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SRI LANKA JOURNAL
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POPULATION
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CHANGING FAMILY STRUCTURE IN SRI LANKA

Manori K. Weeratunga* and Graeme Hugo**

Abstract: *This paper discusses the influence of demographic and socio-economic factors on the changing family structure in Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan family has undergone significant changes during the post-independence period as a result of variety of demographic and socio-economic transformations that the country was exposed to. The family transformation experienced over the years in the changes of the nature of family from the extended to nuclear family system eroded the traditional roles and responsibilities of the family and its members. Equally, mortality decline leading to the increased longevity extended the number of living generations while fertility decline has reduced the number of children in the family. Implications of marriage patterns also have made marked changes in the family structure. Moreover, the urbanization and migration especially international labour migration made structural changes of the family in Sri Lanka because of the volume for migration observed after late 1970s. The out-migration has also been more heavily contracted among females, leading to a slight shift sex ratio of the working age population. Generational inequalities of the population have occurred as a result of the changing age-sex structure of the Sri Lankan population. Its impact on the family structure is substantial. The age-sex structure of the population has changed considerably by increasing aging of the population and decreasing the population in the younger age cohorts.*

Key words: Family transformation, family composition, intergenerational relationships, modernization, value of children

Introduction

The structure and functioning of the family has undergone significant change in Sri Lanka in the post-independence period as both a cause and consequence of made social and economic transformations. Sri Lanka has almost completed the demographic transition with low mortality rates and fertility rates approaching replacement levels. A key part of the explanation for those changes lies in the shift in the nature of the family. The traditional family comprised a large number of members due to several generations living together and large number of children. In rural settings, children were an economic asset to work in farm and household enterprises. The production of goods and services was largely household-based and having a large family made both economic and social sense. However, widespread social and economic development over the past five decades has brought about changes in the family size due to fertility decline and migration of young person's to urban areas for employment.

An important feature in the modern family system is the changing attitude towards the value of children resulting from the decreasing economic benefits from children to the family. Furthermore, with changes in economic structure and urbanization,

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growth of employment opportunities in urban areas and in the Free Trade Zones and numerous industries, a large number of females are seeking employment outside the home. There is therefore, no doubt that family roles and responsibilities have been transformed as a result of the changes that are taking place in the family structure (Abeykoon and Elwalagedera, 2008). There has been a transformation from dominance of emotionally extended families to a nuclear family system. This paper discusses the influence of demographic and socio-economic factors on the changing family structure in Sri Lanka. Census data and data from Demographic Health Surveys are used to investigate the demographic, socio-economic factors that have contributed to the changing family structure in Sri Lanka. In particular it examines the influence of changes in the fertility, marriage, migration, education and intergenerational relationships.

Family

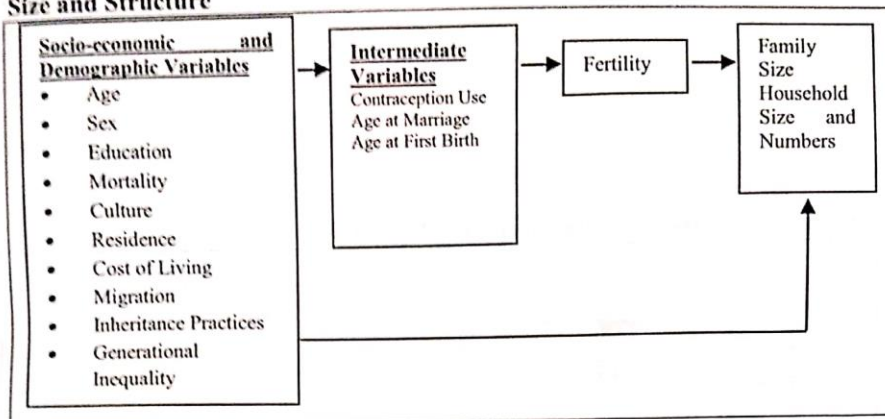
The family within the household, a concept of particular interest, is defined as those members of the household who are related, through blood, adoption or marriage. The degree of relationship used in determining the limits of the family in this sense is dependent upon the uses to which the data are to be put and so cannot be universal. The Sri Lankan literature has not hitherto defined family separately and 'household' has been used interchangeably to define family as well. Furthermore, concepts of 'household' and 'family' have been used interchangeably. The composition of a family mainly depends on biological relationship between members with household is based on certain types of living arrangements. As provided by the Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka, the definition of household includes one or more than one family, or one or more families live together with one or more non-related persons, or can comprise of non-related persons (Abeykoon et al, 2008).

Theoretical Underpinnings

A logical framework is required to comprehend how socio-economic and demographic determinants influence family structure in Sri Lanka. The framework needs to demonstrate how these socio-economic and demographic determinants are related. The model developed in the present paper is shown in figure 1 and based on the Davis/Blake (1956) analytical framework. The level of education of women is often found to be inversely related to fertility. Where there is delayed marriage there is evidence of low fertility hence small family sizes. Available evidence suggests that among the educated and well informed, marriage is relatively late and the use of contraception is more frequent (DC &S, 2009). Those who marry late plan their families and use contraceptives to space their children in order to have desired family sizes. In order to maintain high standard of living, families prefer small family sizes. Similarly, women spending to extent their education delay childbearing and complete their bearing children the latter years of reproduction, and hence have fewer children. Some writers (Thornton et al, 1993; McDevitt et al. 1996) claim that age at marriage is of special concern because it signifies the transition to adulthood in many societies; the point at which certain options in education, employment, and participation in society are foreclosed; and the beginning of regular exposure to the risk of pregnancy and childbearing. Variation in age of entry into marriage helps explain differences in fertility across populations and also helps to explain trends in fertility. International labour migration in Sri Lanka has also become a significant

factor influencing family change from the early 1980s. It can weaken family structure because of couples' separation for long periods of time. This can also create conflicts in the family and even divorce, hence weakening the family structure.

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework: Socio-demographic Determinants of Family Size and Structure



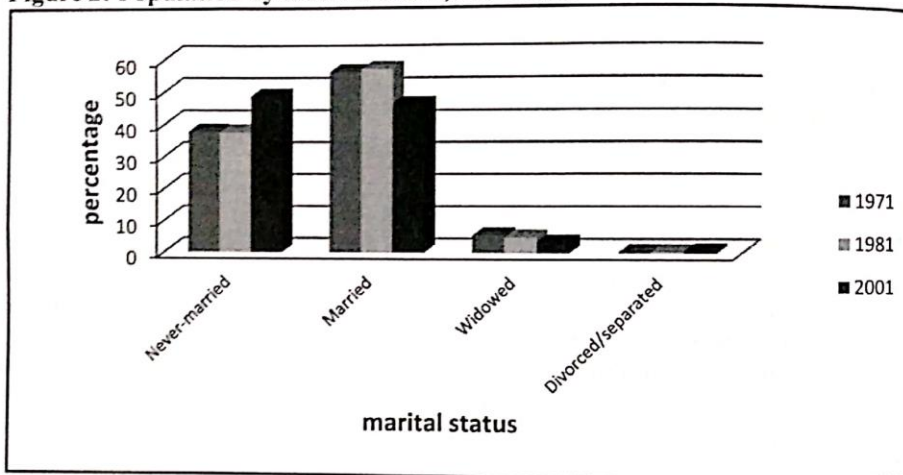
Marriage and Family Structure

In most Asian societies including Sri Lanka, marriage defines the onset of the socially suitable time for childbearing (DHS, 2006/7). Nonetheless, age at marriage differs across social classes and ethnic groups, from poorest to richest and from lowest to highest education levels. Women in some groups marry earlier than those in other groups. Women who marry early will have, on average, a longer period of exposure to pregnancy, frequently leading to a higher number of children ever born. Marriage has been identified as a factor that fuels changes to the family structure in Sri Lanka (Dissanayake, 1995, 2003). Statistics on marriage are largely associated with demographic variables such as fertility. Caldwell (2001) articulates that in Sri Lanka the mean age at marriage is closely associated with childbearing, especially operating through women's educational attainment which gives rise to female autonomy. In Sri Lanka age at marriage showed a 6 years increase during the latter part of the 20th century and was accompanied by a shift from family-arranged to self-selected (or love) marriage. This can be mainly attributed to socio-economic changes which lessened the centrality of the family in wider social and economic relations, and placed a greater emphasis on individual abilities and attributes. In Sri Lanka, marriage is regulated by customs and laws that vary widely between groups. There are three main ethnic groups living in Sri Lanka, namely Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslims, and four main religions: Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. In Sri Lanka, the term marriage fundamentally refers to monogamous unions between one man and one woman. Although polygamy is permitted among Muslims, it is infrequently practiced in Sri Lanka.

Statistically the intensity of marriage is declining. Figure 2 demonstrates that the never-married population has significantly increased after 1981 and consequently the married proportion has considerable declined. Although the women's role in the

traditional family is limited to childbearing and household work, increased female education after the mid-1940s has had a substantial impact on changing their role within the family in Sri Lanka (Dissanayake, 1995). This is also reflected in the nature of marriage. It has been claimed that the near disappearance of differences in marriage types (love or arranged) by education is due to the imitation of the educated group's behaviour by the uneducated group among the first generation with mass schooling. This has been continued by subsequent generations as more people tend to marry romantically. It has been shown that girls have more opportunities to start love affairs since they have more freedom due to their increased enrolment in higher education institutions (Dissanayake, 2000). This shows that women tend to acquire more freedom within the family and within the society because of their increasing participation in education and subsequent employment.

Figure 2: Population by marital status, 1971-2001



Source: Various reports from Department of Census & Statistics, Sri Lanka

Women often delay marriage when other more attractive alternatives are present, especially with increasing female labour force participation rates as was observed in Sri Lanka especially during the 1980s. Running alongside this is the general increase in the age at which various family transitions are experienced. In the light of ever lengthening life spans, individuals have been given the time and the liberty to make certain decisions concerning their progression through adulthood. There are indications that this is leading to delayed commitment to long-term adult partnerships and childbearing. Women in particular, are now able to psychologically justify delaying marriage and child bearing as rates of both infant and maternal mortality have declined so rapidly over the past years. However, both men and women are undertaking life transitions at older ages. Thus, in Sri Lanka young people are leaving home at a later age.

As mentioned previously, marriage patterns are important determinants of fertility levels. The postponement of marriage contributes substantially toward reduction in the level of fertility by limiting the total reproductive lifespan of the female, the cumulative effect of which influences the size of the individual families, and the

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population growth rate of the country (De Silva, 2012: 09). Sri Lankan marriage trends show that during the past decade the female age at marriage has increased by almost by seven years. Postponement of formal family formation in Sri Lanka is reflected in the behaviour of the rate of marriage measure, the singulate mean age at marriage (SMAM) of females. The table 1 shows the trends in singulate mean age at marriage from 1901 – 2006/7. The increase of SMAM in Sri Lanka is dramatic, which had increased by almost five years, from 18.3 years in 1901 to 23.5 in 1971.

Table 1: Trends in Singulate Mean Age at Marriage

Year	Male(years)	Female(years)
1901	24.6	18.3
1911	26.5	20.8
1921	27.0	21.4
1946	27.0	20.7
1953	27.2	20.9
1963	27.9	22.1
1971	28.0	23.5
1981	27.9	24.4
2000	-	24.6
2006/07	-	23.6

Source: Department of Census and Statistics from 1901-2000, DHS 2000&2006/7

Total Fertility Rate (TFR) since it can be interpreted as the appropriate number of children women have when they have completed child bearing is a strong determinant of family. TFR values for Sri Lanka from 1946-2006 are presented Table 2. It shows that the TFR declined from 5.5 in 1946 to 1.9 in 2000 and indicated a slight increase from 1.9 in 2000 to 2.3 in 2006/07. Sri Lanka is the only country in the South Asian sub-region to achieve such low level of fertility before the turn into the 21st century, and ahead of the targeted time frame by the United Nations (De Silva, 1994). It is particularly striking that major fertility declines in Sri Lanka occurred when the country's economic growth was slow and a large proportion of the population was still rural (Caldwell, 1993).

Table 2: Total Fertility Rates, 1946-2006

Year	TFR
1946	5.5
1953	5.3
1963	5.3
1971	4.2
1981	3.4
1982-87	2.8
1988-93	2.3
1995-2000	1.9
2003-2006	2.3

Source: 1946-1981- Census Reports, Department of Census and Statistics, from 1982-87, 1988-93, 1995-2000 and 2003-2006 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), Department of Census and Statistics

Fertility decline in Sri Lanka occurred due to the combined effect of substantial social development and the effective implementation of family planning programmes. It became irrational for many people to have large families. An

emerging feature in the modern family system is changing attitude towards the value of children. In traditional societies, where human labour was a source of strength to the family, more children were preferred to fewer (Dissanayake, 1995). However, as the economic contribution from the children in a family decreased, partly because of a move away from agriculture, the requirement for large numbers of children decreased. Improvements in health care and child survival also contributed. In this context, the stress was on the quality rather than the quantity, of children (Dissanayake 1995).

Impact of Labour Migration on Family Structure

Migration of one or more members of the family can influence the way in which the family functions and the way in which roles are distributed within the family. The absence of particular family members, on either a permanent or temporary basis, will shape family structure, both in destination and origin areas (Hugo 1987). The family has to adjust in the roles of members left behind. For example, during the husbands' absence, the wives may take over several of his roles in order to maintain family functioning, such as handling more agricultural tasks (Siegel 1969; Colfer 1985; Rodenburg 1993) or acting as a de facto household head (Hetler 1986).

Migration is a significant feature of Sri Lankan society and economy in terms of the numbers involved and the beneficial contribution to the country. Female participation in foreign employment was 51.7 percent out of total departures of 247,119 in 2009 (SLBFE, 2009). Most who departed in 2009 were housemaids. Most striking is that 42 percent of women who migrated as housemaids were aged between 30 and 44 years. This indicates that women of childbearing age tend to seek higher incomes through overseas employment. International, unskilled and semi-skilled labour migration began after 1977 due to opening up of opportunities in the Gulf regions. It is estimated that Sri Lankan people currently employed abroad is about 1.7 million (SLBFE, 2009). These employees brought foreign exchange earnings in 2009 which was 47.03 of total foreign exchange earnings of the country (Central Bank, 2010). Foreign employment through international migratory flows from the 1980s has become the highest net earner of foreign exchange in Sri Lanka. The share of females in foreign employment was 24 percent during 1986-87 periods but increased to 51.73 percent in 2009. Hence, the share for males was 48.27 percent in 2009.

Huge infrastructure development projects took place in the Middle-eastern countries during the mid-1970s and 80s attracted a large number of Sri Lankan unskilled or semi-skilled men while women were recruited as housemaids (De Silva, 2012). In the initial phase, the labour recruitments were facilitated by private agencies without any policy guidelines from the Government but when the volume of migration became significant, the Government set up its own Foreign Employment Bureau to manage and protect labour migrants (SLBFE, 2009). Gradually, South-East Asian countries also have started recruiting labour migrants from Sri Lanka.

The increasing rate of international migration has produced a significant number of transnational families as a result of dispersion of family members in different countries. Transnational families consist of core members residing in two more countries but continue to share strong bonds of collective welfare and unity (Basch

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et al, 1994). Sri Lanka has been producing transnational families as a consequence of the increasing rate of international migration. Migrants in transnational families who work particularly as domestic workers overseas negotiate family responsibilities with their family members at place of origin through monetary and non-monetary remittances as well as via communication (Ukwatta, 2010). Transnational families with absent mothers for a significant proportion of the growing up of their children have become more common in Sri Lanka over the past few decades because of the increasing participation of women in overseas employment as domestic workers. There are not only economic benefits to families and the Sri Lankan economy but also social costs to the families (Ukwatta, 2010). While they typically make arrangements to ameliorate the effects of spatial separation forced by migration, there are numerous challenges to themselves and to their children left behind.

A most important aspect of the labour migration is its influence on structural changes of the family (Hugo, 2002). Although the international labour migration is temporary there is a substantial effect on family structure. The majority of international labour migrants are in the reproductive age groups, especially the peak age of capacity for childbearing. Undoubtedly international labour migration has through reducing the time exposed to the risk of becoming pregnant reduced family size. Table 3 demonstrates that departures for foreign employment have accelerated after the 1980's which has had a substantial impact on family structure. At present, over 250,000 persons leave Sri Lanka annually for foreign employment mainly as contract employees in the Middle Eastern countries (SLBFE, 2009). In recent years, the out-migration has been more heavily focused towards women which lead to a slight shift of the sex ratio of the working age population (DC & S, 2003). Table 4 shows that 39.9 percent of the migrants were in the prime reproductive ages of 25-34 years of age.

Table 3: International Labour Migration, Departures for foreign Employment, Sri Lanka 1986-2009

Year	Male		Female		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	
1986	11,023	76.25	3,433	23.75	14,456
1990	15,377	36.08	27,248	63.92	42,625
1996	43,112	26.52	119,464	73.48	162,576
2000	59,793	32.82	122,395	67.18	182,188
2006	90,170	44.65	111,778	55.35	201,948
2009	119,276	48.27	127,843	51.73	247,119

Source: Information Technology Division, SLBFE (2010), Airport Survey 1992-1993, SLBFE

Table 4: Departure for Foreign Employment by Age Group and Sex, 2005-2009, Sri Lanka

Age group	Average (2005-2009)		Total
	Male	Female	
19 & below	1.5	1.6	1.5
20-24	17.3	13.2	15.1
25-29	25.3	19.5	22.2
30-34	16.9	18.2	17.7
35-39	13.5	16.9	15.3
40-44	9.6	15.3	12.7
45-49	6.7	9.3	8.1
50 & above	6.1	5.0	5.5
Not identical	3.0	1.1	1.8
Total	100	100	100

Source: Information Technology Division, 2010, -SLBFE, De Silva 2012

Two characteristics of migrants which are gender identity and marital status have a considerable impact on the family (Devasahayam, n.d). For married women migrants, whether they are professional or low-skilled, mobility in search of employment impacts on family structure because mothers tend to be the central point of social relationships in the family (Devasahayam, n.d; Devasahayam, 2003). Hence, if they are separated from the family for extended periods, the family has to acclimatize (Asis, Huang and Yeoh, 2004).

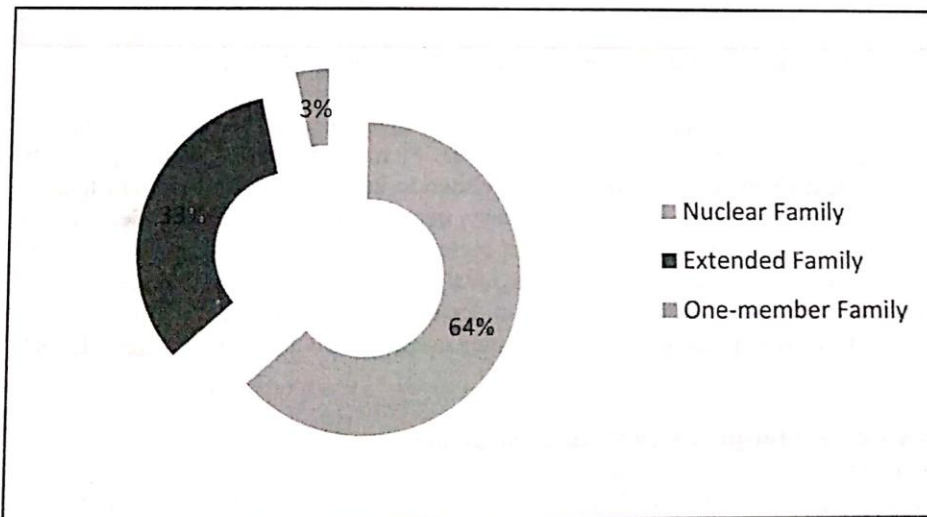
Only 25.9 percent of primary caregivers (PCGs) were fathers while others were close relatives of the children with nearly three fourths being female, the majority of them grandmothers (Migration and Health Fact Sheet, 2012). A national study on families left behind (Migration and Health, Fact Sheet, 2012) showed that 73 percent of migrants were in the age group 20-34 years out of which 67 percent of migrants were married and 67 percent had children. It was also found that married mothers leave behind 2-3 children an average which means that up to one million Sri Lankan children are deprived of mother's care (Migration and Health, Fact Sheet, 2012). The study also showed that among pre-departure migrants, there are a high proportion of children in the younger age-group 1-10 years. About 23 percent had one or more children between the ages of 1 and 3 years while 32 percent had children in the age group 4-6 years. This phenomenon has led to 'a dynamic process of reconfiguration' of traditional forms of raising families, as migrant women negotiate long-distance mothering while left behind children cope with absent mothers (Sobritchea, 2007). The reconfiguration of gender roles depends largely on which parent migrates for work. In the case of the woman migrating, this phenomenon calls in to question the "male as breadwinner" role model. From the perspective of migrant women, while migrating for work has increased their status and enhanced their decision-making power in the family as they are actively contributing to raising the levels of well-being of the family (UNESCAP, 2008, Ukwatta, 2010); married migrants face tremendous challenges in playing the mother role. For these women, 'good' mothering entails engaging in activities of 'multiple burden and sacrifice', spending 'quality time' during brief home visits, and reaffirming the 'mother influence and presence' through surrogate figures and regular communication with their children

(Sobritea, 2007). In spite of engaging in these activities, many reported feeling a sense of failure in this role, especially if they handed over the basic responsibility of caring to their relatives. Some also confessed feeling guilt for not caring for their own children while they cared for the children of other women (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002). While it cannot be denied that women migrant workers do find empowerment in their role as financial providers in the family, but many end up feeling that they have not lived up to the cultural notions of 'good mothering' because their work physically takes them away from their children. Thus, migrating for work comes with heavy social costs (Rahman and Devasahayam, 2004). In contrast, married male migrants with children do not feel a similar social pressure; if they were away from their families for work, their children only perceived this to be an extension of their breadwinner role (Parrañes, 2005).

Fertility and Family Structure

Changes in fertility have also contributed to changes in family structure in Sri Lanka. Considerable changes in marriage have played a role in the destruction of the old family structure through late marriage and low fertility rates. According to the SLDHS 2000, there was a 64% of nuclear family structures compare to 33% of extended family structures in Sri Lanka as depicted in Figure 3. The transition from arranged marriages to romantic marriages is not a recent phenomenon but it has had profound effects on family structure in Sri Lanka (Dissanayake, 1995). This has subsequently led to the formation of nuclear families as result of imitating western middle class culture which was acquired partly through the education system.

Figure 3: Type of Family, Sri Lanka, 2000

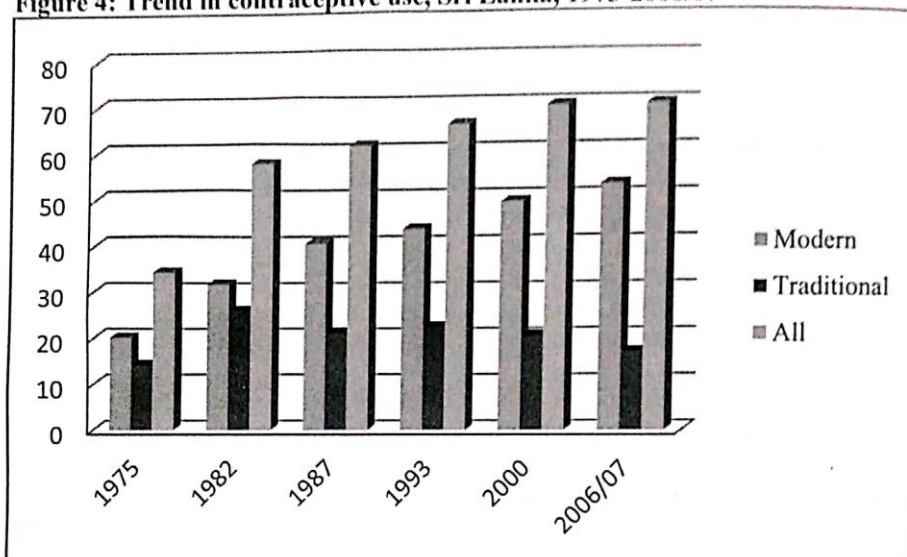


Source: DHS 2000, Department of Census and Statistics

Information on fertility preferences is of considerable importance to understanding the changing nature of family structure in Sri Lanka. Data on desire for more children provides an indication of future reproductive behaviour given that the necessary family planning services are available and accessible to permit people to realize their fertility preferences. According to the SLDHS 2006/07, there was a

considerable desire among Sri Lankan women to control the number of births and their timing. Among currently married women, 60 percent either did not want to have another child or were already sterilized. An Additional 17 percent desired to postpone the next birth by two years. Finally, 15 percent wanted a birth soon, and most of these women at the time of the survey had no children. Almost half of women wished to have two children, and nearly 30 percent prefer three children. This behaviour was heavily influenced by the increasing use of contraception in Sri Lanka. The trend in the use of contraception is presented in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Trend in contraceptive use, Sri Lanka, 1975-2006/07



Source: 1975: SLWFS, 1982: SLCPS, 1987; 1993; 2000; 2006/7: SLDAHs

The positive relationship between the ideal family size and the actual number of living children can be due to several reasons. First, to the extent that respondents implement their preferences, those who wished to have bigger families will tend to achieve larger families. Second, respondents may regulate upward their ideal size of family as the actual number of children increases (i.e., rationalization by reporting their actual number of children as their ideal number). It is likely that respondents with large families, being on average older than those with small families, have larger ideal sizes because of attitudes they acquired 20 to 30 years ago (DC&S 2009).

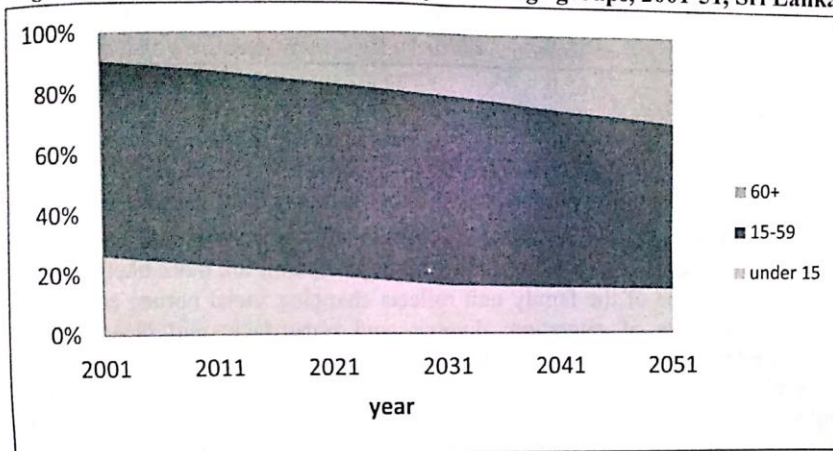
Generational Inequality and Family Structure

Generational inequality has had significantly influence on the family structure in the country. The sustained decline of fertility observed after 1960 has significantly affected the age structure to gradually move away from its broad base, where the majority were in the younger age groups due to high fertility that prevailed before the 1960s. When the Sri Lankan population of 1981, 2001 and 2010, is compared, a gradual reduction of population in the child age category is observed. Demographic and socio-economic changes have occurred in Sri Lanka since independence, have shifted the balance between generations such as elderly parent generation, adult-

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children generation and children (or grand-children) generation. Figure 5 shows the distribution of population by broad age groups from 2001-2051. It demonstrates the changing increasing proportions of older and younger person. The proportion of children (that is, persons under 15 years of age) is projected to decrease from 26.27 per cent in 2001 to 14.9 per cent in 2051 while the proportion of persons of aged 15 to 59 tend to change gradually from 64.5 per cent in 2001 to 56.2 per cent in 2050.

Figure 5: Distribution of Population by broad age groups, 2001-51, Sri Lanka



Source: drawn from De Silva, 2007

The proportion of persons aged 60 years or over was lower than (9.2 percent) the proportion of children (26.3 per cent) in 2001 but by 2031, the trend in both categories changed into the opposite direction by showing 20.7 percent for the aged 60 years and over while 16.1 percent for the children below 15 years of age. By 2051, the proportion of children is projected to decline to 14.9 per cent, whereas the proportion of older persons is projected to reach 28.8 per cent.

In a society where everyone has a large number of children and few people survive to very old ages, grand parents would be in short supply for children, but individuals who survive to older age tend to have many grandchildren (Harper, 2003). Most elderly today have children, and many have grandchildren and living siblings. However, in countries with low birth rates, future generations will have less potential care and support for older people from their families in the future due to changing structure of the family (United Nations 2009).

As life expectancy increases in most nations including Sri Lanka, it is highly likely that several generations are alive at the same time. In more developed countries, this is manifested as a "beanpole family," a vertical extension of family structure characterized by more but smaller generations (Harper 2003, Bengston *et al* 1990, Goldman 1986, Hagestad 1986, NIA & NIH, 2007: 16). "As mortality rates continue to improve, more people in their 50s and 60s are likely to have surviving parents, aunts, and uncles. Consequently, more children will know their grandparents and even their great-grandparents, especially their great-grandmothers.

There is no historical precedent for a majority of middle-aged and older adults having living parents" (NIA & NIH, 2007: 16). Table 5 shows the life expectancy at birth of males and females. There is an increase of life expectancy at birth by sex from 1975-2030. It also shows higher female life expectancy at birth and the gender gap is almost 6 years. It means the female partner may live 6 years after death of her male partner. This will result in a significant number of female households in Sri Lanka in the near future.

Table 5: Life Expectancy at birth by sex 1975-1980-2025-2030, Sri Lanka

Year	Male	Female
1975-1980	65.0	68.5
2000-2025	69.9	75.9
2025-2030	74.4	80.3

Source: United Nations 2009

When the life expectancy at birth increases the number of surviving generations in a family may also increase. However, today these generations are more likely to live separately. The shape of the family unit reflects changing social norms; economic security; rising rates of migration, divorce, and remarriage; and blended and stepfamily relations (Silva, 2004). In addition, more adults are choosing not to marry or have children at all. Even in societies with strong traditions of older parents living with children traditional living arrangements are becoming less common (Panigrahi, 2009). In the past, living alone in older age often was equated with social isolation or family abandonment. However, research in many cultural settings (World Bank 2006; Uhlenburg 1996; Martin 1988; DeVos 1995) shows that older people prefer to be in their own homes and communities, even if that means living alone. This preference is reinforced by greater longevity, expanded social benefits, increased home ownership, elder friendly housing, and an emphasis in many nations on community care. Older people who live alone are less likely to benefit from sharing goods that might be available in a larger family, and the risk of falling into poverty in older age may increase as family size falls. On the other hand, older people are also a resource for younger generations, and their absence may create an additional burden for younger family members.

It is critical to understand the position of older generations in systems of family support, both as recipients of help and also as potential providers of assistance to children and grand children (Andrews and Hennik 1992; Butterfil 2003). Among the consequences of successful family planning programmes have been population ageing and declines in family size. While both are welcome transformations, these phenomena have elicited concerns from both policymakers and researchers about the capacity of families to sustain the support of older members during a process of rapid demographic change. In addition, socio-economic changes, such as rising rates of women's participation in the labour force and increased geographical dispersion of families, have implications for resource flows between adult children and their ageing parents (Caldwell 1982; Martin, 1989; Mason et al, 2005; Knodel et al. 2005).

Changing Family Structure in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka Ageing Survey (2007) found many interesting features in relation to living arrangement of older adults in Sri Lanka. The majority of Sri Lankan elderly live with their children and only 6 percent live alone. About 77 percent of elderly live with their children in either of two arrangements: with their spouse and children (40 percent) or only with their children (37 percent); elderly who live with their 'spouse only' comprise younger, well-educated and economically sound. elderly who live only with their children include the more aged, widows, and those with less education; elderly who live entirely alone comprise a great share of older widowed women, with little education; Among those living alone, women appear to more vulnerable than men; only about half of all Sri Lankan elderly consider living with children to be the best living arrangement.

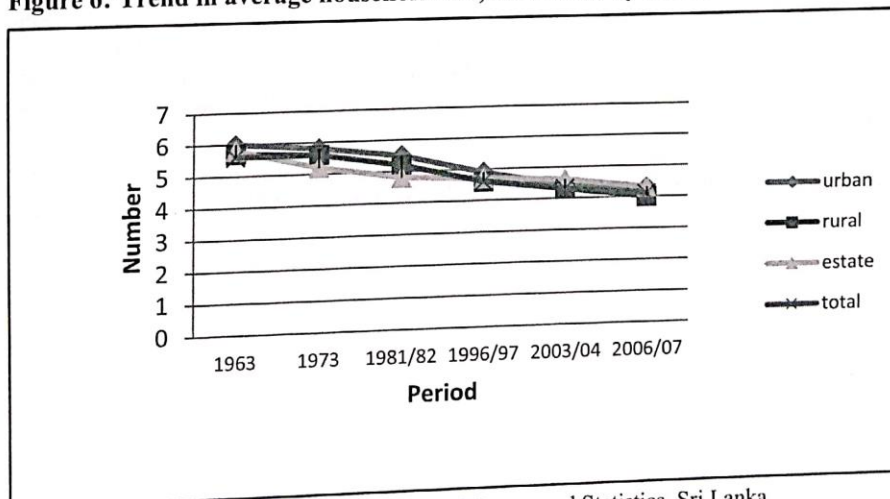
Family, its composition and structure

The ways in which Sri Lankans are grouping themselves into families has undergone significant change. This is a function of major shifts in the demographic, economic and social processes which impinge upon the size structure and functioning of the Sri Lankan families.

Trends in Household Size

It is apparent from Figure 4 that major change in the size of the household arose from the 1980s and this is even true for all the sub-sectors of the population. The household size of the urban, rural and estate sectors have started to converge into a similar size from the mid-1990s as depicted in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Trend in average household size, Sri Lanka by sector

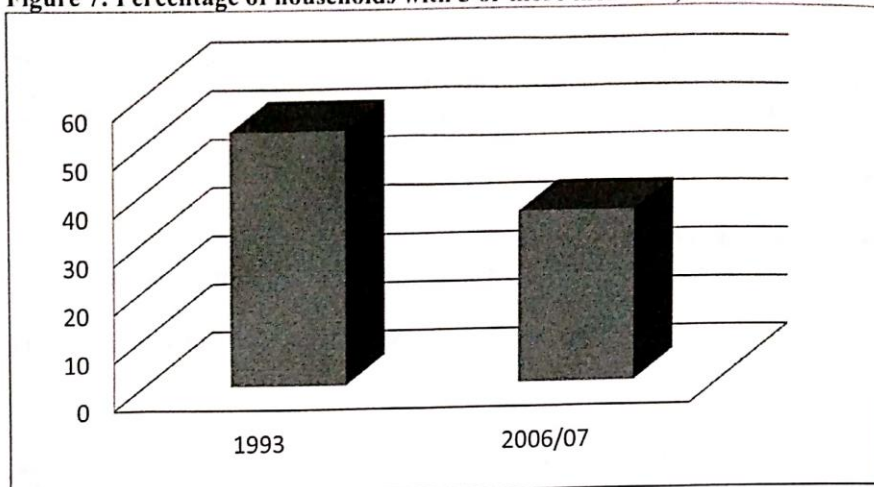


Source: Various reports from the Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka

In the Asian context, families with relatively large number of families have been the norm but this has tended to decline over the years (De Silva 2005). As Figure 7 shows, Sri Lanka had a significant decline in the percentage of households with 5 or more members from 52.6 in 1993 to 35.4 in 2006/07. However, 35.4 percent of families with five or more members can still be regarded as relatively large in the

global context. The decline of the size of the family could be attributed to reasons such as economic difficulties, cost of education, and higher expectation for standard of living (Dissanayake, 2012).

Figure 7: Percentage of households with 5 or more members, Sri Lanka

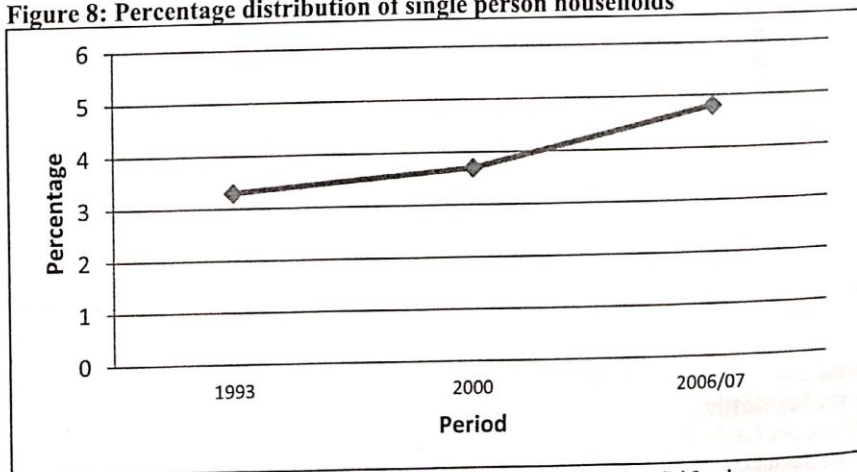


Source: Various reports from the Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka

Single Person Households

Although single person household were virtually non-existent in the first half of the twentieth century in Sri Lanka, Figure 8 shows that the proportion of single person households is increasing exponentially during the past few decades adding a new dimension to family structure in Sri Lanka. This is a result of population ageing, international migration, and disasters such as tsunami and the thirty year-long civil war.

Figure 8: Percentage distribution of single person households



Source: Various reports from the Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka

Changing Family Structure in Sri Lanka

Female Headed Households

The Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2009/10 estimates that out of 5 million households in Sri Lanka, 1.1 million households or 23 % of the households were female headed. The majority are in the age group 40-59 years are more than 50% are widows while a small percentage (4.5%) has been reported as never married. It is also important to note that this survey did not include Mannar, Mullaitivu and Killinochchi districts as there was a massive programme on the clearance of landmines in those districts at the time. As the latter two districts were heavily affected by the war, it is quite reasonable to accept that there will be significant proportion of female headed households although actual numbers cannot be determined at present. Most of these women are also poor, rural and their specific needs should be identified and addressed. Current policy intervention identifies female headed households as target beneficiaries but do not address women farmers' needs or others in the rural sector. A full range of categories of women should be included and their needs are mainstreamed into policies, programmes and projects. Many internally displaced persons and refugees have been resettled or relocated; most of their livelihoods were land resource based. Therefore, they also need assistance to recommence their original livelihood activities or to start new ones. Women should be recognized as producers contributing to their household economies to ensure that they too receive resources and inputs for income generation. In this regard, the government's effort to recognize women as the head of the household in instances where she shoulders the responsibility of the family through legal provisions needs to be supported. In addition, equal right of access to productive resources such as land can further create supporting institutional framework.

Conclusion

Historically the family structure in Sri Lanka has always been changing, as most of the nations in Asia. As already mentioned, socioeconomic and demographic factors fuelled the changing of family structure in the country. Changes in fertility have contributed to changes in family structures in Sri Lanka. Considerable decline in marriage played a role in the destruction of the old family structure through late marriages hence less fertility rate. A major emerging feature observed in the modern family system in Sri Lanka is the changing attitude towards the value of children. As the economic contribution from the children in a family decreased, because of a move away from agriculture, the requirement for large numbers of children decreased. Improvements in health care and child survival also contributed. In this context, the stress was on the quality of life rather than the quantity of children.

Migration can be regarded as a significant feature of Sri Lankan society and economy in terms of the numbers involved and the beneficial contribution to the country. Increasing rate of international migration has produced a significant number of transnational families as a result of dispersion of family members in different countries. Transnational families with absent mothers have become progressively more common in Sri Lanka over the past few decades. This has created social costs to their families. The most important aspect of the labour migration in relation to both males and females is its influence on structural changes of the family in Sri Lanka. The out-migration has also been more heavily contracted among females,

leading to a slight shift sex ratio of the working age population. In addition, a substantial proportion of the migrants were in the prime reproductive ages of 25-34 years of age. This suggests that international labour migration may have had a significant impact on family structure because of the volume for migration observed after late 1970s.

Generational inequalities of the population have occurred as a result of the changing age-sex structure of the Sri Lankan population. Its impact on the family structure is substantial. The age-sex structure of the population has changed considerably by increasing aging of the population and decreasing the population in the younger age cohorts. Since the life expectancy at birth of the population has increased, there is a chance of elderly people to live longer. Consequently, a visible grand-parent generation can emerge in Sri Lanka. This will result in a household to have basically three generations living together and perhaps to observe families with elderly people, elderly living alone, single parent families, female headed households and multi-generational families.

Most importantly, the household size of the urban, rural and estate sectors have started to converge into a similar size from the mid-1990s with the influence of demographic, social and economic changes in the country. Sri Lanka revealed a significant decline of percentage of households with 5 or more members. The decline of the size of the family could be attributed to reasons such as economic difficulties, cost of education, and higher expectation for standard of living. The proportion of single person households seems to be increasing in an exponential pattern during the past few decades by adding a new dimension to family structure in Sri Lanka. This can be a result of population ageing, international migration, and disasters such as tsunami and thirty year-long civil war. It was shown that 23 % of the households were female headed households. The majority of female heads of the households are in the age group of 40-59 years.

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