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**STUDY OF THE DESPERATE FUTURE OF ELDEST CHILDREN IN RURAL FAMILIES**

**Dr. B. V. N. Wijewardhana**

*Ph.D (Criminology) University of Sri Jayawardenapura, Mphil (Criminology) University of Sri Jayawardenapura, PG Dip. (Psychology and Counseling) University of Colombo, BA (sp-Hons) (Criminology) University of Sri Jayawardenapura. Senior Lecturer in Criminology, Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of Sri Jayawardenapura*

**Abstract:** In fact, it is increasingly recognized that nearly 70% of Sri Lankan communities still living in rural settings or in close proximities of plantation sector with minimal infra structural facilities. Hence they used to earn their living income either being employed in the plantation or through other ways, and it is typical that eldest children are entrusted to take care varied family needs when parents are busy in their daily work. Taking care of younger brothers and sisters, cooking, washing clothes are some of the tasks assigned to them. However, it was revealed that this practice had ushered negative effects such as higher drop-out on education and also causing diverse impact on their childhood.

The objective of this study is to identify the causes and effects that influence the

adolescents due to the prevalent causes explained above. Also intended to diagnose the impact caused on the adolescents and their education and psycho-physical growth and very specially to study possible strategic interventions that can set in motion within rural communities to create positive living status of children and adolescents as well. It is also necessary to initiate productive dialogue too, to discuss best possible ways to implement appropriate social action once the facts revealed on the poor responses of parents such as the carelessness or disregarding risks of abusing adolescents. In this regard, a sample survey was steered in 12 villages comprising with a sample of 475 families within 5 Divisional Secretarial divisions.

**Key words:** Adolescents, Childhood, Desperate Future, Rural, Social Work.

## INTRODUCTION

Societies living in territories which cannot be branded Geographically as "townships", and also those living within moderate agro-based product cycles, following respective concepts on land ownership etc., also living with simple social organizations can be delineated as "Rural communities". Typically, there is a value of traditional means of living, and in addition rural communities preserve a closer affiliation with the nature which is supported by the prevailed geographical attributes. Customarily, the children in rural societies join the process of education, yet, an extremely low fraction of children take initiatives to continue education to reach higher academic levels. There are several reasons affecting to disrupt the education of rural children such as; the inadequacies of basic infra-structure, conceptual draw backs, poverty, powerlessness and the slow-go process of social change and growth speed in comparison to urban societies that happens due to the barriers of traditional views and feelings.

In particular, there are specific income earning methods in practice; Agriculture, traditional industries, income earning activities connected to plantation sector, self-employment are some of them. A large majority of those participating in the above living means are also dependents of subsidies or lending made available by different agencies, however a large majority of rural communities live with absurd poverty, with low per capita income. In addition, they suffer from nutritional deficiencies, and varied interconnected diseases too. In this milieu, even sociologists accept the fact that the only path to eradicate poverty is to attain an achieved status through an empowered community via education. Furthermore, when the birth rate in rural sector is concerned it shows a higher rate in comparison with the birth rate in urban sector. A notable prominence in the rural economy is that the poor in the habit of 'filling stomach' by ad-hoc daily earnings rather than focusing on future expectations. Conversely, due to the conscientious role of parents to earn income as a daily practice, it is unavoidable that the grown children in those families are attributed on crucial roles. Thus, it becomes obligatory that children need to be engaged on wide-ranging activities such as land preparatory work, domestic affairs, agricultural activities going beyond the primary tasks of educational activities. This has also resulted that even schooling children take decisions to avoid attending schools on particular days when there are activities planned on agriculture or similar work either in their own family or in a neighboring family. Similar incidences have been disclosed via researches too, done by agencies such as National child protection bureau of Sri Lanka. The role of children in particular those adolescents are essentially involve in activities to assist parents or relatives even after the schooling time and such conduct has crucial impact on the role of grown children. As a whole it is essential to diagnose the decisive impact of poverty in the rural sector which demonstrates varied backdrops such as; dependency on state driven subsidies or credit transactions, closure of rural schools, continuing dropout rates, pre-matured marriages. At a glance, one can visualize these complicacies as debt burden, due to low educational facilities, shortage of infra-structure and so on, yet, it would be extremely appropriate to understand the grounds of causes and reasons affecting the continuation of above incidences for a long time. In this respect, this Research paper deliberates on factors beyond outwardly assessed facts, but to determine broadly the impact of causes and effects of the unconsciously done ascendancies on children in their childhood, subsequently, their effects on the grown children and very specially when they reach adulthood what type of socio-economic, cultural psychological settings to be in existence.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The common assumption in the literature—led by the influential, theoretical work of Basu and Van (1998)—is that child labor is driven by income poverty. In analyzing quantitative and qualitative evidence in the agrarian economy of Ghana, this paper tests the hypothesis of the “luxury axiom” by Basu and Van that a child only works when household income drops very low. Not only has no research topic on child labor received more attention than this relationship between child labor and monetary poverty. But also much research on child labor, while often citing its non-poverty influences, views household poverty as the most important determinant. This is not unexpected as the majority of studies on child labor are conducted by economists who tend to focus their analysis on the subset of economic sources of child labor.

On the empirical side, because most studies do not combine and enrich household survey analysis with qualitative data analysis, they often ignore important factors such as cultural norms or attitudes about child labor that are generally not well captured in household surveys. On the theoretical side, the discussion on child labor is driven by theoretical models that at times implicitly claim to identify universal ‘truths’ as they often a priori contain the causes of why children work and the preset policy responses. They often neglect the idiosyncratic and heterogeneous sources of child labor, i.e. the specific traits of different groups of children of different gender and age involved in different economic activities in different geographic areas within different countries with different norms and institutions over different seasons and time periods. Thus, while a strong interrelationship between household poverty and child labor appears intuitive and is argued and modeled theoretically at the global level (e.g. Basu and Van 1998; Bardhan and Udry 1999; Dessy and Vencatachellum 2003).

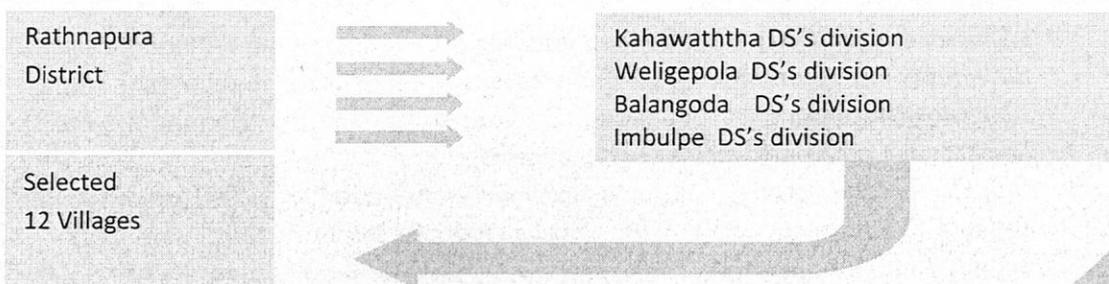
## OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

1. To ascertain the status and the role of elderly child of families in rural societies.
2. To study the effects and causes resulted due to the status and role in prevalence and how those had affected the childhoods of particular children.
3. To identify the causes and effects those affected the role of adulthood and identify related problems.
4. To design actions to control problems related to the rural families and to propose approaches to empower rural community.

## METHODOLOGY

### Study area and Sampling

#### (a). Study area



**Table 01 Study area**

Divisional Secretarial divisions	Names of the Villages
Kahawatta	Kotakethana, Dimbulwela, Nugawela
Waligepola	Paragahamadiththa, Ilukkumbura, MedaganOya
Balangoda	Pettigala, Hatharabage,, Mahawalatenna
Imbulpe	Imbulpe, Aluth Nuwara.

**Table 02 Study Area Sampling**

Divisional Sec. Div.	No. of respondents	Male	Female
Kahawatta	162	202	
Weligepola	101		
Balangoda	114		
Imbulpe	98		
<b>Total</b>	<b>475</b>		<b>273</b>

For the research sample, 475 individuals (Male 202 and Female 273) were selected in 12 villages at the rate of 3 villages in each of the four Divisional Secretarial divisions. Selection of the sample was attended through a survey. In the case of selection of adolescents and adults for the research the respondents were from the age limits in between 14 to 40 years irrespective of gender.

**Data collection**

1. Selection of the sample of respondents for the research was achieved through a sample survey done in each selected village
2. In the process of data collection from respondents, the research team used a survey questionnaire and the information were gathered in focus of their living pattern, family backgrounds, status of employment and the details in pertinent to the socio-economic environment , too.
3. The survey respondents were represented varied categories of personnel such as; elders, Teachers those who currently employed and retired teachers as well, GN officers, Police officers and several categories of Govt. employees. Process followed in survey was in different modes such as;
  - 3.1. Interviews conducted based on the questionnaire.
  - 3.2. Focus group Discussions (FGDs) – Gathered cross-checked information via. com. Groups
  - 3.3. Chain of discussions
4. Also gathered information on the key respondents
5. Case stories / Case studies - 20 respondents were categorized for shared information on analytical and diagnostic data and formulated a set of case stories.

Desk research: In addition to above processes the research team pursuit information interconnected to the life style of rural poor, by studying inclusive reports / documents such as; research studies done previously. Also collected inclusive details through documents available in DS's offices, school attendance registers and the police reports.

**Results and Discussions:**

Age ranges of respondents in the research sample are as follows;

**Table 04 Sample survey outcomes: Structured age limits of respondents (n=475)**

Structured age limits	Female ( 273)	Male (202)
Between 14 – 18 years	42	49
Between 19 – 25 years	147	94
Between 26 – 35 years	64	35
Between 36 – 40 years	20	24
<b>Total</b>	<b>273</b>	<b>202</b>

(Field Research – 2017)

As per the above table 04 ; 42 females and 49 males represented the age category of (14-18) ; and 147 females and 94 males represented within the age limit of (19-25) ; while 64 females and 35 males epitomized age category of 26-35; whereas 20 females Vs. 24 males signified the age group of (36-40) and it was mandatory and also treated as a pre-condition that all above respondents were to be eldest children in respective families, which was the key criteria to enter into the research.

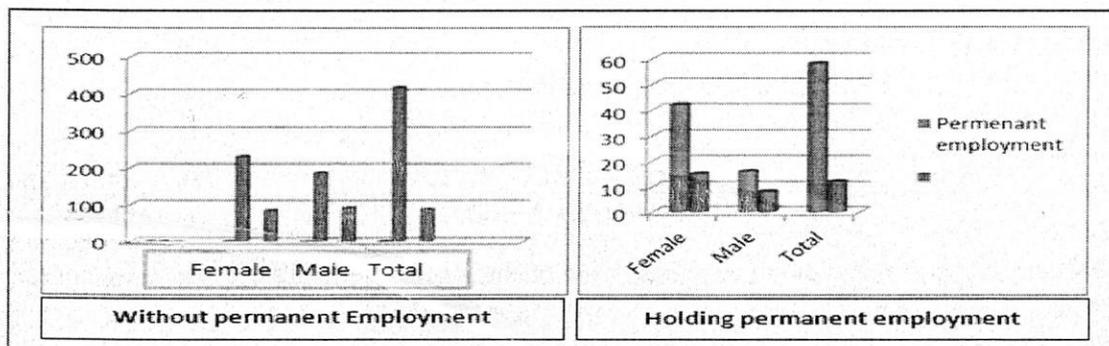
**Table 05- Sample survey outcomes - Current Status of Employment of the respondents**

(It is notable that the number of respondents who were permanent employees of Government at the time of interview was an extremely a low proportion)

Holding permanent employment	Without permanent Employment
Female- 42 (15%) - (n=273)	231 (85%)
Male - 16 ( 8%) - (n=202)	186 (92%)
58 (12.2%) - (n=475)	417 (87.8%)

(Field Research – 2017)

**Chart 01 - Current Status of Employment of the respondents**



It was revealed that, 15% of female and 8% of male found to be employed on permanent basis. Also disclosed the fact that those employed on permanent basis were designated as Samurdhi officers, Grama Niladhari, Agri. Officials which are jobs got through politically blended relationships. In contrast, the overall data reflects that only 12.2% were regular employees and 87.8% were without fixed income. Also revealed that the parents of those permanently employed had been qualified to join Govt. employments and the Children of this category of families had found job opportunities having reached educational qualifications.

#### Case Story –1. Articulated by a 29 year old school teacher.

*“Both my parents are school teachers. So, attending schools daily on time was possible since we could join them to go to school and to return home without difficulties. I also could attend homework assigned in classes without failure and could get through needed exams, thereby; I could join the employment as a Teacher. My younger brother is a Clerk. We didn’t have tasks to attend at home other than the home-based studies assigned by teachers”.*

#### Case Story –2. Uttered by a mother of four children having completed 28 years of casual labour work.

*I could not continue my education. I am the eldest in my family. There were three young ones also in my family. Living means of my parents were strongly connected to Agriculture. I was entrusted by parents to attend domestic tasks while taking care of the three youngsters and also to help parents as and when necessary on diverse tasks. The said tasks absorbed my time entirely and there was no space for me to attend studies at home. I could study only up to 7th grade. At that time I could start a friendship with a guy in my village during my adolescent age. One day I left the family with the guy secretly to live together and to live through a changed life style. Now I am undergoing enormous amount of hardships. All four children are employed as coolie workers.*

The above expressions affirm that the prevailed socio-economic environment had the power either to preponderate or to support the job seekers to find a permanent job.

The table below illustrates processes of economic propensities of 417 respondents those who without economically sound livelihoods.

**Table 06- Outcomes of Sample survey - Distribution of employment /Livelihoods**

Nature of employment	Female (n=231)	Percentage	Male (n= 231)	Percentage
Self employment	22	9.5%	11	6%
Coolie work	42	19%	49	26.7%
Agro-based activities.	68	29.3%	24	13%
3 Wheeler drivers	04	1.5%	43	23%
Mining industrial jobs	06	2.5%	19	10%
Daily casual income earners	34	14.5%	29	15.6
Returned after overseas jobs	09	3.8%	01	0.4%
Not engaged in Income acts.	34	14.5%	07	3.7%
Other	12	5.2%	03	1.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>100 %</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>(417)100%</b>

(Field Research – 2017)

(The data shown in Table 04 affirmed that none of the jobs shown therein is not subjected for monthly regular income).

### Case story – 3. Disposed by a 3 Wheeler Driver – 31 years old

*"How we are entitled to be employed under higher positions? We are not educated. Chances available for us to continue education was limited. Being the eldest in the family the entire home based tasks were put on us. We carried out all assigned work except education since there was no desire to continue education. Sisters could continue education desirably. Employment-wise they are now in better positions. Yet none of them living in the village and they don't like to come to the village."*

In summary, one of the outcomes emerged through this male and female sample was, as confirmed by more than 58% respondents that their younger sisters have reached somewhat higher social status, progressive levels of education, better economic status. One other factor came to light was the greater commitment and dedication rendered by the elder children had enabled younger ones to attain a better positions.

The sample survey has disposed that there had been a disorderly background that had disintegrated children to continue education.

**Table 07- Outcomes of sample survey - Levels of Education**

Level of education	n = 231		n =186	
	Female	Percentage	Male	Percentage
Not attended school	07	3%	13	7%
From 1-5th. grade	72	31.5%	63	34%
From 6th.-10th. grade	81	35%	76	41%
Succeeded in O'level	39	17%	13	7%
Upto A'level	10	4.3%	13	7%
Passed A'level	12	5%	6	3%
Dip. Certificate holders	2	1%	00	0%
Entered Universities	8	3%	2	1%
Other	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>100%</b>

(Field Research – 2017)

The entirety of outcomes of the sample, exposed that 65.56% have studied up to 5th. grade, while 76% has gone up to 10th. grade and had discontinued the education. The following findings have been affected to bring to a halt of education.

**Table 08 -: Outcomes of sample survey – Causes affected for the discontinuation for education**

Reasons affected to discontinue Education	(N =417) Percentage
Due to the added work pressure at home	72%
Priority had to be given to take care younger sisters.	81%
Mother's migration or separation from married life	42%
Continued sickness of parents	63%
Involvement in Agri. Support activities	71%
Found a job	39%
Other	05%

(Field Research – 2017)

**Case story 4 : 22 years old mother of one child**

*“Father is a drunkard. Mother suffers due to a sickness in the chest. I was compelled to find a job so as to enable the continuation of education of my younger brother and the sister and also to find money to meet medical expenses of mother. After a while I found a job to work as a house maid in a house in Colombo. I studied only up to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade”.*

The detailed outcomes of the survey confirms further that being eldest in the family he or she had to sacrifice enormously.

The Inclusive view of the overall research on the children who were the eldest in their families.

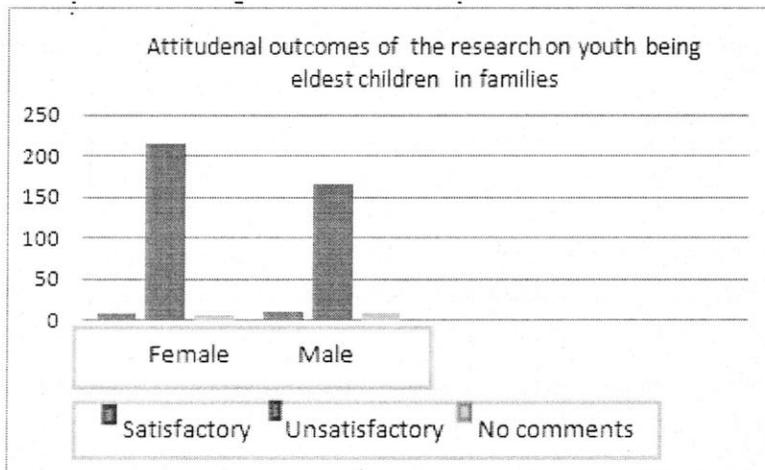
- To become the eldest in the family was a favorable outcome
- To become the eldest in the family was unsatisfactory
- No choice

**Table 09 – Attitudinal outcomes being the eldest in the family**

Female (n=273)	Satisfactory		Unsatisfactory		No choice	
	09	04%	258	93.5%	06	2.5%
Male (n=202)	Satisfactory		Unsatisfactory		No choice	
	11	06%	187	89%	04	05%

(Field Research – 2017)

**Chart 2: Attitude of respondents being eldest in the family.**



(Field Research – 2017)

Further revelation of facts attended through discussions, interviews, questionnaire and case stories to discover what were the gains or losses of respondents those being eldest in their families.

Table 10 - Advantages vs. Disadvantages being eldest child in the family

Statement	n = 417	
	Advantageous (Percentage)	Disadvantageous (Percentage)
*Spent childhood in a peaceful atmosphere	7.62 %	92.38%
Found time for education	6.5%	93.5%
No negative acceptance found within the family	12.82%	87.18%
Experience gained were satisfactory	9.2%	90.8%

(Field Research – 2017)

**CONCLUSIONS:**

The above illustrations disclose the fact that a large majority of children / adolescents declared that their childhood was affected negatively being eldest in families. The said disadvantageous outcomes had contributed for existence of varied social complications such as; lost livelihood, marriages in premature stages, inability to find good employment, continues poverty as a social menace, low education, joining with illegal gangs, habituated on alcoholism and harmful drugs including family clashes. It is a common feature that children in present generation gets indirectly varied bitter experiences from the elders. Undeniably, in this current situation, it is doubtful in achieving expected results by way of launching different social advancement or relief packages. Owing to this situation it would be necessary to pay more attention on the human resources and to evolve services of proficient social workers to handle social assets in a beneficial way. When the prolonged poverty in rural sector or the poverty pockets existing is concerned one leading factor affected was the extreme low priority given to empower the community to assist children to access uninterrupted education. Evidently, those who managed to continue education amidst of varied obstacles could manage their family lives in a better fashion as revealed through the research. Yet those who didn't enjoy childhood in a peaceful manner are the adults seemingly enjoying disadvantageous benefits in their current living.

AS A WHOLE, the decision can be arrived at to accentuate the need of basic facilities by children to enjoy their childhood in a meaningful manner with measures to relieve eldest children from unbearable burdens, while also empowering children to access uninterrupted education including access for vocational training facilities having added with job opportunities instead of continuing investment on baseless actions such as conventional development programmes, provision of credit facilities, relief assistance etc., Otherwise it may not possible to address rural poverty and problems continuing on varied directions totally disrupting the peaceful setting in rural localities.

**PROPOSALS / RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. To usher a positive atmosphere in rural settings in order to fulfill the rights of children
2. To take stern action by the staff of relevant authorities such as Child protection bureau probation institutions against child labour practices in particular among the children not attending schools. Concerned officials need to report progress accordingly.
3. Highest possible number of Programmes to be launched to change attitudes within family units.

4. To design strategic actions to intervene directly to surmount the problems leading for school drop outs while keeping direct contact on the vulnerable children.
5. To focus in a wide scale to empower opportunities for education as an essential part of rural development exertions.
6. Elevated emphasis is paid to strengthen access of children in rural areas to secure their access for rights.

This research document has attempted to emphasize a number of socially distressing elements which are creating path to erode social values in a drastic manner and these elements are constituents hidden within the rural poverty. One important and crucial factor heighted herein is the distressful family setting that keeps childhood away from eldest children mainly in poverty stricken families by putting lot of pressure on them and such tradition keeps their rights away from them which causes enormous negative results and the proposals made herein are aimed that right authorities will follow those proposals to address the said upheavals.

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