to rehabilitate alcohol addicts. It is important to recognize that institutions such as CRADA, which operate at the grassroot level, are probably the most cost-efficient means of rehabilitation, relying minimally on the government. Currently, they charge 15000.00 rupees per patient for the one-month rehabilitation, which includes residence, food, and individual and group counseling. The office of the Medical Officer of Health (MOMH) of the Mannar hospital provides doctors and drugs for the medical treatment of detoxification. However, CRADA used to provide free services when various international NGOs funded its operation.

Economic opportunities that keep young people—especially young men—occupied may also contribute to lessening the influence of alcohol. There is a high level of unemployment among school drop-outs. There is a sense of frustration among youth as they are unable to find salaried employment. In some FGDs conducted in the villages, it was reported that a number of young people have resorted to alcohol as they are not able to do something productive. A previous study in the North and East has recommended building up a knowledge economy in the North and a tourism and industry-based economy in the East in order to lift up the economies of the two provinces (Sarvananthan, 2007). The Director of Planning in one district mentioned, "In rural areas, young people may engage in some agriculture, but in urban areas there is nothing. They are dependent on parents. Adults also feel frustrated due to many reasons." One reason for adult frustration that this informant later gave was land-related issues such as inability to reclaim their previous lands. According to him, alcohol consumption is an outlet for venting out this frustration. A previous study on land use and corruption has also highlighted how land issues have contributed to grievances in the war-affected communities in the North and East (Lindberg and Herath, 2015).

Although this study has placed significant emphasis on the issue of alcohol addiction, several key informants reported the prevalence of dangerous drugs, such as cannabis, 'mawa,' and heroin, which have made inroads among youth in some of the districts, including Jaffna and Mannar. These districts have become not only markets for these drugs, but also transit points in the distributional channels extending to

Southern Sri Lanka. One medical officer mentioned that drug abuse is on the rise and the hospital receives several drug-related admissions a week. The medical officer further pointed out that young people, at times even the girls, show a tendency to initially experiment with alcoholic beverages, such as beer, before slowing moving into more frequent use and eventually addiction. A priest overseeing a CRADA in Mannar made the same point: "Our patients say they started alcohol after the end of schooling or during the school to have fun. Those who take alcohol are considered 'men' and those who do not are 'girlish.' They just experiment, and at times this ends up in addiction." The priest here brings in his experiences in rehabilitating the alcohol addicts over the years. School children, usually, towards the end of their school period, begin to experiment with alcohol. While not all of this ends up in addiction, there is a likelihood some may go on to become addicts.

## Conclusion

This study finds evidence to a community breakup in the North and East of Sri Lanka. I have looked at this from a structural perspective, mainly benefiting from the contributions of Emile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons. Their theories lend useful lens to understand the dramatic social transformation in North and East of Sri Lanka. In fact the North and the East experienced two waves of transformation; one from a very peaceful and traditional society to a regimented and militarised society during the civil war with a strong control over population and limitation of freedom. This caused serious changes in society and culture. The second wave of transformation occurred when the society returned to democracy and civil control after 2009. Both waves of overwhelming transformations engendered anomie in which the previous norms fail to govern significant aspects of behaviour and leads to social disorder. According to Durkheim, it will continue like this until the society arrives at a new equilibrium. This social pathology can be viewed from the functionalist perspective of Talcott Parsons as well. The resulting 'anomie' has had debilitating impacts on the social structure. Family and the associated set of institutionalized relationships, as the bedrocks of society, have been severely distorted. Therefore, the social transformations have created a community breakup, which, inevitably, has caused other social dysfunctions such as domestic violence and alcoholism. The social

environment thus has become laden with complex social dysfunctioning, signifying a situation in which key social institutions are weak in performing their established roles.

It is important to note that although all the aspects of the community breakup are important for both North and the East, marital instability and related family issues were more pronounced in the North. This is expected, given the North suffered most in the final phase of violence, and the 'anomie' is strongest in the North. Further, although this study highlights the overwhelming significance of the societal transformation and the anomie condition, it does not ignore other formative factors. Society is a dynamic complex, which evolves in response to circumstances. Macro-level social and economic influences as well as the impact of various diasporic social networks and global transformations must also be studied to generate a holistic picture of marital instability, domestic violence, and alcoholism in the North and East. This remains a task for future studies.

The community breakup in the North and East requires multi-faceted social interventions. Addressing a number of issues, including extra-marital relations, sexual exploitation, the abandonment of spouses, and violence within the family, requires effective social and economic interventions by relevant government institutions and non-governmental organizations. This includes the divisional secretariat, hospitals, and the police. To mitigate these problems, a concrete set of actions will be necessary in the medium to longer term. Awareness of not only the problems, but also the possible solutions—including access to services that can contribute to empowering families (for women in particular)—is critical. Relevant officials need retraining, as well as a reasonable incentive structure to handle complaints professionally and effectively. A particularly important need is that of strengthening women's organizations, including WRDS, in order to build not only a social network but also to build bridges between service providers and service seekers. Grassroot level community organizations need to play a bigger role in mobilising and empowering the affected people to challenge the unfavourable social inhibitions and structural barriers.

Formal as well as informal education is vital for combatting pernicious attitudes, which contribute to community breakup. The key issue of alcoholism also requires both conventional and innovative approaches to rehabilitate addicts and prevent further addiction. Yet, one has to look beyond treatment to find out why more and more people are becoming addicted to alcohol and other substances in the first place.

I place significant emphasis on support for livelihoods development, in urban areas as well as at the grassroot level, in order to combat many facets of community breakup. Post-war Sri Lanka witnessed a larger share of state investment in mega-development directed toward three provinces of the North, East and South. However, the contributions of these provinces to the GPD did not increase significantly (Sarvananthan, 2016). This opens up space to discuss a model of alternative small-scale development, not only as a development pathway for rebuilding people, but also as a post-conflict reconstruction strategy. This paper highlights the need for livelihoods support for women and youth. There are categories of women, such as widows and young mothers, whose mobility is curtailed due to child rearing and a general lack of familial support. They find it very difficult to be employed away from home, and hence self-employment is their only option. This requires various kinds of support, including: mobilization out of seclusion and giving them motivation, helping them to identify suitable self-employment opportunities, training and grants or loans to support self-employment, as well as help with marketing until they are in control of their lives. Establishing day care centres can play a significant role in easing household burden for women and giving them time to be economically engaged. We found many women who liked to work but could not work as they had small children to look after. What widows—and even young women or young boys—can do varies from place to place. I saw in many places in the North and East that there are women who succeed in various forms of self-employment, such as dairy farming, poultry farming, the production of rice-related products, operating small boutiques along main roads, preparing food items, making palmyra products, and home gardening. When women make economic contributions to their families, they lift their social statuses, and this helps to prevent or minimize domestic violence.

I also observed that in in the so-called 'border villages' of Vavuniya, that while there is enough land for cultivation and plenty of enthusiasm to make use of it, there are a

number of structural hindrances, such as getting permission or a lack of capital. I also found very successful farmer entrepreneurs who have cultivated as many as 20 acres, albeit without land permits or external assistance. These kinds of entrepreneurs, who have gained capital by their own means, need support. For example, additional economic support would not only help land owners but would also provide farming or transportation employment to other people in the village. Viable self-employment would require efficient services from government institutions such as the DSD, in addition to government institutions related to agriculture, export agriculture, tourism, fisheries, technical colleges, women's affairs, and Samurdhi and social services—both at the provincial and central levels. NGOs and CBOs can play a vital role in the identification and training of beneficiaries, as well as the disbursement of funds.

Distortions in the social structure demand social interventions by the government, as well as by community organizations and NGOs. Addressing social consequences is sine qua non for the development of the North and East. We conclude that livelihoods support and development assistance which disregards the social consequences I have noted are highly likely to fail, as people who are not emotionally and psychologically healthy may find it extremely difficult to effectively manage any assistance which may be available to them.

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# Breakup of Community Social Structures in the War-Affected Northern and Eastern Provinces in Sri Lanka

By
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This paper documents profound social transformations witnessed in North-east Sri Lanka as it emerges from massive social and political disturbances during nearly three decades of war. The paper argues that there is a breakup of community social structures as evident from changes in family relations in critical domains such as extra-marital relations, sexual exploitation, abandonment of spouses, household violence and alcoholism. This study calls for concerted actions to stem further deterioration and initiate a process of community restoration and trust building as an essential component of post-war rebuilding in SriLanka .

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