

# Continuities and Discontinuities of Life of Military War Widows in the Post-war Sri Lankan Society

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## Abstract

This article is a result of a study on the war widows of fallen security personals attached to tri forces (Navy, Air and Army) of Sri Lanka. The civil conflict which prevailed for three decades in Sri Lanka ended up with many post war issues in different fields such as peace building, addressing the issues of war affected people etc. War widows are considered as one of the issues during and after arm conflicts and many studies have been conducted in order to investigate the issues of the war widows as well as many facilitating and supportive progammes have been organized to address these issues. However, the challenges faced by the military war widows in post-war society in Sri Lanka have not being studied adequately. Hence, this study has examined the challenges of military war widows encountering as a result of continuity and discontinuity of their life circle referring to their life course. It has identified three broad challenges faced by military war widows namely the social challenges, economic challenges and psychological challenges. The study which has employed both the secondary and primary data collection approach has concluded with that the gender roles attached to men and women influence in continuing the life as a widow and it sometimes discontinue the women empowerment such as participating into community events and it creates vulnerability of women's decision making as a widow.

**Keywords:** children; civil war; society; widows.

## 1. Introduction

There is a clear and distinct shift in the emerging discourse on conflict analysis from the traditional warfare-military contests between nation-states to defend their territorial integrity and independence to the 'new wars' or intra-state conflicts where the state is only one among many other players in a conflict that includes guerrilla groups, ethnically mobilized armies and mercenaries [1].

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In the period of 1989-1998, 92 out of 108 wars in the globe were domestic wars, with the highest number in Asia, followed by Africa and Europe. Moreover, the changing nature of warfare, especially in internal wars, means that it happens in the middle of human communities rather than battlefields distant from civilian life. The dividing lines between the battle front and home front or rear have increasingly blurred, if not disappeared [1]. The new wars tend to be increasingly waged in multicultural urban spaces and neighborhoods pit those who once were neighbors of different ethno-religious or linguistic communities against one another [2]. Further it is argued that there is no abrupt cut off between war and post-war periods as conflicts acquire a cyclical character, the post war period is sometimes better called inter- bellum or a pause before the fighting begin again [1]. The earlier literature on armed conflicts and wars has been mostly gender-blind, with women's participation simply not identified as women were disappeared from the public sphere. Waging wars as well as political violence within the state were seen as male domains, executed by men, whether as armed forces, guerilla groups, paramilitaries or peace keeping forces [3]. This perspective was developed with stereotypes that characterized men as active and women as passive; men as agents, women as victims, men as rational, women as emotional. Even when men were victims on the battlefield, they were portrayed as omnipotent, masculine heroes [1]. This under representation or misrepresentation of the gendered causes costs and consequences of violence has resulted in insufficient recognition of women's involvement and participation, both unavoidable and deliberate, in violent conflicts [4]. There is a growing recognition that claiming inherent differences between women and men contradict the real-life actions of men and women. History has demonstrated that many men resist war through a refusal to participate, draft evasion and outright protest, and on the other hand, many women express their citizenship or even nationalism by proudly sending their men to wars directly joining the ranks of militants in insurgency situations [1]. Likewise, feminist have rejected idealistic associations of women with peace, which have long served to disempowered women and keep them in their place, which is out of the real world of international politics [1]. In overall, the literature on women and war and women and peace has focused on issues such as women's human rights abuses during conflict [5]. Moreover, women's testimonies of their experiences of conflict, the linkages between militarization and patriarchy and women's role in the peace negotiations or their exclusion from the peace process [5].

## **2. Statement of the problem**

This study is mainly focused to examine changes in the family due to the death of the husband and it believed that widowhood is a life event that creates challenges to the women those who became widow due to the civil war situation of the country. Therefore, the research problem of the study was located as what are the challenges of military war widows encountering as a result of continuity and discontinuity of their life circle referring to their life course. The terms continuity and discontinuity are coined under the 'family life course perspective' in which the discussion is based on the historical investigation of the family from the classification of household structure at individual points in time to a developmental perspective. Rather than viewing the family as a static unit, they examine it as a changing entity over the life course of its members [6]. The family cycle measures role changes in the family unit as it moves from stage to stage over the life of its members, from family formation by marriage, to its dissolution after the death of its head [6]. In studying families as they change with time, however, it is necessary to go beyond the individual life span metaphor and beyond the micro social (family) level of analysis [7]. Moreover, it needs to examine the unfolding history of intimate connections in families and

the social context of such long-term relationships in terms of social structure and historical location, exploring issues of transition and transmission in families over periods of time and the socially constructed meanings that result from transitions and transmission [7].

There were three main research questions explored in this research and they are; (a) what are the opportunities available of being a military war widow rather just a widow? (b) What are the challenges of being a single parent? (c) How society considers the widowhood of an ex-wife of a fallen security personal during the civil war of the country? Thus, this research supported to fill the gap of existing knowledge on war-widows in a post war situation of the country as the southern perspective of widowhood is not being studied adequately.

### **3. Civil war and its cost: The case of Sri Lanka**

The Swedish International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) and the Department of Peace and Conflict Research at Uppsala University in Sweden have established a number of basic but significant definitions or categories of conflict. By and large, any conflict with over 1000 battlefield related deaths per year is defined as war or major armed conflict. Intermediate conflicts are those in which battle related deaths are between 25 and 1000 during a particular year, but exceed 1000 throughout the duration of the conflict. When violence is more sporadic and less intense, the conflict is said to be of low intensity. Conflicts in which one of the parties has threatened the use of violence or has deployed military troops or made of force are labeled as serious disputes [8]. Moreover, the use of violence, especially organized group violence, is symbolic of a more profound breakdown in the way people relate to each other [8].

When understanding the crisis of Sri Lanka referring to the civil war situation of the country, the following details provided an insight to the thesis. Geographically Sri Lanka; the island is a 65,610- square-kilometer (25, 332- square mile) teardrop off the southeast tip of the Indian subcontinent. It is separated from the continent by the Palk Strait and Gulf Mannar, but a chain of island and sand bars known as Adam's Bridge links them. It is about 400 kilometers (137 miles) at its widest point [9]. According to the basic demography of the country, Sri Lankan people speak 74% Sinhala and 18% Tamil and remaining 8% speak other languages. English is commonly used in government and is spoken competently by about 40% of the population. Sri Lanka has 92% literacy rate and 83% of the total population have secondary education [10].

“The Sri Lankan society experienced over three decades of civil conflict which has been reported as ended in May 2009. The conflict killed tens of thousands of people and destroyed public and private properties in large scale. After the end of armed conflict, the society entered in to a post conflict situation where the need was on the rebuilding of whole society which include the aspects of social, cultural and economic development” [11]. Most of the literature on the Sri Lankan conflict has been straightforward in its tenet and tenor: historical accounts of the conflict and analyses of internal or external factors that gave rise to it [6]. Moreover, some authors suggest that the large body of writing exists on the Sri Lankan conflict, it is conceptually limited. It portrays the conflict largely as either a terrorist problem between an extremist secessionist group and the Sri Lankan state or a primordial and intractable ethnic problem between the Sinhala majority and the Tamil minority [12]. Moreover, some studies are based on the investigation of post-independence language,

employment opportunities for different ethnic people and land settlement policies as the accelerating points to emerge legitimized Tamil grievances, ethnic conflict including two main ethnic groups in the country and a separate Tamil state [13].

The investigation of the root of the crisis of Sri Lanka: civil war goes back to the pre-colonial history. Much of the long pre-colonial history of Sri Lanka was characterized by ethno-religious pluralism and co-existence over antagonism and conflict [12]. The present day population in Sri Lanka is consisting of the assimilation of the many pre-historic tribal and linguistic groups with colonists. The vital event in identifying the roots for the ethnic division in Sri Lanka can be traced back to the time of three centuries of colonization in which Sri Lanka was under the rule of Portuguese, Dutch and the British. According to the historical exploration of causes to identify modern Sri Lankan conflict that prevailed for three decades started during the period of British colonization from 1815 to 1948. Moreover, it is noted that documents written by colonial authors are used to prove that both the Portuguese and the Dutch administration acknowledged the separate identity of Tamils and respected their relative independence [6]. However, the stratification of the society for both Tamils and Sinhalese is based on caste system before colonization [14]. Anyhow, there was inherently uneven and unequal manner of integration into the polity under the British rule and British colonial policies contributed to new forms of ethno-religious competition and stratification among different ethnic but inhabitants of the country [15].

Thus, the colonial rulers could manipulate and exacerbate ethnic antagonism between Tamils and Sinhalese through their own administrative policies which divided the ethnic groups. The another major paradox of the country during the colonization was that in terms of citizenship all ethnic groups were started to treat as equal where British rule yet sustained the heterogeneity in formalizing cultural differences and making it basis for the social organization and political representation as separate ethnic groups [16]. The tension among Sinhala and Tamil educated elite class leaders were manifested during the time of elections in political representations as British rule bifurcated the presentation of Sinhala and Tamil ethnic groups as Colonizers' wish. Anyhow after independence gained in 1948 could not eliminate all the issues attached to the ethnic tensions started and developed by the Colonizers. For instance, in the independence government, one of the first acts that made ethnicity based rigidity was passing citizenship legislation in 1948 and 1949 restricting Sri Lankan citizenship to those who could claim it by descent on stringent conditions where vast majority of the Indian Workers brought during colonization period to the island were denied Sri Lankan citizenship and the right to electoral rolls [17]. While the Westminster model of parliamentary democracy deepened the venom between the Sinhala and Tamil as it allowed the majority of Sinhala parties to form government without the minority's will, 1956 made another remarkable event in post-independence Sri Lanka. Keeping the political promise alive, the leader of SLFP (Sri Lanka Freedom Party), could address the Sinhala Buddhist majority to make him win in 1956 and this could create more tension between two ethnicities. There is a popular belief in Sri Lanka that the conflict was caused by the introduction of the Sinhala Only Act and if the language issue is addressed in a satisfactory manner, the conflict could be solved with ease [18]. The Tamil resistance to the Official Language Act could create a numerous political upheavals in the country planting hatred between Tamils and Sinhalese more and more [19]. Not only the Official Language Act but also many economic and demographic conditions made the conflict emerged. The Political decisions such as settling Sinhala speaking inhabitants in Eastern province with new settlement schemes in dry zone could deprive the ethnic identity of Tamils. Moreover, open economy during

1977 could not satisfy the needs of both Tamil and Sinhala youth. Likewise, the struggle of Sinhala Tamil relationship became armed, violent conflict which led the island's crisis into a regional and the international level conflict during 1983-2009 [20], brought many socio-economic and psychological damages to the country. Meantime, the Tamil diaspora was seen as a monetary supporter of LTTE where they could purchase advanced weaponry for its military struggle[21]. However, the Sri Lankan government officially announced as an end to the civil conflict when LTTE leader was found dead in May 2009.

“The conflict resulted in the displacement of thousands of people from their homes, disrupted the potentially vibrant economy of Sri Lanka, severely undermined basic norms of human rights and chronically divided a society that initially seemed set to provide the model for Asian ethnic accommodation and development” [22]. It is obvious that fundamental effect of war is uncountable including destruction of lives, families and whole communities. For instance, in 1996, an estimated 50 million were living as refugees or displaced people worldwide. That is, 50 million ordinary people whose lives were devastated by war. There is also crucial economic dimension to any conflict. War destroys property and agriculture. It destroys the houses, schools and hospitals, industry and trade. It destroys the very infrastructure that keeps a society together.

The arms struggle between the Sri Lankan government and the secessionist LTTE has turned Sri Lanka into ‘one of the most dangerous places on earth’. The vicious territorial struggle has been going on in the Northern and Eastern regions, while the entire island is threatened by suicide bombings and other deadly attacks [12]. Since 1983, 70000 people- have been killed due to the conflict. Of the country's 20m people, more than a million have fled abroad. Hundreds of thousands have been displaced internally by terrorism and war. Moreover, the country has led to economic decline and even the fear of losing sovereignty to Tamil separatism or possible foreign intervention. Sri Lanka has become the most militarized state in South Asia. In 2008 the government is to spend 166 billion Sri Lankan rupees (\$1.5 billion) on the army. With its finances in poor shape, the country depends heavily on foreign aid. To finance subsidies and a whole range of populist but unproductive expenditure, it has taken to printing huge amounts of money. This has contributed to soaring inflation, which reached an annual rate of 21.6% in 2007.

Not only the economic cost, but the social and cultural cost also could be witnessed during and after the civil war in Sri Lanka. The civilians were affected in many ways. During the war, thousands of people, including prominent political figures, journalists and civilians were harassed, kidnapped, tortured and murdered [23]. One of the long lasting issue of the civil war of Sri Lanka was that its influence on children. According to available estimates, by 1993 about 400,000 children had been displaced in the north- east due to the prevailing condition of violence and instability [24]. While the war was going on, the LTTE actively recruits children as young as 10 years into their Baby Brigade. It is quite common to encounter children less than 15 years, trained in the use of firearms that are also used in combat situations [24].

“Gender is generally meaning to socio-cultural relationships between men and women. There are number of studies on gender which have concentrated on the women, women subordination, women marginalization etc” [25]. However, gender impact of conflict is also a significant area which needs to be explored. The impact of civil war of the country on women also noticed significantly and tens of thousands of women lost their

fathers, husbands, sons and daughters [23]. Considering the Tamil society and its women, war had influenced their life a lot. For instance, since the 1980s there was an apparent increase in war-related sexual violence against Tamil women perpetrated by security forces and civilians, often in situations of displacement [23].

As Tamil culture views female chastity of paramount importance, sexual violence has had devastating effects on Tamil women, not only emotionally and physically, but there are also many social ramifications [23]. “Though there is an economic supportive system for these effected women from the government side, there are much more social and psychological as well as economic consequences attached to widowhood and it arises from the social structures as well” [26]. Moreover, sexual autonomy of men and women also affected by war and women suffer more. Women share with men the problems of displacement, physical and psychological injury, loss and disappearance of kin, loss of housing, possessions, livelihood and lack of overall security during armed conflict. However, war also challenges notions of female domestication and sexual chastity and affects women’s ability to depend on male breadwinners and heads of household, take exclusive responsibility for childrearing and care of elders, and withstand sexual harassment and assault [27].

#### **4. Objectives of the study**

The broad objective of this study was to understand the challenges faced by widows of fallen security personals of Air, Navy and Army forces of Sri Lanka due to the civil war prevailed for three decades in the country. Particularly, the continuity and discontinuity of life of a wife of ex-soldier who has involved in the actions during ongoing conflict period was investigated to understand their challenges with the priority of life after the death of a husband.

The study has three particular objectives which directly play a part in identifying the relevance of the broader objective of the research and they are, (a) to examine the support services obtain from the government as a military war widow. As an ex-wife of fallen security personal during the actions attached to the civil war period, the government of Sri Lanka has different branched that work for the welfare of the families of war heroes. Thus, this objective is to identify the challenges, if any, of support getting from the government in meeting the welfare provided by them. ( b) to find about the social attitude towards a military war widow.

The widowhood is culturally determined fact and especially when the husband dies, a woman become more vulnerable than when wife dies, the man does. Thus, the attitude towards a single woman after the death of the husband who is engaged in a role of security of the country is concerned here as war heroes are always privileged by the society. (c) to investigate the nature of being a single parent as a widow. The aim of the research was to understand the challenges faced by these women as a single parent to understand continuity and discontinuity of life when the father of children is no more.

The research focuses on the challenges of continuity and discontinuity of the life of military war widows under the life course perspective in which the study brings new arena to study family within the context of absence of a life partner. Single parent is another aspect of life course perspective in which the research focuses on single

mothers after the death of the soldiers who were attached to the civil war during the time of severe conflicts in the country.

The widows of war in Sri Lanka mainly consist of widows of North and East of the country which consist of many women of ex-LTTE carders or civil population and the widows of ex-security personals attached to government security forces and Sri Lankan Police. Moreover, the topic on fallen war widows of ex security personals attached to the government security sector is hardly researched as the government welfare package is taken as the huge appreciation by the government for the families of war heroes. Thus, this research can be applied for the policy formation regarding the welfare sections under relevant authorities that work for the betterment of families of war heroes of the country as the welfare provided by the government is studied as a strength of a military war widow's life.

### **5. Limitations of the study**

Although the preset study tried to cover the challenges faced by the military war widows of southern part of the country, the research has been limited to one district secretariat of the southern part including only three divisional secretariat divisions attached to selected district secretariat office. Thus, the primary data gathered from selected study location can be different from the other part of the country where as there can be many social and cultural factors influence on the research subject. Consequently, the research itself is limited from its sample whereas the generalizing of primary data can appear as one of the limitation of the study.

### **6. Methodology adopted**

This research followed a mixed method design including both qualitative and quantitative data. Quantitative data have been utilized to gather the demographic data of the military war widows where qualitative data employed to follow the narratives of the military war widows referencing to their widowhood.

The quantitative data allowed the researcher to understand the family structure, economic structure and their societal relationship towards the community through their relationship among various community organization of their social setting. Qualitative data permitted the researcher to identify the unique stories of each and every military war widow regarding the challenges they face as a military war widow.

Though the war widows of the country are researched after the year 2009, the more attention is given to the North and East where the war was directly ongoing for long time. Thus, this research was aimed to study the southern war widows who belonged to the fallen security personals attached to the government. Though the military war widows attached to Tri forces could be noticed all over the country, southern province also have reported considerable number of affected people and the number of widows can be estimated around 1154 (Refer to the Table Number3)

The widows of fallen security personals of the Matara District Secretariat are selected as the field location of the study where there are 16 Divisional Secretariat Divisions (DSDs). The following table consists with details of DSDs wise forces widow's pension details.

**Table 1:** DSD Office wise widow's pension details of tri forces

Name of the DSD	No. of Pensioners
Matara	69
Weligama	43
Kamburupitiya	17
Hakmana	13
Pasgoda	16
Kotapola	17
Malimbada	23
Akuressa	14
Dickwella	31
Thihagoda	16
Mulatiyana	14
Dewinuwara	17
Welipitiya	24
Pitabeddara	11
Athuraliya	06
KirindaPuhulwella	10

**Source:** District Secretariat Office, Matara, 2016

The following tables indicate the War Affected Military Service Personnel in Sri Lanka and War Affected Military Service Personal According to Their Civil Status (Killed in and Missing in Action).

**Table 2:** War Affected Military Service Personals in Sri Lanka

Province	Killed in action	Disabled in action and discharged	Total numbers affected
Southern Province	3899	591	4490
Western Province	4681	1185	5866
Central Province	4505	771	5276
Sabaragamuwa Province	2963	440	3403
North Western Province	4616	850	5466
Uva Province	3064	384	3448
North Central Province	4352	760	5112
Eastern and Northern Province	1854	184	2038
<b>Total</b>	<b>29 934</b>	<b>5165</b>	<b>35 099</b>

Source: Report on Statistics of Fallen Security Personnel in Sri Lanka. *RanaviruSewa* Authority, 2011.

**Table 3:** War Affected Military Service Personals According to Their Civil Status (Killed in and Missing in Action)

Province	Married	Unmarried
Southern Province	1154	2740
Western Province	1603	3078
Central Province	1403	3102
Sabaragamuwa Province	890	2073
North Western Province	1458	3158
Uva Province	909	2155
North Central Province	1465	2887
Eastern and Northern Province	799	1055

**Source:** Report on Statistics of Fallen Security Personnel in Sri Lanka. *RanaviruSewa* Authority, 2011.

Military war widows (widows of Tri Forces of Sri Lankan government) are taken as the study population of the study and there are 341 numbers of pensioners who are eligible for government pension scheme in Matara District Secretariat (Table-1). The sample was selected according to the number of military war widows who are eligible for the pension scheme provided by the government. The research used the two way of sample designs in order to follow the investigation. It was random and non-random methods in selecting the sample of the study. For the purpose of quantitative data, three DSDs selected purposely and those are Matara, Weligama and Dickwella in which there is more than 1/3 of the population under non-random sampling methods. Moreover, 1/3 (30%) of population, from each and every divisions, selected employing the simple random sampling method. The sample frame was utilised to select the following number sorting the name list of military war widows as pension receivers in alphabetical order A-Z. Accordingly, the lottery system was utilized to select the number of respondents from each and every DSDs. The number of respondents selected utilizing the formula as mentioned bellow.

Matara-  $69/100 \times 30 = 20.7 - 21$

Weligama-  $43/100 \times 30 = 12.9 - 13$

Dickwella-  $31/100 \times 30 = 9.3 - 9$

Thus, 43 out of 143 in Matara, Weligama and Dickwella were selected as the sample of the study. Consequently, ten respondents representing each and every DSD were selected for the purpose of qualitative data under the judgmental sampling design in which researcher believed in selected respondents that they could provide the best information to achieve the objectives of the study. This number 10 was picked out based on the 1/4 policy for each and every DSD selected for the research. The sample and numbers has been given in the table-04.

**Table 4: Study Sample**

Name of the DSDs	Total population	Study Sample	
		Quantitative	Qualitative
Matara	69	21	05
Weligama	43	13	03
Dickwella	31	09	02
<b>Total</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>10</b>

In order to collect the primary data; the researcher employed a structured questionnaire which was followed by interview. Questions of the questionnaire were designed with close ended questions whereas the researcher interviewed each and every respondent selected from simple random sampling method in filling the answers to all the questions. In-depth interview method was employed to gather more in-depth data about the research area using 10 respondents out of 43 of sample which were selected under judgmental sampling design. In-depth interview allowed researcher to find the respondents' perspective on their lives, experiences and the situations expressed in their own world. The non-participant observation method was employed during the in-depth interviews are conducted to draw conclusions of respondents' emotional attachment with their story. Moreover, the researcher did field visit at households of respondents in order to collect data through questionnaire and in-depth interview method. Additionally, researcher participated in *Ranaviru Sewa Sansada* (Associations)<sup>a</sup> which are located in each and every DSDs. Sequentially, secondary data was collected through Government publications, earlier research and census reports in which quantitative as well as qualitative data was gathered.

## 7. Results and findings of the study

Data analysis were done under a three broad sub themes illustrating the social psychological and economic challenges faced by the military war widows regarding their life course after the demise of the husband who has engaged in ongoing military actions under the guidance of Sri Lankan government during the civil war period of the country. The three sub themes of the areas of data analysis were (a) Social Consequences, ( b) Psychological Consequences, and (c) Economic Consequences.

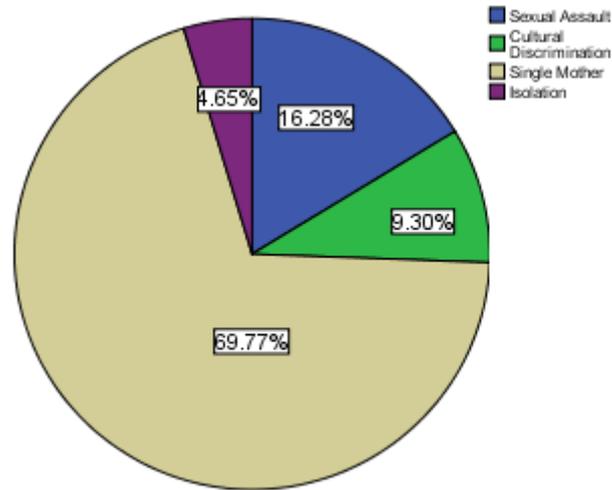
### 7.1. Social Consequences

A recent study by the author in [28] has concluded that “although the traditional family unit as the basic social

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<sup>a</sup> This association is authorized by the RanaViruSewa Authority and each and every month there is one meeting in which all the members such as widows, parents of fallen security personals and disable soldiers during the ongoing civil of in the country. Moreover, this association provides a platform to the members of the association to discuss their issues regarding the welfare facilities they receive from the government. RanaviruSewa Authority has appointed a district representative also in order to monitor the meetings and provide the awareness regarding what government provides as welfare to the RanaViru families.

unit has barely survived in the contemporary Sri Lankan society, its function has been irrevocably changed due to various reasons". Similarly, being a single mother was a great challenge of the widows studied in this research as well.



**Figure 1:** The challenges of being a widow

As illustrated in the figure-01, the majority (69.77%) of women explained that being a single mother as the most challenging factor. 16.28% women experienced of cultural discrimination attached with widowhood. The cultural discrimination was attached with patriarchal social relations in the society as well. Sexual assault also one of the challenging situation faced by the widows and it is attached with the singleness after the death of the husband. The suspicion of the widows by the society was mentioned by the women studied under this study. Further, the invitation for sexual relationship by men was mentioned as there are many young widows in the study sample. Another challenge faced by the widows researched was the isolation they feel after they lose the life partner. The isolation of losing the husband as well as isolation from the society could be investigated through this research on military widows and their challenges when they continue their life after the death of the husband. Taking care of children was mentioned one of the key social challenge to the widows. Most of the children of these widows at the time of their husband's dead were at very young age. Accordingly, 76.47% of children were under the age category of below 05 years while 20.59% and 2.94% of children under the age category of 6-10 years and 11- 20 years respectively.

According to the research findings, there were respondents who were expecting a baby while the husband is arrived home as a dead. It is a established fact that the psychological grievance during pregnancy is unhealthy for an expecting mother.

The pregnancy was difficult when those women studied in this research knew that they have lost the husband while she is expecting a baby.

"I was blank when I heard that my husband is no more. I was expecting my second child and it was 7 months already with my pregnancy. I was shocked and I do not know how I survived during that time period till we do

the last rituals of the remaining of my husband. When I think of it now, I am surprised that my second baby was totally healthy when he was born. I think I couldn't eat even during the time of my husband's death announcement" (In-depth interview 01).

"While I was pregnant my husband could not come to see me since he was put into the battle field and I had to manage of going to medical clinics with my mother-in-law or sister-in-law. But other mothers had come with their husband and I was sad since I could not have that chance. In clinics, there are some lessons for fathers as well. But my husband missed all that and he could not actually cuddle the baby. My baby was only three months when my husband dies" (In-depth interview 02).

A woman's psychological state during pregnancy has been noted in previous research in order to predict the mother's adaptation to maternal functioning. Pregnancy is generally a time when a woman experiences positive mental health [29]. However, it may bring with it anxiety which can be regarded as a sign of psychological adaptation and a positive, experiential process. Becoming a mother is a major transition and requires physical, social and emotional adaptation. Difficulty in adjusting to pregnancy and/or motherhood can also compromise the quality of mother-infant relationships with resulting detrimental effects on infant socio-emotional and cognitive development [29]. The woman's character and personality, her background, her socio-economic situation, her previous health and well-being, and the support available to her are all dimensions that contribute to a woman's psychological well-being during pregnancy. The most widely researched aspect of well-being is a woman's depression levels, and studies suggest that maternal postnatal depression has a detrimental effect on child development [29]. Thus, it is obvious that the antenatal period influences towards parenthood and the forthcoming child.

Singleness is another social consequence of these widows. The singleness experienced by the widows studied had started living as a widow and they had decided to not to marry again. After the demise of the husband widows were experiencing singleness not only because they have not gone for the marriage but the society had also considered them as women who experience singleness. When it is considered as a single lady, it denoted the social conception on family which is believed that both husband and wife should be available to be called as a family.

The widows had lost their right of wifehood as they had decided to be single after the demise of the husband and there were social and psychological reasons to continue as a widow which were eventually created social and psychological consequences in widow's life.

The following case studies confirmed the above notes of the previous research when asked why respondents did not decide to marry again.

"How I can think of a marriage again, i have two children and if I marry again that person also wants to have kids. So there will be many differences surely for his kids and these kids. So, I already dedicated my life to these children, though my in-laws also asked me to marry again" (In-depth interview 03).

"My in-laws and parents asked me to marry again, but I refused their suggestions as I have my kids who have

the same features of my late husband. So I don't think that a new husband will care these kids as his own kids. So I live for my children after my husband died". (In-depth interview 04).

Thus, it is obvious that children become a reason of being single and being a widow for the life time after the death of the husband and these notes denoted the prevailing social conditions of remarriage of woman with children and it signified the social and psychological consequences of taking a decision in remarrying. "The protracted and unresolved conflicts between parents considerably affect the children's wellbeing negatively. Better interactions and communication between parents, and positive child-parent relationships are essential factors for children's well-being. Parenting behaviour and the quality of the parent-child relationship play a critical role in understanding children's well-being in relation to role of family" [28]. 90.70% of the respondents of the study mentioned that they didn't go for a second marriage due to their responsibility to look after their children. Not only the children of first marriage, but there were some more reasons for not going for the second marriage and continue as single. Those reasons include the memories of the respondents attached to the late husbands ( 4.65% ) , and cultural barriers of going for a second marriage including the cultural shame ( 4.65%).

"I never thought of going for a second marriage. But my neighbors criticize me saying that I have secret affairs with their husbands. If I go for a second marriage they will definitely tell me '*lejjanethieki* (shameless woman)' according to what they say even having no men" (In-depth interview 05).

The previous researches also have noted that cultural barriers had led to the reluctance of the remarriage of widow than a widower [30]. Empirical work on singleness has drawn extensively on psychological and sociological frameworks developed for broader purposes of examining human experience, understanding or based on their familiarity with the event.

## **7.2. Psychological Consequences**

The death of one's spouse is one of the most devastating events in life as noted many times in this article and it had significantly disturbed the life of the widows of the study. Widowhood brings psychological consequences due to many interlinked situations such as financial strain, the assumption of new tasks in household management, and changes in social relationships. Moreover, both social roles and mediating factors in adjustment to widowhood vary by gender, it has long been hypothesized that men and women experience bereavement in different ways that are reflected in depressive symptoms. Although depressive symptoms diminish over time among the widowed, they seem to remain high for many years following widowhood [31].

The study found that, the respondents experience the depressive symptoms even after the seven years after the civil conflict scenario attached to their widowhood. One respondent revealed that when the yearly alms giving ceremony is organized as a religious even for the dead person (on behalf of her late husband), she used to dream of her husband and she is suffering from a severe headache till the alms giving is over. She herself described it as the stress she experienced thinking whether she is able to fulfill all the rituals nicely or not in order to satisfy the late husband's family members. Another respondent described how memories of husband become alive

when she observes married couples during the parents' meeting at her child's school. As she noted,

"I feel very sorry about myself when I see loving couples at parents' meetings. I always feel that I never have the chance of being loved from my husband after his death. I myself cry when I recall all the memories we shared when he is alive. It hurts me a lot and sometimes I feel to die but I still think of my kids' future that mine" (In-depth interview 06).

In accordance with the life course perspective, it emphasizes the importance of the timing of spousal loss and widowhood duration. For example, the experience of widowhood in early stages of the life course may be unexpected and involve delayed psychological adjustment; the timing of widowhood then interacts with gendered roles (e.g., parenting) and disparities (e.g., economic), which serve to exacerbate psychological outcomes [31]. The respondents studied were widows of young age and they had experienced unexpected outcome of the civil war of the country. Thus, the psychological outcomes consist of many challenges such as single parent, young mother, celibacy.

The social isolation is another psychological consequence experienced by the widows. Widows, according to face a 'social death', which robs them of their status and communities due to their lack of association with a man. They also face stigma and are often blamed for their husband's death [32]. When women separated from men through widowhood or divorce, their sexuality received new emphasis and was constructed as uncontrolled, unpredictable and, thus, threatening to the community. Widowed and divorced women's sexuality, in short, was perceived as something that must be monitored or reined in. Other women in the community were often the most suspicious [32]. This condition found factual in this empirical study also.

"Since I'm alone, community peeps at my home and check whether I bring men inside or not. So, I often avoided interactions with community members as a way to 'protect' myself from this increased suspicion"(In-depth interview 07).

The social isolation creates the widows vulnerable in different events of the life after the death of the husband. The story on interview-08 notes how social isolation leads to the inability of all forms of support including social, economic and health care support.

"I'm suffering from a cancer, I have one son and I still do not know till when I'll survive. If my husband was alive, I do not need to afraid of the future of my son. But now I'm afraid because after the death of my husband, my in-laws also stopped talking to me as they think that my bad luck caused for the death of my husband. I do not get any support from husband's side for my treatments. I use only the amount of money I get from the government on behalf my husband's service to the country. So it is not easy though we get a sum of payment from the government to decide all the life events of us. I use the card issued to the families of war heroes sometimes when I go to the treatment at the hospital. Some care some do not. War is over and now people do not care the service of our husbands' for the country" (In-depth interview 08).

Adjustment to widowhood is one more psychological barrier experienced by these widows when they continue the life. In any post-conflict society war widows are invariably subjected to numerous iniquities because of their

vulnerability without any moral and material support for them to lead their lives independently as individuals either with or without family encumbrances [26].

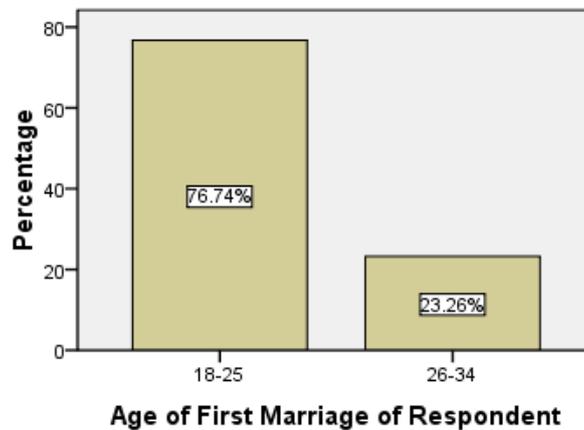


Figure 2: The age of first marriage

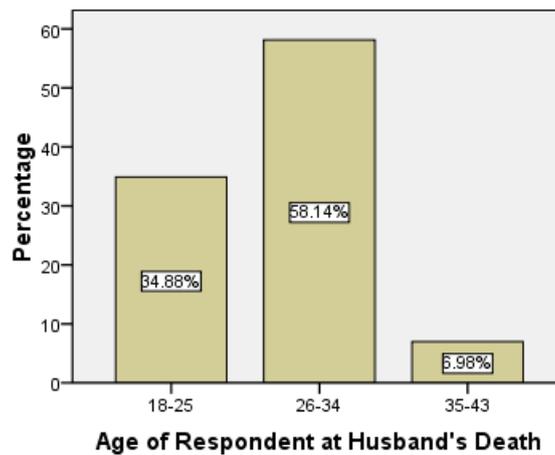


Figure 3: The age of being a widow

The above figures 02 and 03 illustrate the age of the first marriage at the respondent and the age of becoming a widow. According to the analysis, it is obvious that some respondents who have been married during their age between 18-25 have become a widow also during the same age category. It means that, the some respondents had experience early widowhood in their life course; particularly during the young age of the respondents.

As in-depth interviews revealed about being a widow during their young age was the most difficult situations they had never expected.

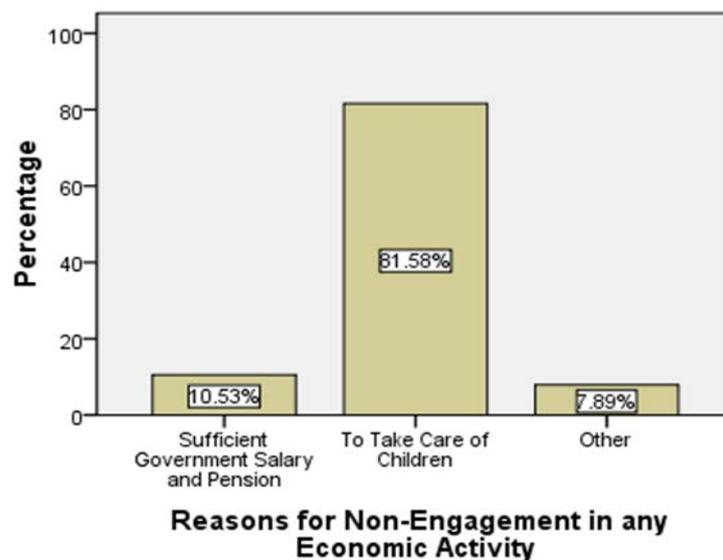
“Believe me; we only could stay around one year of our married life. When I was married I was 18 years old

and when I become a widow I just passed 19 years old. I was really frustrated and I actually did not want to leave after that. But I'm living for my son now" (In-depth Interview 09).

"I was very young when I become a widow and I had two children. The youngest one was just five months and my husband wanted to see how my kids are growing. It is not easy of course to be a widow" (In-depth interview 10).

### 7.3. Economic Consequences

"Widows remain no longer wives and mothers with clearly defined gender roles within the household but rather fall within several contested sites of socially constructed gender roles" [26]. As a single parent and as the agent of handling the household activities, economic consequences experience by the widows also could be seen during the investigation. When asked about the expenditure of the income of the family received mostly by the government, all widows stated that, the spend more on children and their education. Though they receive the salary or pension or both of the fallen security personals, the amount was varied based on the title of the ex-soldier in their relevant forces. On the other hand, depending on one economic channel was another issue of widows. It was found that only three widows studied had being employed before and after the demise of the husband and all the other respondents, economically, survived through the welfare scheme of the government. It was researched the reason for not engaging in economic activity before and after the demise of the husband by the widows studied. According to the findings 40 widows who had not engaged in economic activities before the husband's demise as some of them did not find any need of engaging in any economic activity. Moreover, some of widows were asked to stay home and take care of the household by their late husband. The following figure illustrates why widows the majority of widows, 39 in number had not decided to being engaged in any economic activity after the demise of the husband.



**Figure 4:** Reasons for not engaging any economic activity before and after the demise of the marriage

Accordingly, it affirmed that the children have become a reason to stay home rather starting a new work. This again connects with the single motherhood and how it creates consequences in decision relating to the economic conditions of widows. Thus it was obvious that the majority of widows depend only on the economic support provided by the government and it was one of the economic barriers of widowhood.

Moreover, there were respondents who had temporarily shifted to the natal place after the demise of the husband and they mentioned that they are trying to build their own house for the children and her. Anyhow, respondents mentioned the difficulty of constructing a home without a support of the husband as one of the consequences though the outsiders only could see the income they receive from the government.

“I know how difficult it is to construct a house without the husband. We ladies do not know this types of work and it is not only money but how to handle is important when we construct a house. I myself worked very hard to find the people for housing constructions. So having money is nothing when consider the support of a man, husband to a woman to continue a family under a one shelter” (In-depth Interview 11).

Thus, considering the amount of compensate received by the widows are not able to solve their issues related to widowhood and economically also widows find difficulties in managing their life ahead.

## **8. Conclusion**

It was obvious that the nature of challenges faced by each and every respondent was unique though there were similarities in challenges they face such as single mother, loneliness and adjusting to widowhood. Being a single mother was mostly challenging socially as well as psychologically for the widows interviewed in this study. The responsibilities of a head of household was experienced differently by the widows as some of the widows had changed their residence to the natal house where the members of the natal house had taken the decision about the family life of the widow when they continue their life ahead. The social stigma attached to with widowhood had created vulnerable situations in widows' life. For instance, some of the widow women were considered as bad luck for the death of the ex-soldiers by the parent in-laws of the widows. The psychological disturbances in widows' life were never ended according to the stories of the widows researched under this study. Not only the memories of the late husband, but also when it is adjustment to the widowhood, the widows had to deal with their own psychological status of being a widow. Being a single mother and rearing children was socially, economically and as well as psychologically challenging for most of the widows as majority of widows studied had children during the period of school age.

Thus, the social and psychological consequences of being a military war widow cannot be measured and social and psychological consequences cannot be separated in a line as it overlapped in many cases. It was identified that, military war widows of Tri forces in Sri Lanka receive compensate based on the welfare policies of the government. However, the economic consequences attached to the single motherhood could be visible when husband dies of a family. Moreover, the reason of being unemployment of majority of the women studied could create the economic barriers in managing their expenditure only through the amount they receive from the government. Though there are special provisions in government policy level in addressing the issues of

'*Ranaviru* Families'; the analysis revealed that there are still social, economic psychological consequence encountering by these military war widows. Moreover, though these women considered in this study did not directly engaged in war or though these women do not belong to the areas which were highly influenced by the war, life of military war widows should be considered as a phenomenon in a post war situation.

The study concludes that being a widow in unexpected time matters greatly regardless the support extended by the government under the provisions of *Ranaviru* families. Moreover, widowhood is challenging in particular with single motherhood, loneliness and taking care of family without a spouse. Hence, adjusting to widowhood took time and it differs from widow to widow based on the own social, psychological and economic backgrounds of these widows. Fundamentally, the study focused on women and women matters that conclude the importance of studying and investigation on gender studies and the topic of this study intensely belonged to studying of the sensitive human aspects. Thus, the research concludes that the respondents were wrapped by their emotions while providing the information. Anyhow, eventually, the study could conclude that, gender roles attached to men and women influence in continuing the life as a widow and it sometimes discontinue the women empowerment such as participating into community events and it creates vulnerability of women's decision making as a widow. Thus, the study prompts that, the community has a particular role in galvanizing vulnerable women in post war situations.

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