Family and the Sexual Identity Development of Youth: A Comparative Sociological Study of the Semi-urban and Rural Youth in Ratnapura District of Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The study captures the impact of structured relationships within the family on sexual identity development of youth. Research problem stems from the quarry whether the semi-urban and rural families exposed to the social dynamics of globalization, differ in their role constructing the sexual identities of youth. Parent-youth communication, social class and style of parenting, family role in the resolution of sexual identity crisis, and inter sibling relations are considered pertaining to the sexual identity development. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were adopted. Multi staged simple random sampling technique is employed representing semi-urban and rural youth (n=225) in the postal survey. Informal interviews and ten in-depth case studies of youth with unresolved sexual identities were carried out. The study substantiates that although, semi-urban and rural families do not drastically contrast with each other, and they constitute two different contexts of sexual identity development. Although, social class is not correlated, gender role socialization, style of parenting cause the semi-urban and rural difference pertaining to family role in sexual identity development. Qualitative analysis revealed the precursors of negative sexual identity development within the family. Sri Lankan families leave little margin and are emotionally less supportive in case of negative sexual identities.

Key words: Youth, Sexual identity, Family, Urban, Rural

Introduction

Sri Lanka today has been exposed to an unprecedented degree of social dynamics of foreign origin. It is the global age which makes the realty, rather a fragile collection of mental states. Thought, action and the material culture are subjected to change and ever widening gap between generations alters the perspectives of realty [Davis, 1995]. Universe of realty is turbulent since the individual no more is capable maintaining a unique, coherent sense of identity. No society, no culture, so that no individual seem to remain intact in this massive process of change. This study specifically focused how the Sri Lankan semi-urban and rural families in the back drop of globalization socialize youth helping them to mould their own sexual identities.

Sri Lankan youth spend an extended period of time within their family of orientation. Parents find it increasingly difficult launching their children to be independent adults for many reasons. Marriage in Sri Lanka has been less feasible [Caldwel, 1999], due to a range of reasons such as unemployment, escalated educational needs, land shortage etc. Basic facts of life say that the individual reaches his/her puberty gaining the reproductive capacity sooner or later with the beginning of the second decade of life. Current social environment keeps the bulk of the youth population away from the privileges of marriage till they reach their late twenties or even thirties. Freudian perspective suggests that individuals need a constant release of their sexual urges [Collins & Coltrane, 1991]. On these circumstances there is no wonder that youth rebel against the traditional sexual norms seeking the alternative avenues satisfying their emotional needs.

'There has been little work done on masculinities, both as a field of inquiry and site of advocacy in Sri Lanka' [De Mel et al., 2013]. Same is the case for other domains of sexual identities. This has largely been due to the related social attitude and the restrictive legal backdrop. Section 365, 365 A of the Sri Lankan Penal Code criminalizes a range of non-procreative sexual practices and the penalty is even up to 10 year imprisonment and a fine [Penal Code, Sri Lanka, Section 365]. Criminal status and the stigma associated may have compelled researchers mainly focusing behavioral aspects of sexual identity. All minority sexualities

tend to keep their identities latent in a cultural setting in a sexually restrictive cultural setting hinder sexual expressions of young people. Despite this reality, within the age group of 18 20, about 27.9% (n/491) of females 54.9% (n/755) of males were sexually active. About 1.1% female and 10% of male adolescents had sexual relationships with partners of same gender [Perera & Reece, 2006]. About 40% of unmarried youth bear the attitude society do not tolerate premarital sex. However, this has been a reason why the say 'No' for sexual behavior. About 85.5% of youth had one sexual partner when a minority of 7.2% had two sexual partners while 3.2% of sexually active youth had three or more sexual partners. About 2.1% of 20-24 year old males 0.4% of females (20-24 years) had same sex relationships [National Youth Health Survey, 2012, 2013].

This state of affairs has kept youth on sexual experimentation over an extended period of time since their sexual maturation. Furthermore the relative absence of life transition rituals has been problematic in the present context as these rituals played a pivotal role transmitting sexual knowledge in to youth [Collins & Coltrane, 1991], Continuous inflow of Western sexual standards through mass media, traditionally set sexually restrictive culture may have affected the current sexual attitudes and practices of Sri Lankan youth. Economic liberalization in 1977, seemed to add a momentum. Below text brilliantly captures the dramatic changes accompanied.

> *The decline of local arts under the influence of intruding western mass media, alleged decline of human bonds under the growing influence of naked materialism, deterioration of the sexual morals under the influence of the tourism and the overseas travel by female workers and the spread of Western lifestyles and behavior patterns which allegedly undermine or devaluate native (deshiya) ways of life* [Hettige, 2000].

Being backed by the growing sense of individualism infiltrated, the social order newly arisen has devaluated the so far established patterns of human bonding. The text further brings a clue of ever widening generation gap. Adults in one hand maintain a 'hegemony' [Gramsci, 1991], by which they take upper hand being a privileged class that gets the consent of youth willingly or unwillingly to be ruled and be controlled. Indisputably family becomes one of the basic premise that regulates the individual sexuality .Yet in the effort of sexual socialization and being socialized, both parents as well as youth inside family seem to go through a hard time full of conflict and the resultant tension. Picture is increasingly complex and the below framework may help perceiving the context in which both generations are in conflict , potentially more since sexuality is rather a 'restricted' or 'dirty' topic! Is the sexual socialization within family all smooth?

Globalization and the capitalist expansion are two processes that feed each other. The capitalist expansion has restructured the labour market to the extent that young in side families spend increasingly a higher period of time without parental supervision. A much deeper analysis would say that labour market conditions have even restructured the family itself [Steel & Kidd, 2001]. Limited membership, highly mobile family units, single parent families, dispersal of family members and altering gender based division of labour are some examples.

On the other hand mass media, which has replaced some of the traditional avenues of socialization has been the most effective weapon of globalization. Youth increasingly are exposed to the channels of mass media by which modern sexual ethics are incorporated in to the naturally inquisitive minds of youth. High inconsistency in information received through channels of mass media in this backdrop can even lead a sexual anomy. Cultural pluralism has been the dominant lineup on the face of blurring traditional identities. People in traditional societies had to accept a single, socially predetermined identity unlike the wide range of choices available in a liberal democratic social surrounding. Erickson has suggested that identity confusion is very much likely to occur in a democratic social environment where the individual is exposed to a larger degree of choices and alternatives [Dacey & Travers, 1996]. Youth as a sensitive social category are prone to free choice of life style and this takes place in a changed family setup embedded in a turbulent social environment. This social backdrop conceptualized (Figure 1) may have become a breeding ground for multiple sexual interests. Adolescents and youth who are typically vulnerable to the identity crisis may find it fairly difficult to develop a clear sexual identity and sexual
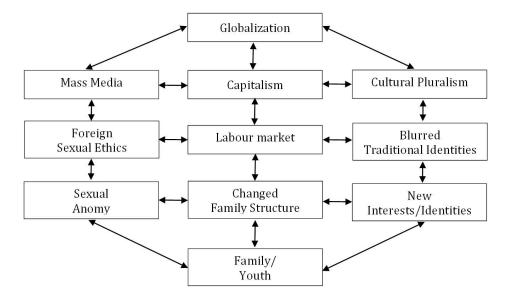
Figure 1: Conceptual frame reflects sexual identity diffusion.

commitments through a smooth flow of life events.

Research Problem and Objectives

The impact of the change above elaborated may not equally strike the people of center and peripheries. Being based on this basic assumption, the study placed the research problem whether semi-urban and rural families differ with reference to their role in sexual identity development of youth? Pertaining to the research problem, four research objectives were aligned. Differentiation of Semi-urban and rural family in the context of sexual identity development of youth, evaluation of parent-youth communication pertaining to the sexual identity development, comparison of family backgrounds which may positively or negatively contribute the resolution of sexual identity crisis and understanding the inter sibling attachment with reference to the sexual identity development of youth were the objectives realized.

Concepts and Theory

Youth is considered to be the most progressive social category. Trotsky held the view that youth are the thermometer of society [National Youth Council, 1983], for the reason that they are the first to react being in the social forefronts. In another words, they are the most sensitive category of age, which is with the quality of showing unconditional conformity or extreme defiance for foreign agents of change. Since youth is a socially constructed phenomenon, historically it has been problematic defining the age limits of

youth. Concepts of adolescence and youth cover an age range, which certainly overlap each other yet not being the same. Available definitions identify adolescence to be the years between puberty and the attainment of physiological and psychological maturity. Being more specific, adolescence is defined as follows.

> *The developmental period of transition from childhood to early adulthood entered at approximately ten to twelve years of age and ending at eighteen and twenty years of age* [Santrock, 1995].

Youth is the age between childhood and maturity. This study takes all young people between the age range of 15-29 years as youth, since the criteria adequately represents the age specified in the above definition. Yet youth of 18-24 years were subjected to study due to the ethical considerations involved in the study.

Historically youth has been perceived as a problematic age of the human life cycle. The famous Greek philosophers Socrates and Plato had documented the restless attributes of the youth [Dacey & Travers, 1996]. The modern invention of the adolescence in 1880's by G.H. Stanley Hall highlighted it as a period of 'storm and stress', which strikes the individual at the onset of youthful behavior. More often the available academic literatures go with the assumption that youth is problematic [Steinberg, 1993]. Many perspectives on the human development in biological, psycho-

logical and sociological orientations (Biopsychosocial Model), explain youth to be one of the most turbulent periods of human life cycle.

Is youth problematic? Concepts of 'identity' and 'identity crisis' coined by Erik Erickson adequately provide a formidable explanation regarding the psychosocial uncertainties of adolescence and youth [Collins & Coltrane, 1991]. The central importance of the Erickson in the theories of adolescence is mainly due to his explanation of 'identity crisis' the youthful individual is subjected. It is explained that the adolescence is in the problem of developing his or her self-image establishing a coherent sense of identity. According to Erickson, the main goal of adolescence is the identity formation. Since the modern youth spend a longer period of time attached to family, family itself may contribute constituting the sexual identities of youth. Identity formation in a way becomes a process of making personal choices in the pursuit of the most appropriate roles to follow. Confusion of such roles can lead to lack of stable identity. The identification of socially unacceptable roles may possibly end up as social deviance. Naturally individual at this stage is expected to choose the roles within the limits of social conformity. Family becomes the primarily important domain in which individual develops his identity in general. Functionalist systems approach of family [Rodger, 1996], adds a clear perspective understanding how family take care while disciplining and molding an individual who would conform the socially set boundaries of behavior.

'Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison' (1977) and 'History of Sexuality' (1979) by Foucault identify family as a 'massive site of surveillance' which disciplines the body. Increasingly the human bodies within the context of the family are overtly and covertly controlled and disciplined by the discourses generated by the professionals like doctors, teachers and the family itself. State by and large uses family as a 'repressive state apparatus' inflicting its power over the bodies of the individuals who are positioned in the so-called curtains of privacy which surround the family [Steel & Kidd, 2001]. Individual behavior is highly regulated by the discourses formulated by the high ranks of the society punishing the slightest of the deviant behavior. Limits over the expression of sexuality are exemplary of such controls.

Sexual identity becomes a centrally important concept addressed in this study. If touches the concept 'identity' prior to the specificity of sexual identity, as defined, identity is 'like a blue print for future commitments and life choices. It is a set of belief and goals about one's relationships with family members, lovers and friends, one's role as a worker or a citizen, religious behavior or one's aspirations for achievement' [Nollar & Callan, 1991]. As more specifically defined sexual identity refers to the person's internal sense of being male or female, which is expressed in the personality and behavior. Researches identify the following three vital components of sexual identity.

1. Sexual (or gender) or one's feelings of being masculine, feminine, androgynous or undifferentiated

2. Sex (or gender) roles, or the way in which one expresses one's biological gender in society according to the norms and stereotypes

3. Sexual orientation, or the object(s) of one's sexual interests: being heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual or asexual in one's sexual orientation [Kroger, 2000]

Capturing the scope of sexual identity, this literature provides us the insight that gender roles become part of one's sexual identity. However, it should be stressed that the identity established during adolescence and youth may necessarily be the basis for resolving future psycho-social tasks during the total life span ahead. Those who have developed a sense of identity are in intimate relationships [Kroger, 2000]. Being based on this conceptual frame the study captured the parent-child relationship and the inter sibling relationships in the context of sexual identity development. Possible difference between semi-urban and rural family, social class factor, most and the least helpful parenting styles pertaining to the sexual identity development and the precursors of negative sexual identity development within the family were further investigated under the light of objectives set.

Methods

This study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. Input contained both primary and secondary data. Postal questionnaire, interviews, and case studies were the methods of data collection. Semi-structured postal questionnaire was successful with

a 65% of response rate (n =225). Family with a youth respondent was the unit of sampling. Each family was subjected to an informal interview prior to the submission of postal questionnaire. Respondents for the postal questionnaire were selected on random basis using the technique of multi staged sampling. The first stage of sampling focused selecting Divisional Secretariat Divisions (DSD) represented semi-urban and urban fraction. Ratnapura and Balangoda DSD's were selected and in the second stage of sampling, two Grāma Niladāri Divisions (GND) in above two DSD's namely, Mihindugama GND of Ratnapura DSD and Māmalgaha GND of Imbulpe DSD were selected. In the third stage of sampling, the total population of families in GNDs was identified using statistics at Grāma Niladāri. About 149 semi-urban families and 76 rural families were represented the in the sample. In case a male respondent was found from the first family unit in the randomly selected family list, a female respondent was expected from the next selected family assuring the equal gender representation. Ten in-depth case studies were carried out specifically capturing the precursors of negative sexual identity development inside the family.

Limitations and ethical consideration

Youth is a socially constructed concept and the boundaries of youth as a specific age may vary through time and space. This study specifically considered the individuals who are within the age range of 15-24 as youth and this age group was selected on the grounds of the World Health Organization (WHO) definition of youthful age. One of the main objectives of this study is to study the family backgrounds that lead positive or negative sexual identities. Yet, a certain sexual identity considered to be negative in one society may not be assigned the same negative status elsewhere. This study considered all sexual identities with illegal and deviant status in Sri Lankan society to be negative. Urban communities are highly heterogeneous in its character. This inequality is made due to different ethnic, religious, lingual or social class representations. The sample drawn predominantly represented Sinhalese Buddhists of semi-urban and rural families in working class and lower middle class statuses. Studying the parent-child and inter-sibling relationships pertaining to the sexual identity development was intended in the study.

Since the research is on a sensitive topic, nec-essary precautions were taken at the field. Relevant police divisions and Grāma Niladāri were informed in writing. Parents of each adolescent and youth were personally met, and informed by the researcher before taking consent to be a respondent in the survey. They were given a written document which explains objectives and terms of research. As a compensation, researcher had to hold free English language teaching sessions for selected youth in Mihindugama GND under the supervision of Grāma Niladāri. The researcher was ethically bound to protect their privacy and to avoid all forms of questions that can cause emotional discomfort.

Results and Discussion

Gender role adherence and youth sexual identities

Sexual identity itself is a psychosocial construct, which is influenced by the social environment within family and outside. Dimensions of sexual identity ; one's own evaluation of self , others' evaluation of individual as a sexual being on the basis of one's biological sex, sex or gender roles, sexual orientation and related sexual behavior as a whole was considered in relation to the semi-urban and rural difference. This study was with the basic assumption that semi-urban and rural backgrounds might produce two more or less different environments for the development of youth sexual identities. A gender role as a strong constituent of sexual identity was investigated pertaining to the potential semi-urban rural difference in the development of youth sexual identities.

Family may take maximum effort to train the young with gender appropriate behavior. Functionalist sociologists, strongly put the view that gender roles or the division of labour within the family as a natural phenomenon [Steel & Kidd, 2001]. As Young & Willmott (1975) put in their literature "Symmetrical Family", there is a trend in the modern nuclear family for joint conjugal roles. This trend may not strictly hold children in the family to natural division of labour explained in functionalist terms, yet children are provided with the orientation to be flexible carrying out domestic roles showing no indifference to traditionally carved male-female roles in the family. Supporting the above argument, study revealed that 34.2% of the sample engaged in domestic work traditionally branded as masculine or feminine irrespective of their sex. In

the traditional societies clear cut gender role had been maintained in the assertion of firm socially desired gender identities [Mead, 1943]. Gender role adherence appeared to be correlated with the semi-urban or rural setting in which families are located (P=0.019). This brings the sense that two different social settings of semi-urban and rural families have significantly influenced gender role performance of youth.

The rural percentage those who engaged in domestic roles purely labeled as masculine remained low (24%) compared 38% of semi-urban youth. Those who do both masculine and feminine type domestic work are high (46%) in the rural sector compared to 28% of youth in semi-urban sector. In spite of the emergence of the 'symmetrical family' in the urban industrial backgrounds in which both males and females increasingly showed indifference to engendered domestic roles, the labour intensive rural family too has become symmetrical in its gender based domestic chores considerably. For instance, even male youth significantly were skilled in cooking, washing or cleaning. Opposite is that the female youth contribute their labour in agricultural work of the family. It is obvious that, as far as domestic work is concerned, youth were internalized more of a gender neutral mind set within the rural family. Study furthermore revealed that youth(48%) who adhered to both male and female domestic gender roles had more liberal attitudes towards minority sexual orientations (P=0.017).

Parental control and sexual identity

Levels of discipline expected by parents within the family seem to have implications in this regards. Disciplinary demands of parents may play a decisive role as a determinant of the level of exposure youth gain for the external sources of sexual socialization. The style of parenting may be a strong determinant of the personalities of young persons. It directly affects deciding how far the child gets opportunity in experimenting themselves as full-fledged individuals. Authoritarian, authoritative and permissive parenting styles and corresponding practices provide different models of parenting that allow democratic or autocratic family environments [Collins & Coltrane, 1991, Steinberg, 1993], which can make lasting impact on individual personality.

About 77% of urban fathers expected a high level of discipline form youth compared to 65%

of rural fathers. Same percentage value for rural mothers remains moderately high. This sample predominantly represented urban working class families and results tally with the realty those parents of urban working class demand high level of discipline from their children [Collins & Coltrane, 1991]. This may be due to the parental anxiety that town is full of deleterious avenues for youngsters at their choice. On the other hand working class parents, especially in urban settings are in an eternal struggle of placing their children in the ladder of social mobility. A significant degree of evidence is found to relate higher disciplinary demands of parents with sexual inclinations of youth. The study revealed that there is a positive correlation between high level of discipline expected by mothers and the youth attitude towards homosexuality (P=0.006).The same correlation is found with 90% probability for family settings with disciplinarian fathers (P=0.072).

Variables of positive, negative or unresolved sexual identities of male youth and the level of discipline expected within the family are correlated with 90% of probability (P=0.08) and this correlation is not detected for female youth in the same situation. Results clearly show that more of male youth (70%) who showed diffused or a negative sexual identity represented authoritarian family environments expected high level of discipline. Families demanded low discipline too apparently result youth with negative sexual identities. Obviously percentage of positive sexual identities increased with a moderate level of discipline and this pattern is inconsistent with female youth. Higher level of discipline, with a marginal variation appears to produce both positive and negative identities for female youth.

Love and premarital sex

Another set of variables proved marginal differences between semi-urban and rural families pertaining to the youth sexual identity development within the family. 63% of semi-urban youth compared to 59% of rural youth had love affairs. Unlike as it happened several decades ago, youth's long term economic dependence on the family appears not to hinder the prevalence of love marriage [Caldwel, 1999]. Above comparison supports the early research finding that 'the autonomous mate selection and romantic love are common in societies with nuclear families than extended fam-
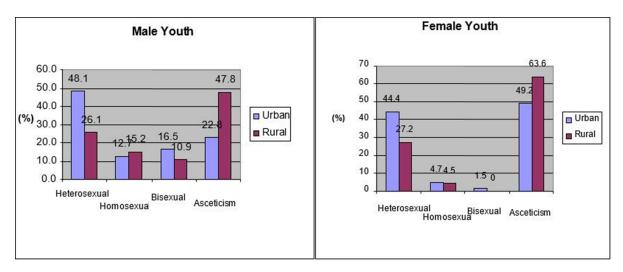
Figure 2: Male and female sexual orientations by living sector (Source: Field Research, 2012).

ily systems' [Weeks, 1999]. Yet, results convince of the narrowing gap between the urban and rural youth. Attitude towards the premarital sex and marriage of parents too marginally varied between two sectors. 55%-59% of both urban and rural youth were in the attitude that premarital sex is wrong whereas at least 17% of youth in both sectors see premarital sex as desirable. However, more of rural youth held a negative attitude towards the premarital sex.

Youth, sexual identity and experience of abuse

Semiurban, rural disparity in the context of sexual identity development can be further viewed in terms of vulnerability for sexual abuse. Experience of a sexually abusive childhood or healthy familial grounds for the psycho-sexual development becomes a precursor of the positive or negative sexual identity development of the individual. Abused children show the maladjustments such as the risk of depression, suicide, and drop in intelligence, low self-esteem and easy distraction. As adults they may abuse drugs or engage in violent crimes [Calhoun et al., 1997, Schultz & Schultz, 2001]. In addition, some of the sexually abused children might experience sexual preoccupation, sexually deviant behavior, and sexual dysfunctions or might even become the future perpetrators [De Silva & Hobbs, 2002]. On the other hand the assumption can be developed that risky familial environments may hold young or adolescent children as the potential victims of child sexual abuse. Incest is a common but secretive state of child sexual abuse that happens within

the iron curtain of the family. More of rural youth (15%) compared to 8% of semi-urban youth had encountered sexual abuse as children.

Sexual orientation

Sexual orientation of the individual is stressed as a vital constituent of sexual identity. Perplexities between sexual identity and sexual orientation have been unresolved for some scholarly writing. Carroll (2007) mentions that sexual behavior, sexual fantasies, emotional attachment and sexual self as constituents of the sexual orientation. Yet, it is 'more acceptable to view sexual orientation as a continuum from exclusive heterosexuality to exclusive homosexuality' [Santrock, 1995]. Sexual identity is built on the basis of the sexual orientation. Sexual identity rather seems to work as a self imposed label largely backed by the sexual orientation. Despite of one's real sexual orientation an individual might maintain slightly a different identity ["Sexuality", n.d.]. Nonetheless, sexual orientation remains the most critical factor of formulating the individual sexual identity. Graphs below support the comparison of existing sexual orientations of youth in both semi-urban and rural sectors.

This comparison (Figure 2) between semi-urban and rural sectors convince the relative low prevalence of sexual behaviors in the rural sector. Except to the high prevalence of asceticism, above graphs depict obviously a low expression of sexual orientations in the rural sector. 48.1% of semi-urban male youth disclosed their heterosexual orientation compared to only 26.1% of rural male. For females the semi-urban and rural percentages of openly disclosed heterosexual orientation remain

as 44.4% and 27.2%. Bringing contradictory results to some of the early research about sexual behavior evidenced more prevalence of homosexuality in urban Sri Lanka [Thalagala et al., 2004] this sample reveals slightly more of rural male youth (15.2%) have a homosexual orientation at the point of research compared to 12.7% of semi-urban male youth. Bisexual orientation was more prevalent in the semi-urban sector that is 16.5% of semi-urban male youth and 10.9% rural youth. Same value for female youth remains as low as 1.5% for semi-urban female youth while zero percent presence reported from the rural sector.

Another vital observation in this backdrop is that rural male and female youth were less aware or not expressive of their sexual orientation compared to their urban counterparts. On the other hand, female youth in both sectors were sexually less expressive and less awareness of their sexual orientations. Percentages of female youth displayed a homosexual or bisexual orientations remain very low. This result matches with the below argument.

> *Traditionally women have been socialized to be more concerned than men about the context (love, commitment and security) as a condition for sexual expression. By contrast men have traditionally been more sexually aggressive and pleasure focused and independent of the relationship context* [Knox & Schacht, 2005].

This text provides us more power understanding the above shown less sexual expression of female youth. We are in a position to argue that lack of sexual expression not necessarily means that they have unresolved sexual orientations. Females may naturally disclose their sexual orientations on the grounds that the context assures some emotional security.

Parent-youth communication and sexual identity

Parent-youth communication in relation to the sexuality related matters marginally vary between semi-urban and rural families. Communicative parents in regard to the issues of sexuality become a vital determinant of the sexual self development of youth. Wijesekera (1990) held the view that 'subjects related to sex and love are seldom discussed in homes and such matters may mention among elders only'. It is clear that facts of life in regard to sexuality have been less communicated in the parent-child relationship in traditional Sinhalese society. An overwhelming majority of both semi-urban and rural youth do not communicate sexuality related matters with parents. Early research points out that having such communication with parents is beneficial for the female youth. Adolescent girls those who were more sexually active reported to have less frequent and less supportive communication with their parents than to the sexually less active female adolescents [Santrock, 1996]. In the sample, 71.2% of female youth with a positive identity and 84.6% female youth with negative or unresolved sexual identities had no sexual communication with parents. Generally youth who are with both negative and positive sexual identities had very low level of such communication with their parents. Intensity of sexuality related communication with parents is not correlated with the positive or negative sexual identities.

Social class, family and sexual identity of youth

The study considered whether the social class could become a determinant of the sexual identity development within family. Social class is a multifaceted concept. Income, education, occupational category, type of housing, neighborhood and possession of symbolic goods are some of these indicators of social class. This study utilized family income and level of parental education as the determinants of social class. A number of early researches have revealed the relationship between social class and the sexuality of the individual. Middle class seems to maintain a monopoly over the healthy and hygienically practiced of sexuality. Unhealthy or immoral practices have been attributed to the lower class impoverished groups [Hawkes, 1996]. Although, class constitutes a different opportunity structure that can influence the individual at different directions, analysis of data does not generate a sound relationship between the social class and the process of sexual identity development within family. Education of parents as a class criterion does not relate with the sexual orientations of youth. Only noted association in this context is the relationship between the family income and youth indifference to the masculine or feminine gender roles within the family (P=0.012). For a majority of youth (56.2%) who represented the middle income group treated masculine or feminine roles in home indifferently.

Inter-sibling communication and sexual identity

Sibling influence on the sexual identity development is under researched in the Sri Lankan experience. There is some research evidence on foreign cultures tackled this issue. Siblings may influence each other in gender role learning within the family, being a 'social mirror' and a model. This influence may vary on the basis of the age of siblings. Siblings may also become a source of competition and a trigger of jealously towards each other [Knox & Schacht, 2005]. The gender of siblings appears to make a subtle influence and family settings exclusively with male or female siblings obviously affect the development of gender roles.

As low as 8% of youth communicated sexual issues with their siblings as 92% mentioned they are shy as it is impossible or unnecessary to talk sexual matters with siblings. Nonetheless, talking about marriage partners was not so difficult and about 47% of youth reported to have such communication. Obviously slightly a more percentage of female youth (9.5%) communicated sexual matters with siblings in comparison to 6.5% of male youth. However, a vast majority of both male and female youth found not to be in such communication. Early research has revealed that only about half of the young people subjected to the study get on well with their siblings and it has been attributed to a prevalence of 'sibling rivalry' [Fenwick & Smith, 1998]. It was noted that 47% of youth were in inter sibling communication about marriage. Within the sample of youth, 79% disclosed that they received no sibling admonition. About 13% of youth found brother as the main source of admonition compared to 8% who found sister as the main source of admonition. Though a strong correlation is not observed, a considerable proportion of youth (21.2%) who currently have no sexual alliances reported their elder siblings are in the same position. This research finds only very limited associations that ratify the influence of siblings on sexual identity development as far as inter-sibling communication is concerned.

More of males those who communicated sexual matters with siblings preferred such communication with the elder brother whereas the preference for female youth was the communication with younger sister. Younger brothers, sisters or the elder sisters were least selected as partners for communication as far as male youth are concerned. More of youth who communicated the issues of marriage and sexuality with sisters reported that they are more satisfied with the advice received, when the sister is older (P=0.025) and when sisters spent more time in home (P=0.045). Higher the number of hours sisters stay in home siblings tend to think that they do not engage in sexual relationships (P=0.034), and this relationship is not observed for brothers stay at home. Higher the age of the brother, the number of youth who are satisfied with the brothers' advice increased (P=0.006). Youth attitude in regard to whether their brothers had a stable sexual relationship is correlated with the brothers' status of being married or unmarried. Children are likely to behave more negatively with siblings than to their parent [Santrock, 1995]. Another siblings related issue noticed is that unresolved sexual identities of the elderly siblings appears to make an impact on the early settling of the sexual identities of the younger sibling. Further noted that in case youth is with a minority sexual orientation that has been a reason for grater familial disharmony.

Family and the precursors of sexual identity confusion

Sexual identity falls in to the category of sensitive data that demands careful capturing of the subjective reality. The study contained ten in depth case studies of youth who were found to have diffused sexual identities. Confusion of sexual identity can be attributed to a state in which the individual lacks a stable identity in which he or she is confused with sex roles not being able to identify appropriate roles to follow. Such a confusion can motivate individual to undertake roles which are perhaps socially unacceptable so that branded as deviant [Feldman, 1992]. All case studies revealed a range of factors that can be taken as precursors of unresolved sexual identity within the family.

Case study

Wathsala (23) had been with her mother, brother and grandparents since the death of her father due to a road traffic accident. She was just twelve when in the midst of extreme financial hardships her mother left for foreign employment. She was never happy with her mother who was very strict on them. She could continue her education only up to grade nine where she appeared to lose the in-

terest. Wathsala and her brother lived with grandparents got inadequate financial support from the mother so that she had to work in a near by timber shed supporting her grandmother's family. Grandfather has been alcoholic and a bisexual. She had witnessed how he forcibly had sex with her grandmother. She was shocked to see her brother too being sexually abused by the grandfather. She says that she did not know how to mediate with the situation and she had learnt to be oblivious to the happenings. At the age 18 she had had an affair with a worker who was in the timber shed but it has been a temporary affair. Her mother's arrival did not make things better for her as her mother initiates an affair with another man in the timber shed. With the time mother's lover gets friendly with Wathsala and it has ended the man raping her in the absence of her mother. It seems that this sexual alliance continued and result was her pregnancy resulted an illegal abortion. Being in her pregnancy her plan for suicide has too been abortive. She had tried jumping in front of the train while she was on a pilgrim with neighbors. She had increasingly become hostile with her mother. Today she lives alone with another two friends. She acknowledges her status as a sex worker. She has no connection with her family and her brother has fallen out with her. She does not think of marriage or she does not seem to be serious about what future holds for her. She has a number of casual sexual alliances and she plans to come out of this situation soon she met some financial security. Wathsala in her predicament blames her mother.

All case studies including the above mentioned, helped noting below facts that can be listed as the identified precursors of negative sexual identity development within the family.

- Absence of parents
- Negative body image
- Unresolved sexual identities of elder siblings
- Early parental death
- Lack of emotional support within the family
- Too permissive family
- Lack of fathering
- Strict disciplinarians of parents

- Wrong parental models
- Poor parent-child relations
- Abuse and unexpected shocks
- Communication

Loss of father and the single mother in side the family leads ineffective discipline and poor monitoring [Rutter, 1998]. Such poor monitoring and the lack of discipline may constitute a permissive family setting that can endanger the youth inclined at alternative sexual identities. On the other hand, the death of a parent leads a family setting with limited resources such as time, money and energy. This shortage of resources may compel young to be prematurely autonomous [Santrock, 1995]. Yet research in western societies points out that the impact possibly made due the loss of a parent is not the main risk factor [Rutter, 1998]. This conclusion may rather fit with the western social backings, which are blessed with the relatively prosperous economic conditions in the family and strong welfare mechanisms. In the Sri Lankan experience, especially loss of a parent in a working class family may drag the whole family in to the absolute poverty conditions. On this grounds death or loss of parents may become a high risk factor associated with the sexual identity development of youth.

Qualitative analysis captures another high-risk situation associated with parental loss that can potentially harm the vulnerable youth. The death of a parent can result the remarriage of the living parent. Especially a family environment in which the children of both old and new marital union share resources may constitute a conflicting environment. Especially the happening of discrimination towards children can make serious psychological impact on children. Early research reveal that better opportunities for quality education help the ego development of the individual [Kroger, 2004]. Besides some step family environments are found to be physically, emotionally or sexually abusive [Bruce et al., 1995]. Freudian psychology suggests that the proper ego development is the basis of rational behavior and largely its an out come of early socialization take place within the family. Sexual identity rather is an option rationally sorted accepting one's inner self.

Absence of a father and a young mother of sexually active age may bring some different experience for youth. There are two camps of scholars argue on fathers' contribution on the develop-

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ment of children. One group highlights the importance of fathers' influence on several ways where as the other group only emphasized the potential harm that can occur due to the weakening family finance due to the absence of a father. On the other hand the scholars of Freudian camp are with the view that unresolved oedipal complex, 'over protective mothers and distant fathers inhibit the normal masculine development' of male children [Carroll, 2007]. Obviously many of male youth in the sample have very poor communication with their fathers so much so that in some family backgrounds such communication is zero and conflicting. All most all cases of male youth with negative or unresolved identity report seriously disturbed and an alienated relationship with father.

Another possibility observed is the apparent link between the loss of a parent and a temporary or permanent development of sexually ascetic orientation. Loss of a parent is an unexpected shock for a child or a young person. Similar unexpected shocks appear to disturb their normal trajectories of sexual identity development inclining them for an ascetic orientation with an inclination towards high religious dedication.

There prevails the notion that attractiveness is considered as a major factor contributes in interpersonal relations. Adolescents in search of their identity, often worry about their physical attractiveness and their capacity to appeal sexuality [Frost, 2001]. The study brings the evidence that prolonged feelings of unhappiness due to self labeling as physically unattractive lead diffused or delayed sexual identity resolution. It is interesting to note that for some individuals, different sexual, religious or caste identities are conflicting in their effort of sexual identity resolution. Their strong identification with the religion appeared to clash with their sexual identities, even up to the extent that it can alter their sexual orientation.

The heterosexual monogamy is the ideal, anything fall short brings immense stress and pressure to the individual. In the Sri Lankan family, revelation of one's homosexual, bisexual or such identities itself is enough to cause a violent shock that leads serious alienation from the family, perhaps in a more severe manner than it happens in the western experience. The logical inference can be build that Sri Lankan family is relatively less supportive for youth who are with sexual orientations other than heterosexuality suppressing alternative

sexual identities and this is mainly due to sexually restrictive cultural norms.

Conclusion

One of the main objectives of this research was differentiating the semi-urban and rural family in the context of sexual identity development of youth. Any drastic contrast cannot be noted between the semi-urban and rural families in regard to the sexual identity development of youth. Yet, this study has identified some subtle differences between semi-urban and rural families that may constitute two slightly different trajectories of sexual identity development. Research revealed that the gender role performance by youth within the family is correlated with the semi-urban or rural status of the family. Proportion of youth engaged in both masculine and feminine branded gender roles remains higher in rural families so that rural families seem relatively successful socializing gender neutrality as far as domestic work is considered. Those who are more engaged in feminine branded domestic roles show high emotional sensitivity and the masculine branded domestic roles typically correspond with the quality of less emotional sensitivity.

Parents in either sectors demand high level of discipline from youth and sectors are not statistically correlated with the degree of discipline demanded in the family. Yet, semi-urban parents demand more discipline from youth. It is proven that high or low demand on discipline within the family becomes a useful predictor of the sexual identity although the impact varies on the basis of the gender of youth. Data supports that youth who are subjected to high disciplinary demands communicate less anything in regard to sexuality with their parents. Positive or negative sexual identities of male youth correlate with the level of intimacy with parents and the same correlation is not observed for female youth. Overwhelmingly higher proportion of youth in both sectors does not communicate sex related issues with their parents. Family environments with disciplinarian parents showed more inclined towards the sexual deviance. For instance, youth in regulative and restrictive family environments had more positive attitudes towards alternative sexual orientations. This study reveals that more of both highly permissive and highly restrictive family backgrounds are in the semi-urban sector. Such family environments can be related with markedly increased sexual behavior and mi-

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nority sexual orientations prevalent among semi-urban youth in comparison. Intensity of all forms of penetrative and non penetrative sexual behavior is obviously higher among male and female urban youth. The nuclear family has not been tolerant of fully autonomous mate selection to the extent it happens in the West. More of rural youth in the sample reported sexually abusive childhood. Although, there is no established correlation between autocratic family and the sex related anxiety, many youth from disciplinarian families report high degree of fear and anxiety immediately after the sexual activities.

The high prevalence of sexual asceticism and non-penetrative sex should be viewed as a form of buffering against the infiltrating sex related western values. This cultural buffering or resistance in Sri Lankan backdrop is exceptionally strong so that the pace of sexual liberalization has been slow. State policy on family still remains fairly conservative leaving a little margin for alternative lifestyles. On the other hand, the less opportunity for leisure, in the western sense that comes up parallel to the economic prosperity is absent. Girls who were more intimate with parents are found to be in an ascetic orientation. However, above facts suggest that intimacy with parents seems to be more crucial on male youth rather than it does for female youth.

In the Sri Lankan experience, many of such alternative orientations in youth is understood as temporary conflict in sexual identity resolution. It is clear that many of rural youth in minority sexual orientations are very unlikely to organize themselves as a sexual minority. It seems that they hardly can conceptualize the issue. Yet, in fast changing urban experience, lack of formally defined space for sexual minorities can bring unintended deleterious consequences as they informally organize being backed by the social media.

No direct relationship between the social class and the sexual identity development of youth is noted and the possible impact is rather indirect. Educational background of the family, as a strong determinant of social class, is not related with any of sexual identity types. Numbers of sexual partners, premarital sex or sexual self-esteem do not depend on the social class of youth. Parental efforts of inducing religious behavior correlated with the sexual identity of male youth yet not for female youth. Percentage of male youth with negative sexual identities increases in non-religious and moderately religious family backgrounds where as the positive identities are common feature of religious families.

Very low sexuality related communication take place among siblings. More female youth appear to communicate sexuality related issues in comparison to the male youth. Male youth who communicated sexual matters with siblings preferred such communication with the elder brother. Such preference of communication for female youth was the younger sister. Younger brothers and the elderly sisters were least selected as partners of sexuality related communication. Findings as a whole suggest that siblings play a less important role as a useful channel of communication in regard to the sexual identity development. A range of characteristics bound with the risky family backgrounds is brought in to the light. Death or the non availability of parents seems much associated with the risk of negative or unresolved sexual identities. Lack of surveillance within the family makes highly a permissive family environment that is not conducive for healthy sexual identity formation. The risk is likely to be aggravated in case of step families or if the family is in socially hazardous neighborhood. Death of a parent is likely to make the risk of young people being prematurely autonomous that can lead harmful self-experimentation. Shock unexpected due to the loss of a parent or similar loved one seems to be a potential factor that can alter youth's normal trajectories of sexual identity development. This study develops ground for the hypothesis that extreme sibling rivalry between the opposite sex siblings might cause negative sexual identities. Unresolved sexual identities of the elderly siblings appear to make an impact on the early settlement of the sexual identities of the younger siblings.

In Sri Lankan experience, realty of having a negative sexual orientation is much unlikely to be a situation that can expect emotional support within the framework of family. Logical inference is built that the Sri Lankan family which is with the traditionally set values of the heterosexual monogamy, is relatively less supportive for youth who are with alternative sexual identities. Added to this, youth's other social identities such as religious or caste identity appear to conflict within their efforts of sexual identity resolution. All persons who encounter the potential risk within family may not end up in negative identities and this convinces of the mysteriousness of the concept of sexual iden-

tity. So far known as well as unknown biological and psychological predispositions and above noted socially and culturally induced environmental factors may cause the sexual identities branded as 'negative'.

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