

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Rate of Crime and Involvement of Army Soldiers in Post-Conflict Society in Sri Lanka; Gender Representation in Crime and Lack of the Psycho-social Awareness in the Army**

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#### **Abstract**

The rate of crime and the involvement of army soldiers, in post-conflict society in Sri Lanka, are substantially significant as the lack of psycho-social awareness in the army profession has caused an increase in the a number of individual criminal incidents in postwar society. In addition, the representation of gender in the rate of crime in the army is of equal relevance to this study. This study focused on the level of the awareness of psycho-social knowledge and how it affects the rate of crime as well as the gender representation of crime in Sri Lanka's post-conflict society. Using a mixed methodology, this study was conducted in the Northern and Eastern Provinces covering 10 army camps. The quantitative analysis revealed the level of psycho-social knowledge and army involvement in post war national crimes. Apart from a survey administered to 50 army service men and women from the army camps, 10 cases of nationally reported crimes were also analysed to identify the relationship and involvement of the army in those crimes. In addition, 10 in-depth interviews with a focus group were conducted to investigate the real nature of the mind of army

soldiers after the long drawn out 30 years of war. The data gathered from the afore mentioned quantitative and qualitative methods were analysed and compared in terms of the objectives of the study. Based on the gathered data and their analysis, this study draws the following conclusions. Army involvement in national crimes is minimal, however, based on the 10 criminal cases studied to analyse factors behind the relationship between army involvements towards crime in post-conflict society, it was revealed that the lack of the knowledge of psychology and lack of appreciation for art and culture have caused some army service men and women to commit crimes. After the war if army soldiers, who had previously been engaged in combat, knew how to manage their depression using psycho-social awareness they could have avoided being involved in criminal activities. Both male and female soldiers communicated their hidden feelings and sexual desires, and there have been occurrences of criminal incidents. However, there were significantly more male involvement in these crimes. Finally, this study highlights the necessity for a comprehensive course on empowerment in psycho-social awareness at the very beginning of the initial training provided in the army as well as in the post –conflict society context. Thus the establishment of a specialised division for mental health services is highly recommended for the military sectors.

**Key words:** *art and cultural appreciation, mental health services, psycho-social awareness, post-conflict society, psychology, rate of crime*

## 4.1 Introduction

*“The 30 year armed conflict in Sri Lanka has produced a new generation of veterans at risk for chronic mental health problems that resulted following prolonged exposure to the war. Over 100,000 members of the Sri Lanka Army had been directly or indirectly exposed to combat situations during these years. There had been nearly 20 major military operations conducted by the Armed Forces from 1987 to 2009. A large number of combatants from the Sri Lanka Army were exposed to hostile battle conditions and many soldiers underwent traumatic battle events outside the range of usual human experience. These experiences include seeing fellow soldiers being killed or wounded and the sight of unburied decomposing bodies, of hearing screams for help from the wounded, and of helplessly watching the wounded die without the possibility of being rescued. Following the combat trauma in Sri Lanka, a significant number of combatants were diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)” (Fernando & Jayatunge, 2014).*

Conflict resolution in postwar society has been making a significant contribution towards solving emerging issues in the relevant societies working in present socio-cultural background. Postwar reconstruction and development consists of many tools and strategies that manage a broad perspective of psycho-social intervention, in addition to the physical and infrastructural applications. One of the burning social and cultural issues, especially after the North-Eastern war in Sri Lanka, is the increasing rate of crime, which has been associated with certain members of the army. This social behaviour is explicable in a

postwar context when the army units and the military profession as a whole lack sufficient empowerment on psycho-social awareness. Psychological counselling and forms of appreciation of culture and art are key methods that can be used to prevent a criminal mentality among army service men and women in a post-conflict society.

*The combat operations in the North and East had involved military personnel in major ground combat and hazardous security duty. A significant number of combatants had post-traumatic reactions soon after the traumatic combat events. Majority of these reactions were undetected and untreated. A large number of combatants of the Sri Lanka Army have been directly or indirectly affected by the armed conflict. These psychological and emotional traumas were resulted from witness[ing] killings, handling human remains,[being] exposing to life and death situations, engaging and witnessing atrocities and numerous other battle stresses. This is a form of invisible trauma in the military. But it has direct implications on the mental health of the soldiers.(Fernando &Jayatunge, 2014).*

Even after major wars, such as the First World War and the Second World War, many officers of the armed forces as well as general soldiers were provided with psycho-social training, but a number of military servicemen were admitted to lunatic asylums for depression and other mental disorders experienced after the war. The main factor leading to this type of behaviour is the lack of proper literacy and education among army soldiers to cope with the ill-effects of military action, with soldiers' professional knowledge in security and defence in turn being instrumental in committing some major national cases of crime. Furthermore, in this context, the study also focuses on the gender representation in criminal activity by the army service men and women.

## 4.2 Literature review

Kelegama (2011) in his paper titled 'Socio-economic Challenges in Post-Conflict Reconstruction in Sri Lanka' has made a substantial contribution to this literature. Dharmawardana (2013) has shown some salient information on post-conflict Sri Lanka in her seminal paper titled 'Sri Lanka's Post-Conflict Strategy: Restorative Justice for Rebels and Rebuilding of Conflict-affected Communities'. Bandarage (2012) has further studied some of the impacts of war referencing the Sri Lankan experience in his seminal paper titled 'Sri Lanka Towards Peace: An Alternative Perspective'. Sowell (2004) in his 'Affirmative Action Around the World: An Empirical Study' has highlighted some relevant factors as well as impacts of post-conflict societies, which is fundamental to this study as well. In 2008, Stewart Bell, in his contribution 'Inside Sri Lanka: Your Cash Going to Arms, Say Ex-rebels', made some relevant points regarding social change and war.

As Fernando and Jayatunge (2014) point out, there is a substantial relationship between war and post-traumatic stress. *The psychological trauma experienced by the military was colossal. The Eelam War in Sri Lanka had generated a considerable number of soldiers with combat related PTSD. Many victims are still undiagnosed and do not receive adequate psychological therapies.*

Jayatunge (2014) has scientifically investigated postwar traumatic stress and its relation to the army servicemen of Sri Lanka. War has serious consequences for both short-term survival and longer-term recovery and development (Sørensen, 1998). War trauma has resulted in a horrendous experience for

Sri Lankans. The Sri Lankan society is still struggling with the negative aftermath of the 30-year armed conflict. If not addressed effectively the psychological scars following combat can remain for many years. It can change the psychological make-up of people, making them more dysfunctional.

Londoño, Romero, and Casas (2012) indicate that exposure to violence in general, and to armed conflict in particular, has been consistently associated with the increased prevalence of mental illness. Although mental disorders are a major public health problem, the development of mental health services has been a low priority globally, particularly in low and middle-income countries.

Sorensen (1998) has conducted a noteworthy study on 'Women and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Issues and Sources', which is attached to the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development Programme for Strategic and International Security Studies. Problems faced by women in a post-conflict society and available sources that can be utilised to solve these problems are substantially addressed in this seminal study.

Research has been conducted on the use of psychological action theories for analysing the interplay of knowledge, behavioural constraints/opportunities as well as personal values and motives in influencing the decision to behave in a pro-environmental way (Bamberg & Schmidt, 2003) Counselling and related psychosocial approaches for dealing with personal problems may then be the only available alternative (van der Put & van der Veer, 2000). In situations where no adequately trained counsellors are available, relevant knowledge and practical know-how of psychosocial work and counselling in that particular context are

essential. This knowledge cannot simply be imported; it must be developed locally. Training local people in skills for helping that are alien to their daily life may bring results that are, at the least, disappointing (Baron, 2006).

## **4.3 Research problem/ research questions and hypothesis**

### **Problem Statement**

As a result of the 30-year long war, many post-war social issues have emerged from the social retardedness resulting from war. One of the fundamental problems emerging from this situation is that some criminal activities are being carried out using the techniques and equipment of army soldiers. Army soldiers have been trained and are experienced in the use of weapons and war equipment during the war. After the end of the war some of these trained service men and women have used their skills to carry out illegal and criminal acts. This behaviour is a result of the lack of sufficient literacy on mental health and counselling and social internalization after the war. Whether gender is represented in these criminal activities and if so in what ways and through what means is also significant. Further, the increasing level of poverty is also a significant factor in these criminal events, with political and cultural forces facilitating such illegal activities.

### **Research Problem**

1. After the end of Sri Lanka's internal conflict, are army soldiers involved in the nationally reported crimes? If so, what are the factors that have caused them to be involving in criminal activity?

2. Has the lack of psycho-social knowledge affected army soldiers' involvement in nationally reported criminal activities in the post-conflict society? If so, what are the existing levels of knowledge of psycho-social awareness in the army?

### **Research Questions.**

1. What is the relationship between national crimes and army involvement?
2. What are the persistent factors governing the use of army professional experiences in socially harmful crimes?
3. What is the change in the mental and social behaviour of army forces after the war?
4. What is the nature of the existing knowledge of psychology and cultural appreciation in the army sectors?
5. What are the existing capacities and backgrounds in implementing psycho-social learning for army forces?
6. What is the relationship between gender and the rate of crime associated with the army soldiers?
7. What is the basic criteria for introducing a thorough psychological counselling knowledge and learning initiative for army forces in Sri Lanka's post-conflict society?

### **Hypothesis**

Lack of psycho-social knowledge among army soldiers after the long 30-year war has affected the involvement of army soldiers in nationally reported criminal incidents during the period immediately after the end of the war.



## **4.4 Significance of the study**

This research was focused on studying the ill-impacts of war in terms of the pattern of social change in post-conflict society. The high incidents of violence, crime, aggression, and murder during the conflict (over a long period of time) persists in the existing post-conflict society which is of great concerned for peace and ethnic harmony. Even after the conflict, the society is concerned about the increasing levels of violence; a concern amongst general civilians which is fed by the sensational reportings of mass media. Army soldiers' involvement in criminal and illegal social behaviour is one of the problematic issues in Sri Lanka's post-conflict society. This can be further studied in the context of psycho-social literacy in the army, which is significant in the postwar period to establish a consolidated and balanced peaceful society. Interestingly, the rate of high crime and the involvement of army soldiers in such incidents after the war can be broadly analysed alongside other associated factors, such as the lack of sufficient understanding of mental health and the existing economic factor of poverty in the country. At the same time, how gender was represented in the rate of crime is also addressed by this study.

This study can be used for practical recommendations for building peace and cohesion within society in terms of maintaining mental health amongst the army service men and women. Perhaps also in terms of how psycho-social training, the findings of the study can help in highlighting solutions to the problem and help army personnel accept the changing role of the army to provide a secure environment and build confidence and links with the communities.

## **4.5 Objectives**

The objective of this study was to identify whether there is a relationship between the rate of crime in contemporary society and the security (defence) talents and experiences of army soldiers in Sri Lanka's post-conflict society. Furthermore, this study focused on how gender is represented in the rate of crime, associated with the army soldiers.

### **Specific Objectives**

1. To study the relationship between national crimes and army affiliation.
2. To identify the persistent factors governing the use of army professional experiences in socially harmful crimes.
3. To reveal the change in the mental and social behaviour of army forces after the war.
4. To identify the nature of the existing knowledge of psychology and cultural appreciation in the army sectors.
5. To identify the capacities and backgrounds in implementing psycho-social learning for army forces.
6. To investigate the relationship between gender and the rate of crime associated with army soldiers.
7. To study the basic criteria required to introduce a thorough psychological counselling, knowledge, and learning system for army forces in the post-conflict societies in Sri Lanka.

## **4.6 Methodology**

This study was conducted using a mixed methodology of both quantitative and qualitative methods. Primarily the field of the study was Kilinochchi, Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Ampara, covering 10 army camps, with the study covering 10 army soldiers from each camp. They were given a structured questionnaire. This survey data were analysed critically and comparatively.

In addition to the quantitative analysis, data was also gathered using focused group interviews and separate individual in-depth interviews selecting relevant members from the respective army camps in the study field. This data was analysed comparatively and critically as a whole.

Besides the survey and interview methods, 10 cases were used in the study to analyse the rate of national crime associated with army soldiers in the recent past, after the war ended in Sri Lanka. These cases were conducted as a qualitative critical analysis. Furthermore, in order to identify the levels of learning on psycho-social factors, in addition to gathering data on army training, individual interviews were conducted with the senior army officers of the respective army camps.

## **4.7 Scope and limitations of the study**

In this study, the focus was only on the postwar psychological transition of army soldiers in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, gender representation in criminal acts was also examined. The study focuses only on the levels of knowledge in the psychological

sciences present in practical field work of army activities. Information on the poverty and lack of social literacy among army soldiers was also restricted by the data collection. In addition, the scarcity of other studies directly focusing on the involvement of army servicemen in crime in post-conflict society was also one of the serious limitations to this study. Identifying the existing levels of knowledge in psychological awareness was also limited by the institutional, ethical and disciplinary barriers within the Sri Lanka Army. Safeguarding of the emblem of the Sri Lankan Army was a fact that had to be of more concern in this study, and was a premier limitation.

## **4.8 Key Findings**

This study focused on 10 army camps in the Northern and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka, and the survey was conducted to reveal the level of psycho-social knowledge among the army soldiers, and how gender is represented in the crimes associated with the Sri Lankan Army. The study findings are presented below according to the specific study objectives.

### **4.8.1 To study the relationship between national crimes and army affiliation**

According to the survey carried out on the 10 army camps, the majority (89%) of the army soldiers were not interested in applying military strategies for other public incidents (such as personal clashes, family arrogances, individual conflicts), while another 11% of them were agreeable in using the skills they were already trained in to deal with incidents such as those involving personal security.

#### **4.8.2 To identify the persistent factors governing the use of army professional experiences in socially harmful crimes**

More than 65% of the respondents agreed on the fact that the absence of a postwar psycho-social awareness programme had resulted in incidents where military knowledge and strategic methods have been used for criminal events after the war. The fact that there were a small number of army soldiers who had been involved in criminal activities was also reflective of the necessity for a thorough training and awareness programme to eradicate the criminal and violent incidents in post-conflict society.

The military experience of gun-firing and heroic mentality were two leading factors that directly affected the involvement of army soldiers in the reported national crimes immediately after the war.

After the end of the long 30-year war, the rate of absence among army soldiers was also high. This was identified as being due to two main factors. One factor was that the soldiers no longer felt compelled and no longer had a sense of moral to report for duty as they were not given the substantial salary which they expected after the end of the war. The second factor for this high rate of absenteeism was due to the involvement of soldiers in criminal activities, so that they could dispel their sense of laziness and inactivity after the end of the war.

### **4.8.3 To reveal the change in the mental and social behaviour of army forces after the war**

Many army camps have introduced several social development programmes after the war. However, army soldiers who were involved in crime had not attained sufficient educational qualifications, with some not having passed more than the General Certificate of Education (Ordinary level). The rate of social literacy among army soldiers has been decreasing after the war in the absence of socialisation programmes and art appreciation programmes.

The rapid expansion and use of new media, such as mobile phones and the internet, is another interesting factor that has facilitated the development of different relations and communications, leading to new criminal strategies. Exposure to strategic knowledge on crime was not only through the mobile phone and internet, but also via television channels which report crime in investigative reporting programmes.

In particular, previously hidden information concerning sexuality and personal desires were exposed without restriction, regardless of existing cultural and moral norms. According to the gathered data, this was much easier with the use of mobile phone with internet facilities. This could be a reflection of the expansion of emerging communication technologies over areas with marginal societies and the bipolar play between urban and marginal remote geographies. In addition, some incidents of homosexual affairs and unacceptable forms of sexual intimacies were revealed in the individual in-depth interviews.

#### **4.8.4. To identify the nature of the existing knowledge of psychology and cultural appreciation in the army sectors**

More than 90% of the surveyed and interviewed army soldiers showed great interest in having training programmes on psychology for their mental well-being in addition to their professional knowledge of the army. In addition, 85% of the respondents were very interested in having a variety of programmes on cultural appreciation.

However, the data also revealed that the existing knowledge on psychology was minimal, approximately 19%. Almost all the soldiers enjoyed musical entertainment programmes which were viewed using their mobile phone and media. In addition, they rarely had any cultural programmes with music and theatre. More than 65% of the army officers recommended conducting an educational programme on psychology and practical sessions on mental behaviour, in addition to conducting more practical sessions on cultural appreciation with music and theatre.

#### **4.8.5 To identify the capacities and background in implementing psycho-social learning for army forces**

Seventy-eight percent of the army chief officers interviewed were interested in including psycho-social courses in their existing training programmes. Especially after the war, the establishment of a division for mental health and psycho-social awareness was deemed significant by 87% of the army officers and 80% of general army soldiers.

At present there is minimal capacity to begin such psycho-social programmes with the required expertise and knowledge. However, 90% of army camp respondents in the study agreed on the establishment of a specialised post for mental health within the military, prioritising expertise in post-conflict mental health. Though many soldiers, and particularly officers, are both mentally weak after a long period of war, they hide their mental health issues.

#### **4.8.6 To investigate the relationship between gender and the rate of crime associated with army soldiers**

In the 10 cases of crime (in which there was some involvement of army soldiers) analysed in this study, 80% of the army soldiers were male while the remaining 20% of army soldiers were female.

While male soldiers had contributed more in criminal activities involving murder and robbery, female soldiers had supported to create an environment for the crime. On the other hand, both genders showed a similar percentage (15%) of overall criminal incidents involving sexual crimes and homosexuality.

#### **4.8.7 To study the basic criteria required to introduce a thorough psychological counselling, knowledge, and learning, system for army forces in the post-conflict societies in Sri Lanka**

85% of the army chief officers interviewed agreed on having a specialised course on psychology in the initial army training courses dealing in mental and behavioural health, in order to



prevent postwar mental and behavioural problems. Seventy-eight percent of the army soldiers surveyed acknowledged the need for a specialised mental health officer in addition to a medical doctor. At the same time, 90% of the general army soldiers believed that if they were given ample time for artistic appreciation and cultural freedom it would be a practical means of coping with mental health issues.

## 4.9 Discussion

The Police state that nearly 18% of the crimes in 2014 were committed by the armed forces (Colombage, 2014). Gunathilaka (2014) states that desertion and crime in the armed forces (including the Army, Navy and Airforce) has spiked five years after the end of the civil war due to the absence of counselling. Police statistics suggest that in the first four months of 2014, nearly 18% of the reported crimes were committed by members of the armed forces - a large increase on the 5% reported for the whole of 2013 (Individual interview-01, conducted on 15-05-2014).

As stated by Gunathilaka, soldiers who fight violent or guerrilla groups can be subjected to scenes not normally seen on a battlefield, triggering post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that fosters irrational behaviour. He believes the high number of desertions can also be attributed to the fact that these soldiers no longer feel constrained by the rules of the army.

*“Soldiers have been witness to scenes on battlefields that many of us cannot imagine they have killed people and been praised for doing so...”* *“They now believe that they*

*are above the law, and this is reflected in their decision to desert and pursue criminal activities.”(Individual interview 02, conducted on 23-08-2014).*

The lack of psycho-social knowledge in the Sri Lankan Army is similar to that of other social institutions, as they are also lacking in sufficient knowledge of psycho-social practices. As a country, which is fully devoted to national development in almost all sectors, it is necessary to recognise the importance of in-depth training and awareness on psycho-social knowledge and counselling practice and that this is essential. Especially after a long period of war, both military forces as well as the general public could be affected by a war psychology, so that dangerous acts of violence and aggression could emanate from such a war mentality.

In order to manage postwar related disorders from the social perspective, one of the identified key areas is empowerment by creating awareness of psycho-social knowledge and establishing sufficient places offering easy access to mental health services. This should be an expertise required, support and confidentiality of services provided, overcoming any stigma regarding mental health issues. Awareness programmes on mental health, cultural stage performances and art appreciation are some of the productive programmes that can be made part of the training or programmes for army personnel.

Though it is a minimal number of army soldiers who have been involved in national criminal incidents, these individual cases signify the urgent requirement for a course and awareness campaign on psycho-social awareness in Sri Lanka's post-conflict

society. The army camps situated in the research area in the Northern and Eastern Provinces are highly vulnerable after prolonged exposure to military war. They devoted resources to the final stage of the war while also, since the very beginning of war, these soldiers and army officers have experienced several social and cultural limitations and restrictions. Hence, the establishment of a thorough awareness on psycho-social knowledge and practice in this background is highly effective in decreasing the involvement of military personnel in local criminal incidents.

Moreover, a scientific understanding on how criminal behaviour affects the human mind and its strong relationship to postwar society would serve in the more effective management of military forces after the war. It is also important to note that it is not only military personnel who are involved in national criminal acts, but as it is these persons who are highly experienced with military strategies and they are tired of the war experience it is the military forces which are vulnerable to engage in criminal action.

Jayathunga (2014) also highlighted the necessity for psycho-social intervention in managing a postwar society, comparing Sri Lanka's experience with the postwar periods of some of the other world famous wars .

*“Post-war societies are highly vulnerable. Therefore the combat trauma in the post-war era has to be managed effectively. There are numerous examples from other countries that reveal the susceptibility of the social networks and communities in the post-war period. For example soon after the American Civil War, some of the traumatized soldiers formed an extremist movement*

*called the KKK which engaged in racial violence. Many American volunteers who participated in the Spanish Civil War engaged in social violence and some Lincoln Brigade soldiers became top criminals. Post-Vietnam War caused vast social chaos in the USA. Similarly, many Afghanistan veterans of the Red Army engaged in organized crimes in the former USSR.*

*Soon after a mass conflict like war, there is a tendency for political extremism and sometimes religious fundamentalism to emerge. In a post conflict society, social fabric is fragile, people are traumatized and they become easy targets to these extreme and damaging forces. Soon after the WW 1, Germany faced such a situation and NAZIS could exploit the collective trauma experienced by the German people. The Taliban fundamentalists grabbed power at the end of the Afghan- Soviet conflict. Hence, there is an impending risk that Sri Lankans face today and the democratic forces have an absolute responsibility to restore peace and justice system in the Country.”(Individual interview 03, conducted on 10-08-2014)*

The high rate of absence reported among Sri Lankan Army soldiers was a sign of their possible involvement in other activities including criminal activities. According to the data from this study, the reason behind the rate of absence after the war was due to soldiers’ hope for a substantial salary increase going unfulfilled. Furthermore, when they went to their villages during the war, soldiers had interesting and heroic stories to tell their colleagues and friends. However, after war, they were not so as

proud among their friends and relatives as they did not have the same kind of heroic stories emphasising their national contribution to the country that they had during the period of war.

Representation of gender in this scenario is significant in a modern social-science analysis. However, while both males and females in the army are susceptible to mental health issues in the post-conflict society, males represented a wider involvement in crime than the involvement of females from the army.

#### **4.10 Conclusions**

Lack of sufficient knowledge among army units on psycho-social practices and the problem of economic poverty are two fundamental factors that basically contribute to the rate of increasing crime, such as robberies and murder, in Sri Lanka's contemporary society. Despite the fact that the Sri Lankan Army has a high competency in their profession and carried out their duties over the long war period, almost all the sectors of defence and security have only a basic level of scientific knowledge in mental health and psycho-social learning.

After the war, a substantial number of soldiers who were exposed to severe acts of violence and brutality in the battlefield had reached a stage where they had the opportunity and mind-set to use their talents and skills in defence to achieve their own personal objectives. The absence of personality training or personal development avenues in the post-conflict period encouraged such activities.

This study assumes that the inability to cope with the postwar social change meant that army soldiers and some of the army officers were vulnerable to the existing private and public issues of the political economy and the contemporary social and political system. The lack of receipt of the expected salary increase by army soldiers as well as their less important status within their communities after the war resulted in a high rate of absence from duty while also prompting some army personnel to engage in other activities which were sometimes criminal in nature.

Finally, this study concludes that Sri Lanka's Army personnel could be subject to the ill effects of the long war, as they were not provided with sufficient practical knowledge on how to cope with post-conflict issues, which include possible impacts on mental health. Based on this conclusion, the study recommends developing initial training and senior level in-service training programmes within the context of a postwar perspective. Thus, courses in psychological counselling, psycho-social awareness, and the appreciation of culture and the Fine Arts could be integrated in to the existing lessons on mental health for military sectors as an effective mode for conflict resolution. In addition, a specialised division for mental health should be established for the respective army units, containing expert knowledge on psychological sciences and therapeutic communication and enabling the timely and effective management of any ill effects experienced during the post-conflict period.

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