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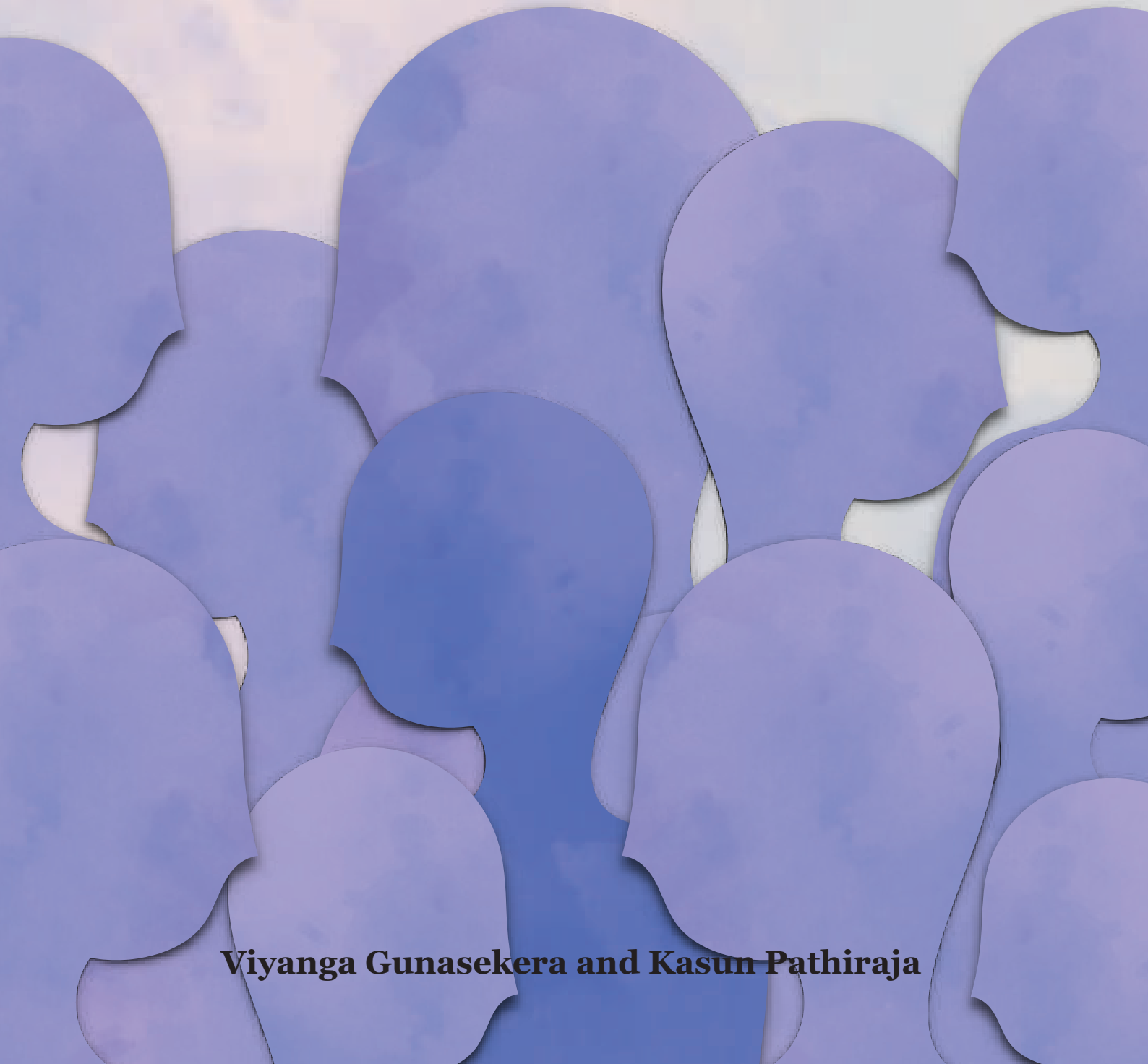
From "Combatant" to Civilian":
The Psychosocial Wellbeing of Ex-combatants in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu, Sri Lanka



Viyanga Gunasekera and Kasun Pathiraja

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From "Combatant" to "Civilian": The Psychosocial Wellbeing of Ex-combatants in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu, Sri Lanka

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Acronyms

ACPR	Adayaalam Centre for Policy Research
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AKASA	The Association of Women with Disabilities
BCGR	Bureau of the Commissioner General of Rehabilitation
CID	Criminal Investigation Department
CPPHR	Centre for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights
CSD	Civil Security Department
CTF	Consultation Task Force
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
ER	Emergency Regulations
EDD	Economic Development Department
GN	Grama Niladhari (Village Officer)
GoSL	Government of Sri Lanka
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICD	International Classification of Diseases
ICES	International Centre for Ethnic Studies
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ILO	International Labour Organization
IT	Information Technology
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of the Tamil Eelam
NAITA	National Apprentice and Industrial Training Authority
NCPA	National Child Protection Authority
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
PADHI	Psychosocial Assessment of Development and Humanitarian Interventions
PARCs	Protective Accommodation and Rehabilitation Centres
PTA	Prevention of Terrorism Act

PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
PWG	The Psychosocial Working Group
RVSA	Rana Viru Seva Authority
SEWCORBs	Socio-Economic and Welfare Coordinating Offices for Rehabilitated Beneficiaries
TEEC	Tamil Eelam Education Council
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
USD	United States Dollars
VTA	Vocational Training Authority
WHO	World Health Organization
ZTF	Zonal Task Force

Executive Summary

After a nearly three-decade civil war, Sri Lankan military forces defeated the LTTE in 2009. According to the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL), some LTTE combatants surrendered to the military, some were captured by the military, and for some there are no records. Some of these combatants were sent to detention centres and some were sent to rehabilitation centres to participate in a government-sponsored rehabilitation programme. The rehabilitation programme was for "one year": six months of rehabilitation and six months of vocational training. After this mandated period of time, ex-combatants were reportedly "reintegrated" to their respective communities.

This study was designed using a concept developed by The Psychosocial Working Group (PWG 2003). "Psychosocial wellbeing" is basically the psychological and social wellbeing of an individual or community (Gauthamadas 2014). The need to analyse the psychosocial wellbeing of ex-combatants was realized because there is limited information on their lives as a vulnerable group of people living in a post-war context. By analysing the psychosocial wellbeing in a holistic manner, it is expected to identify specific areas that seem to affect the overall wellbeing of the ex-combatants' and their community, and by doing so develop better-suited interventions to tackle those issues.

Using the PWG framework as adapted in Colombo (2003), the study explored the current psychosocial wellbeing of ex-combatants who went through the rehabilitation programme, through the accounts of key informants. The ex-combatants could not be interviewed at this stage of the study due to resource constraints; therefore, information was gathered from those who work closely with ex-combatants in the North. The key informants included rehabilitation officers, government officers, civil society representatives, and psychiatrists who work with ex-combatants particularly in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu. Based on 37 in-depth interviews conducted with key informants during June – August 2018, the authors were able to identify multiple psychosocial issues faced by ex-combatants in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu.

With the stigma of being former LTTE combatants, combined with the militarization of society and lack of communality and agency, ex-combatants live in fear of interrogation and harassment, and are excluded from multiple aspects of society. They seem to lead a resigned and passive life. Female ex-combatants and disabled ex-combatants face additional constraints with regard to marriage, securing a sustainable livelihood, lack of basic facilities, and lack of support from the government and community.

The collective trauma due to war and psychological distress experienced by ex-combatants is conveniently overlooked by society at large. Apart from providing basic mental health care, the ex-combatants are excluded by the government from engaging in traditional means of remembering, grieving, and catharsis. The ex-combatants hardly engage in religious or cultural activities, and have limited opportunities and space to express their feelings and concerns.

As above, multiple domains of psychosocial wellbeing are analysed in this study in order to have an overall understanding of the status of ex-combatants in Sri Lanka. The findings of the study point to the conclusion that psychosocial wellbeing of ex-combatants is challenged under each and every domain and that they are in need of immediate psychosocial interventions. Further research can be done to trace the causes and consequences of the issues significant to this vulnerable group of

people. By identifying areas that impede the wellbeing of ex-combatants, better-suited interventions can be developed to alleviate their distresses. However, it is also realized that interventions need to take a consultative approach and the voices of the ex-combatants need to be heard to grasp the ground realities.

Introduction

From July 1983 to May 2009 Sri Lanka experienced a 25-year long armed conflict. The nearly three decades-long war was brutal, tragic, claimed thousands of lives, caused tremendous problems in the political, commercial and the cultural realms, and destroyed valuable property in the country. The insurgents were the Liberation Tigers of the Tamil Eelam (LTTE) who wanted to establish a separate state in the island’s North-East. After several efforts by successive governments, the LTTE was eventually defeated by the Sri Lankan military in 2009. Although the end of the war marked the end of physical violence in the country, it did not solve the protracted ethnic issues that triggered it. The end of the war also left behind complex humanitarian and human rights issues for Sri Lankan society to address.

Any society that undergoes a war is a victim of the destruction of both its human and physical resources. Destruction of property and public infrastructure, protracted displacement, loss of education opportunities, trauma, culture of violence, and breakdown of social networks are inherent consequences of wars. All such consequences result in the disrupted psychosocial wellbeing of those exposed to war. However, the individual’s and the community’s transition from first-hand war experience to “normal” civilian life/community has a significant impact on long-term wellbeing in a post-war context (Hermenau et al. 2013). Any rehabilitation, reconstruction, intervention, and reconciliation initiatives therefore have to be sensitive to the psychosocial needs of the individual, the family, and the community.

In the report “Psychosocial Assessment of the War-Affected Northern and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka: Distress and Growth Post-War” by Usoof-Thowfeek (2018), ex-combatants are identified as a vulnerable group of people among women, children, youth, and the disabled. The report’s findings indicate that ex-combatants are specifically vulnerable to the experience of trauma directly related to combat exposure, and that they are socially withdrawn and unwilling to seek any kind of assistance. The report also brings to light how these ex-combatants are still feared, discriminated against, and ostracized in their communities because of their previous involvement with the LTTE. This makes them more vulnerable as it prevents positive social interaction, which is needed for psychological wellbeing and productive economic participation (see also Porto et al. 2007).

A study conducted on “The transition to Civilian Life of Teenage Girls and Young Women Ex-Combatants: A case study from Batticaloa” by Krishnan (2012) mentions that many of the women ex-combatants bear emotional wounds caused by forced conscription, witnessing of gruesome death, physical injuries of war, loss of education, fear, and severance of close family ties. These ex-combatants may struggle to return to their families and reintegrate with the communities when proper reintegration programmes and needs-based interventions are lacking (see Coulter 2009).

After the war, families and communities expect former combatants to continue with their lives and forget about the past. But this does not happen. A study done by Schauer and Elbert (2010) shows that in a representative sample of 1114 formerly abducted children in northern Uganda, 48% of those who have been forced to stay with rebels for more than one month showed symptoms of PTSD. Dickson-Gomez (2002) showed in a qualitative study of former child soldiers in El Salvador that individuals who have experienced traumatic events are more likely to withdraw from the communities and lose trust in them. A study done in South Africa by Mogapi (2004) shows that

people suffering from PTSD seem to experience serious problems during the reintegration process. Moreover, Mogapi notes that ex-combatants who suffer from mental illnesses have concentration difficulties, are extremely aggressive, have difficulties at work, and these issues lead to experiences of helplessness and depression.

A study done on "Combat related PTSD among Sri Lankan Army Servicemen" by Fernando and Jayatunge (2011) revealed that out of 824 army personnel referred to the psychiatric ward of the Military Hospital, Colombo, 56 were diagnosed with complex PTSD. Furthermore, 17 personnel admitted that they attempted to commit suicide while deployed in the battle zone; 13 reported that they physically abused their spouses. If such is the case for the Sri Lankan army combatants who experienced war and violence, it is highly possible that ex-combatants of the LTTE also suffer such psychological distresses.

There is both a research gap and a lack of interventions to assist ex-combatants in Sri Lanka. Many studies and interventions have addressed other war-affected groups, including internally-displaced people, women-headed households, and child ex-combatants (Usoof-Thowfeek 2012; Somasundaram 2002, 2010b; Kodikara 2018). These studies provide an understanding of the difficulties and ground realities that war-affected people experience after a war. However, there is limited research and insight into the experiences and wellbeing of LTTE ex-combatants in Sri Lanka. A review of research focusing on the impact of conflict on health in Sri Lanka by Siriwardhana and Wickramage (2014) concludes that little is known or researched about the physical health status, modes of recovery, rehabilitation, and/or reintegration to civilian life of LTTE ex-combatants in Sri Lanka. They also mention that epidemiological or other evidence on mental health of LTTE ex-combatants in not available (Siriwardhana and Wickramage 2014).

For these reasons, the present study was designed to explore the psychosocial wellbeing of ex-combatants. According to UNICEF (1997), the term "psychosocial" is the "close relationship between the psychological and social effects of armed conflict, the one type of effect continually influencing the other." Those who experience war may face multiple challenges including displacement, security issues, breakdown of social and economic structures, loss of loved ones, exposure to violent acts, discrimination and persecution, vague legal status, difficulty to access services, loss of one's own social environment, and harassment (International Organization for Migration 2009). Such conditions could leave an individual with a very uncertain and bleak present and future (Somasundaram 2010a). Therefore, by identifying areas that cause distress in ex-combatants, it is expected to set the scene for more rigorous and culturally informed research and interventions.

This study is exploratory in nature and its main goal is to understand the current situation of ex- LTTE combatants in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu. A more comprehensive study of this sample will follow which will capture in more details of the realities of this group and will identify issues requiring attention and intervention.

This paper is arranged as follows. Section one discusses the methodology employed in the study along with ethical considerations. Section two provides an account of the government-sponsored rehabilitation programme for ex-combatants in Sri Lanka, and offers a detailed background on ex-combatants in Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi. Section three discusses the conceptual framework that informed the study. Section four discusses the study findings according to three major themes

(physical and material situation, human capacity, and community life). Section five discusses the conclusions of the study.

Disclaimer

The term “ex-combatants” is used throughout the study to identify those who are commonly known as former combatants of the LTTE. The authors understand that identifying individuals using this term that reflects their past, while for some it may not even be true, can potentially cause stigmatization, and is therefore problematic. However, due to the lack of a better term to refer to this particular group of people, the authors opted to use the term “ex-combatants”.

Section One: Methodology

This paper is based on key informant interviews conducted during June and August 2018, and on analysis of secondary material, reports and statistics. The key informants are those who are working closely with the ex-combatants in Sri Lanka. They work in different capacities and include both government and non-government workers. They were selected based on their current or previous engagement with ex-combatants. Most were from Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi, but few were from the other three districts (Mannar, Vavuniya, Jaffna) of the Northern Province, and some were from Colombo, Sri Lanka. The two districts Kilinochchi[1] and Mullaitivu[2] were selected for analysis in this paper because they were the worst affected areas by the conflict (Gunatilaka and Vithanagama 2018).

Key informants include those who are involved in the Bureau of the Commissioner General of Rehabilitation (BCGR) (district-level post-rehabilitation officers, Commissioner General, former Commissioners, and Director of BCGR), government officers (Grama Niladhari (GN), vocational training officers), civil society representatives (NGO representatives, community leaders, activists), psychiatrists, religious leaders, ex-combatants' political party members, external consultants of the rehabilitation programme, and academics.

The officers of the BCGR are directly involved with the ex-combatants in post-rehabilitation work as discussed in the section Rehabilitation Programme for the Ex-Combatants in Sri Lanka. Some of these officers were also involved in the rehabilitation programme, and had first-hand experience working with ex-combatants. Grama Niladharis (GN) are village officers who oversee each GN divisions. They are government agents who are closest to the communities, and are mandated with identifying and addressing socioeconomic issues of the people. The psychiatrists that were interviewed were from the district hospitals of Vavuniya and Jaffna, and were occasionally consulted by the BCGR when ex-combatants were identified as experiencing severe psychological conditions during the rehabilitation programme.

Civil society representatives, religious leaders, and academics interviewed for the study have had many years of experience working closely with ex-combatants. Some NGO representatives, civil society leaders, and activists that were interviewed are attached to organizations that focus on poverty and other social and economic issues. Some informants are attached to organizations that focus on mental health requirements of those affected by war. One activist that was interviewed revealed later that she was an ex-combatant. However, she opted to speak in her capacity as an activist. The religious leaders were interviewed because people in communities usually reach them when in need of spiritual support. The academics who were interviewed have done previous studies on war-affected communities and reconciliation, and therefore their insights were valuable.

Two members of the ex-combatants' political party (i.e., Crusaders for Democracy) were interviewed because they identify themselves as representatives of ex-combatants. This was the only instance where ex-combatants were directly interviewed.

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1 Population in Kilinochchi was 112,872 (0.6%) in 2012, with a sex ratio of 96.6 (2012), literacy rate of 97.7 (2012) and poverty head count index of 18.2% (2016). (Department of Census and Statistics 2019)

2 Population in Mullaitivu was 92, 228 (0.5%) in 2012, with a sex ratio of 99.6 (2012), literacy rate of 97.3 (2012) and poverty head count index of 12.7% (2016). (Department of Census and Statistics 2019)

Table 1: List of key informants interviewed in the study

Category	Details	Interview Location	Number of respondents
Bureau of the Commissioner General of Rehabilitation (BCGR)	Commissioner General	Colombo	1
	Director of Rehabilitation	Colombo	1
	Former Commissioner General and present Army Commander in Jaffna	Jaffna	1
	District staff	Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu, Jaffna, Mannar, Vavuniya	5
Government officers	GN	Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu	6
	Vocational Training officers	Vocational Training Authority, Mullaitivu	2
Psychiatrists	Attached to Government hospitals	Jaffna, Vavuniya	2
Civil Society representatives	NGO representatives	Colombo, Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu	3
	Activists	Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu	3
	Community leaders	Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu	4
Religious leaders	Catholic priest, Hindu priest	Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu	2
Ex-combatants political party members	Leader and deputy leader	Jaffna	2
External consultants of the rehabilitation programme	-	Jaffna	2
Academics	-	Kandy, Colombo, Jaffna	3
Total			**37**

Key informants were identified through a snowball sampling method. Those who were interviewed initially provided contact information of others who work with ex-combatants in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu. Altogether 37 interviews were conducted for this study. The interviews were semi-structured and were carried out in a way to uncover the psychosocial issues of the ex-combatants after rehabilitation. During the interviews, participants were asked questions based on the PWG psychosocial domains adapted in Colombo (2003).

Interviewees were encouraged to speak freely of their experiences, and provide their opinions and recommendations about the psychosocial issues faced by the ex-combatants. They were also asked about their involvement in the rehabilitation and post-rehabilitation programmes to get an understanding of how the government and other organizations are assisting this war- affected group of people in Sri Lanka. From these interviews, the authors could get information on the psychosocial wellbeing and issues of the ex-combatants that the participants have worked with.

The interviews took place in the North, Sri Lanka and mostly in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu. The interviews were conducted in Sinhala and English and notes were taken down in English. A Tamil translator was used in two interviews: the ex-combatants' political party leaders and Grama Niladharis in Kilinochchi. The field notes taken down during interviews were later transcribed and analysed using a thematic framework with special reference to the concepts in the PWG framework as adapted in Colombo (2003). Documents and statistics were obtained from the BCGR directly and their official website. The findings are discussed in section four of the paper.

Ethical Considerations and Limitations of the Study

The authors were aware of the ethical considerations of conducting this type of research study. Ex-combatants in Sri Lanka are a highly vulnerable group of people. Conducting a study with ex-combatants requires special training and experience, especially when the study aims to explore very personal and potentially traumatic issues. Due to the lack of resources and time constraints, ex-combatants were not interviewed in this study. The two ex-combatants involved in a political party were interviewed with the help and guidance of an academic who has previously worked with ex-combatants in Sri Lanka.

The authors acknowledge that the study is necessarily limited in several respects. In this paper, information about the ex-combatants is gathered from secondary sources and third parties. Therefore, it is likely that issues pertaining to the ex-combatants are misrepresented and/or under/over-represented. The authors of this paper urge the readers to keep this fact in mind when proceeding. Given the exploratory nature of this study, the main aim of this study was to explore the current situation of ex-combatants in Sri Lanka, to identify future research directions, and to set the scene for comprehensive interventions.

Section Two

The Rehabilitation Programme for the Ex-Combatants in Sri Lanka

This section takes a critical look at the process of “rehabilitation” of LTTE ex-combatants implemented by the Sri Lankan government in 2009. Given the limited public information available about this programme, the section relies heavily on information and reports gathered from The Bureau of the Commissioner General of Rehabilitation (BCGR) and from interviews with those involved in the programme.

According to the GoSL, a vast number of LTTE ex-combatants were taken into custody during the last phase of war. The custody of thousands of ex-combatants was the responsibility of the government both logistically and politically (Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights 2009). For most of these ex-combatants, war had been the main part of their lives. Child ex-combatants in particular had lost almost all of their childhoods due to being conscripted by the LTTE, and even adult ex-combatants had had to give up chances at education and having a normal life because of the war. The rehabilitation and reintegration of these ex-combatants into civilian communities was an important next step for the Sri Lankan government to ensure sustainable peace, reconciliation, and long-term development of the country (Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights 2009).

The Bureau of the Commissioner General of Rehabilitation (BCGR) was the institution with prime responsibility for rehabilitating ex-combatants after the war, but had the support of other relevant institutions and line ministries (BCGR 2013). The BCGR was set up under the guidance of Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Justice, and is now functioning under the Ministry of Rehabilitation and Prison Reforms.

The Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights, along with International Labour Organization (ILO), had developed the “National Framework Proposal for Reintegration of Ex-combatants into Civilian Life in Sri Lanka” in 2009. According to its publication, this proposal was developed to achieve the following goals: to safeguard the human rights of ex-combatants, to contribute towards sustainable peace, reconciliation and social cohesion, and to increase the employability of ex-combatants. The proposal also discusses in detail processes such as disarmament and demobilization, rehabilitation, reinsertion, social reintegration, economic reintegration, and cross cutting issues such as transitional justice, information and counselling services, psychosocial wellbeing, gender, children, disabled persons, and education that are identified as important for the “reintegration” of ex-combatants to civilian life (Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights 2009). However, during the interviews with BCGR officials, both former and current, it became apparent that the above-mentioned proposal was not used in the rehabilitation programme.

According to Hettiarachchi[3] (2018), “the first two Commissioner Generals of Rehabilitation, General Daya Rathnayake and General Sudantha Ranasingha together with Prof. Rohan Gunaratna and Ustaz Faizal Mohammed (International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, Singapore) conceptualized and designed the [rehabilitation] programme. The programme continued to develop and grow over time with input from professionals and the successive commissioner generals.” (p. 281).

[3] Mallika Hettiarachchi was a consultant in the development of the Sri Lankan rehabilitation programme.

Many civil society representatives and academics interviewed by the authors presented their critiques about implementation of the rehabilitation programme. One of the key problems identified was that the programme was run by the Sri Lanka Army. The Commissioner General and his staff who were directly involved in the implementation of rehabilitation were army personnel, and most of the times operated in their uniforms. A civil society activist and a researcher from Jaffna questioned the capacity and the ethics of involving military in rehabilitation.

> "*Military is trained to fight in the battle field. Rehabilitation is a completely different subject which requires different skills and expertise. Rehabilitation involves changing people's mindsets and behaviour through close interactions with individuals on their past and future which is completely a humanitarian process. We know for sure that military does not have that capacity. How could a so-called rehabilitation process be acceptable if it was implemented by a military who was trained to kill them before and who don't speak their language*?" (Activist, Jaffna)

According to a report titled "Sri Lanka's Rehabilitation Programme: A New Frontier in Counter Terrorism and Counter Insurgency" published in 2013 by Hettiarachchi, the first step of rehabilitation was to categorize combatants based on their depth of involvement, period of involvement, and activities conducted during involvement. They were then labelled as high, medium, or low risk (see also Kruglanski 2014). Hettiarachchi (2013) further states that "those ex-combatants, who were to be investigated and prosecuted, due to higher involvement in terrorist activities, were tried in accordance with the Sri Lankan law. They were first sent to detention and not rehabilitation and were forced to go through a judicial process" (p. 109). This reference to a trial and prosecution is also mentioned in the BCGR booklet (2013): "… those ex-combatants who were to be investigated and prosecuted, due to their higher involvement in various terrorist activities were tried in accordance with the law of the land." (p. 14). However, further details regarding these trials are not divulged in the above documents. The other ex-combatants, who were to be rehabilitated and sent back to the society, were directed to the BCGR's Protective Accommodation and Rehabilitation Centres (PARCs).

According to the BCGR, there are approximately 12,000 ex-combatants who participated in the rehabilitation programme of Sri Lanka (BCGR 2013). According to the BCGR, these ex-combatants were initially kept in 24 Protective Accommodation and Rehabilitation Centres (PARCs), which functioned separately for children, females, and males. Some of the PARCs that functioned were Poonthottam, Pompaimadu, Nellukkulam, Maradamadu, Tellippalai, Welikanda, Omanthai, and Kandakadu.

All PARCs were reportedly provided with security, water, sanitation, food and nutrition, health and psycho-social support, non-food relief items, opportunities to make contact with their family and friends, and access to all UN agencies (BCGR 2013). At these centres, a comprehensive study on all ex-combatants was said to be carried out by intelligence agencies followed by a dynamic psycho-social and socio-economic profiling. Under this profiling, levels of radicalization, talents, and experiences were assessed (BCGR 2013).

According to the BCGR – Department of Government Information booklet (2013) the number of initially surrendered ex-combatants in 2009 is **10,790**.

Table 2: Statistics of the initially surrendered ex-combatants in 2009

Children (12-18 years)	Boys	364
	Girls	230
Adults	Female	1823
	Male	8373
Civil Status	Married	3658
	Single	7035
	Widows	97
Religious Denominations	Hindu	9967
	Christian	814
	Muslim	03
	Buddhist	06
	Total	**10,790**

Source: BCGR – Department of Government Information booklet (2013)

A number of activists and academics however suggested that the government information and statistics of the rehabilitation programme could not be accurate. One of the key questions they raised was “*who was actually rehabilitated*?” As per their analysis, there is lack of clarity as to whether those who were “rehabilitated” were the “real” LTTE cadres (see also Antonovskaya 2015). A senior academic who has long-term experience working in the North and East explained that according to the government sources, there are approximately 12,000 LTTE cadres who surrendered/were captured by the army. However, the same sources say that those cadres who were found to have had strong involvement with LTTE were detained and forced to go through a judicial process. At the same time, government statistics show that approximately 12,000 cadres completed rehabilitation and were “reintegrated” to the society. According to him, this raises a serious question:

> *“If the numbers surrendered and the numbers “reintegrated” are equal, does that mean that even those who were accused of strong terrorism activities were also released by the so-called judicial process? Otherwise, a significant percentage of them must be in detention or in the prison and those who are said to have been reintegrated should be much less than 12,000.*” (Senior Academic, Colombo)

There is a glaring discrepancy in the numbers of ex-combatants “rehabilitated and reintegrated” provided by the government sources. Recently in a news briefing, former Army Commander Daya Ratnayake, who was the first Commissioner General of Rehabilitation (from July 2009 to February 2010), said that “over 14,000 LTTE members, including those who aided and abetted in killings or attempted killings and bombed religious places were rehabilitated by the Sri Lankan Government. These people were given an amnesty by the government. The convicted LTTE members who attempted to kill the then President were given presidential pardon.” (Pothmulla and Sanjeewa 2019). According to the former Commissioner’s statements, the number of ex-combatants surrendered and captured is over 14,000 and all of them were pardoned and rehabilitated. These claims directly oppose the information we gathered from the BCGR and its publications regarding the number of

ex-combatants and the information on prosecution of cadres with higher involvement with LTTE. Due to these discrepancies it is difficult to determine which version of information holds the truth.

The senior academic mentioned earlier further complained that it is unclear whether the government "rehabilitated" actual LTTE cadres or civilians who were forced to take arms in the final 2–3 months of the war by the LTTE. Krishnan (2012) discusses the incidence of forced recruitment, especially of children, during the last phases of war and how tragic this was to those children and their families. The senior academic argues that civilians who became involved in the war in the final stages cannot be considered as LTTE cadres and the processes of rehabilitation and reintegration should not be applicable to them. Other civil society representatives shared similar concerns. Some said they had heard from communities that all the top- and middle-level leaders who surrendered had been killed and only those who were minimally involved in LTTE activities had been symbolically "rehabilitated". Antonovskaya (2015) further states that the lack of transparency and the politicization of the rehabilitation program for the ex-combatants are problematic in the case of Sri Lanka. Similar concerns are discussed in the reports of the Consultation Task Force and Zonal Task Force on "Consultation on Transitional Justice Mechanisms" in 2016 (Secretariat for Coordinating Reconciliation Mechanisms 2016a, 2016b).

Some of the stories of ex-combatants presented in the book "Voices of Peace" by Kabir (2018) have implications of the symbolic nature of rehabilitation as mentioned above. Some ex-combatants, in their stories, say that they were in jail for a long period of time, ranging from months to years, before being sent to "rehabilitation". Some ex-combatants criticize the so-called rehabilitation programme on the grounds that proper training was not provided, guidance was not given to obtain employment, and that it was a waste of the time that they could have used to earn a living for their families (Kabir 2018).

According to Hettiarachchi 2013, the rehabilitation model that Sri Lanka used followed the Singapore rehabilitation model with its special focus on six modes of rehabilitation (see below). The GoSL has spent USD 9,136,370 to manage the initial rehabilitation centres (Hettiarachchi, 2013). The programme was aimed at reintegrating the former LTTE cadres, members and collaborators into the community. According to Hettiarachchi (2013), the mandatory period of rehabilitation for all ex-combatants was 24 months. According to the BCGR, the mandatory period was one year: six months of rehabilitation and six months of vocational training.

According to the BCGR, the rehabilitation programme that was conducted has focused on six components: (1) Spiritual, Religious and Cultural, (2) Psychological and Creative Therapies, (3) Social, Community and the Family, (4) Sports and Extracurricular Activities, (5) Educational, and (6) Vocational and Livelihoods (see Table 3).

Table 3: Activities conducted under each component of rehabilitation for ex-combatants

Component	Activities
Spiritual, Religious and Cultural	Meditation, spiritual development, celebration of religious events like Thaipongal, Deepavali, Sinhala Tamil New Year, Christmas and Vesak celebrations, mass marriage ceremony for 53 couples of ex-combatants, a Peace Village established to facilitate reunification of married ex-combatants at separate centres, cultural excursions to visit religious places in the South
Psychological and Creative Therapies	Counselling was provided for the rehabilitees, arts and cultural activities such as painting, dancing, singing, drama, etc. were given prominence, composition of the musical band named "Friends of Peace" consisting of ex-combatants.
Social, Community and the Family	Granted home leave to visit families, families were allowed to visit rehabilitation centres and see their loved ones
Educational, and Vocational and Livelihoods	A job fair was organized in Vavuniya, courses on beauty culture conducted for female ex-combatants and a number of bridal shows held, female ex-combatants were also given training in cookery, nursery management in agriculture, tailoring, Juki sewing machine operator training programmes, pre-school teacher training, etc. For male ex-combatants, training was provided in plumbing, carpentry, use of chemical fertilizer, leatherwork, coconut cultivation, bakery production, etc. Provisions were made to give IT qualification and National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) certificate to those who complete the respective training courses.
Sports and Extracurricular activities	Conducted sports activities, those with potential were trained further by the Ministry of Sports

Source: BCGR, 2013

Commenting on the different components of the rehabilitation programme, many activists interviewed complained that such components had been introduced only symbolically and were of no use in addressing the real needs of the ex-combatants.

> *"So-called vocational training provided to the ex-combatants were very conventional and replications of social stereotypes. Such training programmes had not considered other resources and market opportunities available in the area and practical constraints they have to face. Therefore, the ex-combatants could hardly use the skills they gained. It is a key to address the psychological issues before educating or training a person. However, there had been no proper diagnosis of psychological issues or treatment for them other than group level activities such as meditation. Thus, whatever vocational training provided is of minimal use. You can understand it by seeing the unemployment/underemployment levels among the ex-combatants and feeling of uncertainty they're suffering from."* (Women's activist, Kilinochchi)

According to a staff member of BCGR in Mullaitivu, at the conclusion of the rehabilitation programme, all ex-combatants were given two important certificates. One certificate was to ensure their security in case they were arrested or interrogated by the police/other security forces. This certificate was valid for six months only. The second certificate is valid for the entire lifetime and contains information such as name, ID number, name of the rehabilitation camp the individual was

in, duration of rehabilitation, and a statement certifying that the individual is a rehabilitated ex-combatant. This certificate was provided in the languages of Tamil, Sinhala, and English and was signed and sealed by the Commissioner General of Rehabilitation.

Ex-combatants who went through the rehabilitation programme are currently under the mandate of Socio Economic and Welfare Coordinating Offices for Rehabilitated Beneficiaries (SEWCORBs) in each district. The SEWCORBs are the post-rehabilitation coordinating offices of the BCGR. As per the BCGR website, there are eight centres functioning island wide: (1) East (Batticaloa, Polonnaruwa, Ampara), (2) Vanni (Vavuniya, Anuradhapura), (3) Trincomalee, (4) Kilinochchi, (5) Mullaitivu, (6) Jaffna, (7) Mannar, (8) South (Colombo, Gampaha, Kalutara, Galle, Matara, Hambanthota, Ratnapura, Kegalle, Nuwara Eliya, Kurunegala, Puttalam, Matale, Badulla, Monaragela, Kandy). In these centres there is a coordinating officer and other support staff all attached to the military.

As discussed previously, it was the Sri Lanka Military that had first and foremost access to the ex-combatants. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has been mandated with the task of assisting ex-combatants with training and employment, but it is not clear to what extent they were helped with psychosocial needs (Samarasinghe 2014). According to IOM Programme Coordinator Tatjana Cerovino, the IOM's job is to provide the ex-combatants with the information and counselling that they need to make informed decisions about their future, refer them to other agencies for training or employment based on their preferences, and also arrange small grants to set up businesses (IOM Sri Lanka 2009).

Statistics of ex-combatants

As of 31st May of 2013, the total number of ex-combatants registered for the rehabilitation programme was **12,167**; 26 had deserted while in hospital and 13 had passed away.[4] As of 2017, the total number of ex-combatants who have been sent back to the communities after rehabilitation is **12,183**[5] including **594** children.

[4] Statistics published in the booklet Rehabilitation of Ex-Combatants (2013) by the Bureau of the Commissioner General of Rehabilitation and Department of Government Information.

[5] Statistics collected from the Bureau of the Commissioner General of Rehabilitation (2018)

Table 4: Reintegrated ex-combatants per districts (2017)*

No	SEWCORBs	District	Male	Female	Total
1	Jaffna	Jaffna	2447	648	3095
2	Kilinochchi	Kilinochchi	2628	613	3241
3	Mullaitivu	Mullaitivu	2227	477	2704
4	Mannar	Mannar	636	164	800
5	Vavuniya	Vavuniya	944	201	1145
6		Anuradhapura	01	-	01
7	Trincomalee	Trincomalee	447	83	530
8	East	Ampara	73	10	83
9		Batticaloa	414	61	475
10		Polonnaruwa	11	-	11
11	South	Badulla	05	-	05
12		Colombo	09	-	09
13		Galle	02	-	02
14		Gampaha	08	01	09
15		Kandy	04	01	05
16		Kurunegala	01	01	02
17		Kegalle	01	-	01
18		Matale	01	01	02
19		Monaragala	01	-	01
20		Nuwara Eliya	11	02	13
21		Puttalam	01	03	04
22		Rathnapura	01	-	01
23	Unknown Residence				44
	Total		**9873**	**2266**	**12183**

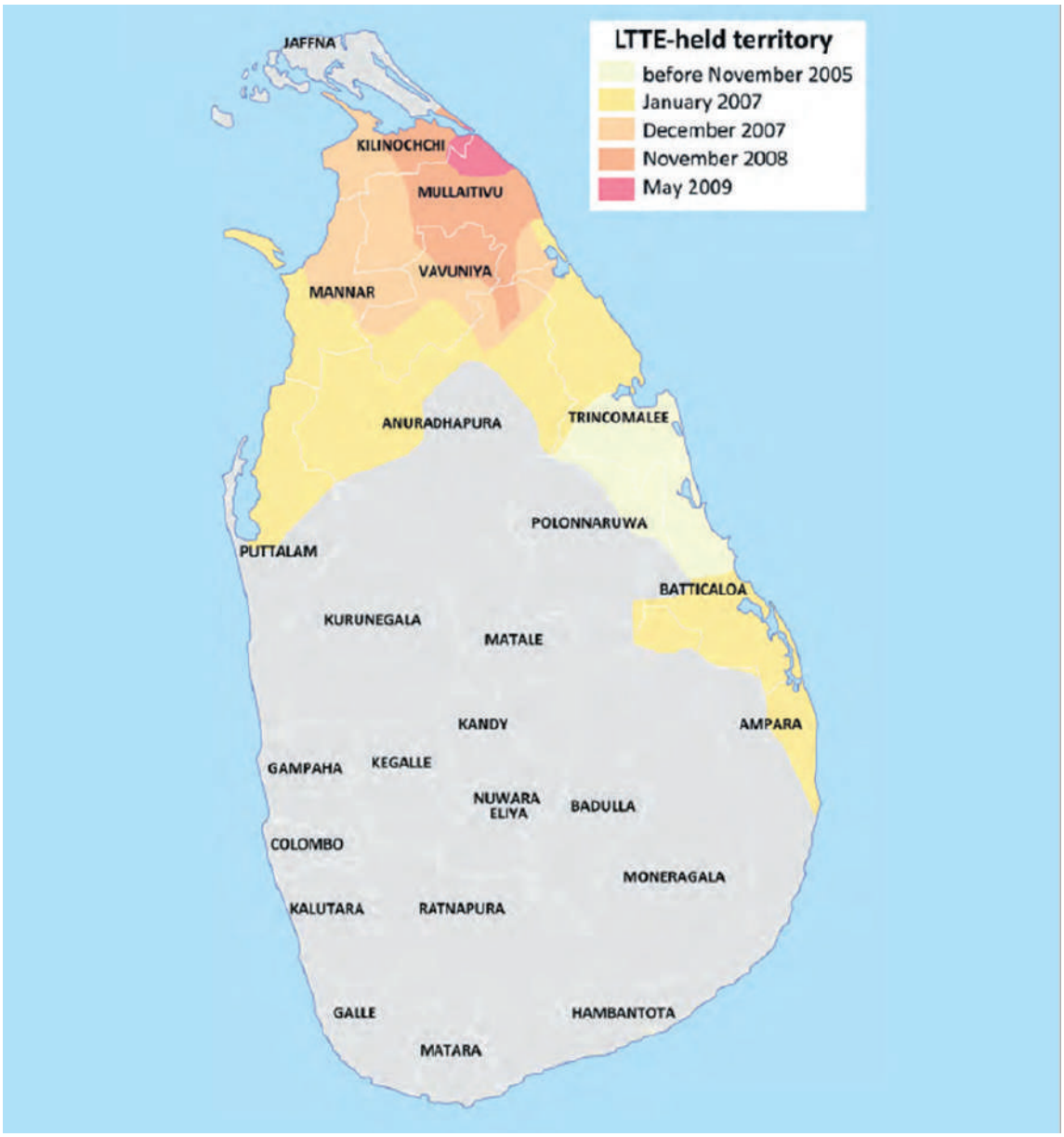
Source: Statistics collected from the Bureau of the Commissioner General of Rehabilitation (2018)

*Term used by the BCGR.

Ex-Combatants in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu

This study focuses on the psychosocial wellbeing of the ex-combatants in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu. These two districts are the worst war-affected areas (Gunatilaka and Vithanagama 2018). As per the Figure 1 (see below), a lot of LTTE combatants were concentrated in these two areas and the last stages of the war were fought around Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu.

Figure 1: LTTE held territory (pre- 2005 to May 2009)



Source: Richards, J. 2014. "An institutional history of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)" Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies-CCDP.

According to the latest (2018) BCGR and SEWCORB statistics, **3245 ex-combatants in Kilinochchi** and **2705 ex-combatants in Mullaitivu** are already settled in the areas[6] (see tables 5 and 6).

Table 5: Number of resident rehabilitated ex-combatants in Kilinochchi district (2018)*

District	Number of Divisional Secretariats	Divisional Secretariats	Number of resident rehabilitated ex-combatants		Total
			Female	Male	
Kilinochchi	04	Karachchi	324	1446	1770
		Kandavalai	113	547	660
		Poonakary	121	435	556
		Pachchilaipalli	60	199	259
Total			**618**	**2627**	**3245**

Source: SEWCORB Kilinochchi

*Term used by BCGR.

Table 6: Number of resident rehabilitated ex-combatants in Mullaitivu district (2018)

District	**Number of Divisional Secretariats**	**Divisional Secretariats**	**Number of resident rehabilitated ex-combatants**		**Total**
			Female	**Male**	
Mullaitivu	05	Manthai East	34	135	169
		Thunukkai	56	218	274
		Puthukkudiyiruppu	171	813	984
		Oddusuddan	88	355	443
		Maritimepattu	120	691	811
		No address/Belong to other districts	08	16	24
Total			**477**	**2228**	**2705**

Source: SEWCORB Mullaitivu

[6] Statistics collected from SEWCORBs in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu (2018)

Section Three: Conceptual Framework

"Psychosocial Wellbeing" is generally understood as the psychological (experiences, emotions, and behaviour) and wider social wellness involving relationships, traditions, and culture that is experienced by a person (Gauthamadas 2014). However, recently the concept of psychosocial wellbeing is heavily discussed as many consider wellbeing to consist of multiple other factors. While including psychological and social factors, the need to focus on fulfilling basic needs, physical wellbeing, having safety and security, developing knowledge and skills, practising one's livelihoods, the impact of the physical environment, self-worth, and competence are also acknowledged (PADHI 2008; Galappatti 2003). Individuals may identify different elements as being more or less important, but each of these elements is considered equally important in a person experiencing psychosocial wellness (Herath and Silva 2012; Usoof-Thowfeek 2012).

A conceptual framework that acknowledges the importance of studying psychosocial wellbeing in a holistic manner has been developed by the Psychosocial Working Group (PWG), a group representing both humanitarians and academic institutions. The PWG framework consists of multiple domains useful to understand the status of the psychosocial wellbeing of individuals/communities (see below). Due to the growing debates over what constitutes "psychosocial", the PWG has developed a conceptual framework that is able to capture the emerging breadth of the psychosocial field.

The framework generally considers the needs of individuals in a family or household located within an "affected community" and aims to analyse the psychosocial wellbeing of the individual and the said community. The psychosocial wellbeing in this framework is defined with respect to three core domains: human capacity, social ecology, and culture and values. These domains identify the human, social, and cultural capital available to people who are in vulnerable situations. The PWG suggests that these domains are useful to understand the events, circumstances, and psychosocial significances of individuals in special situations/communities (Galappatti 2003).

In this framework, human capacity is defined as consisting of health (physical and mental) and knowledge and skills of an individual. In these terms, improving the above factors enhances human capacity and lead to psychosocial wellbeing. Psychological distresses such as depression and PTSD, physical disabilities, loss of education or skills for labour can degrade the human capacity of an individual and hence their psychosocial wellbeing.

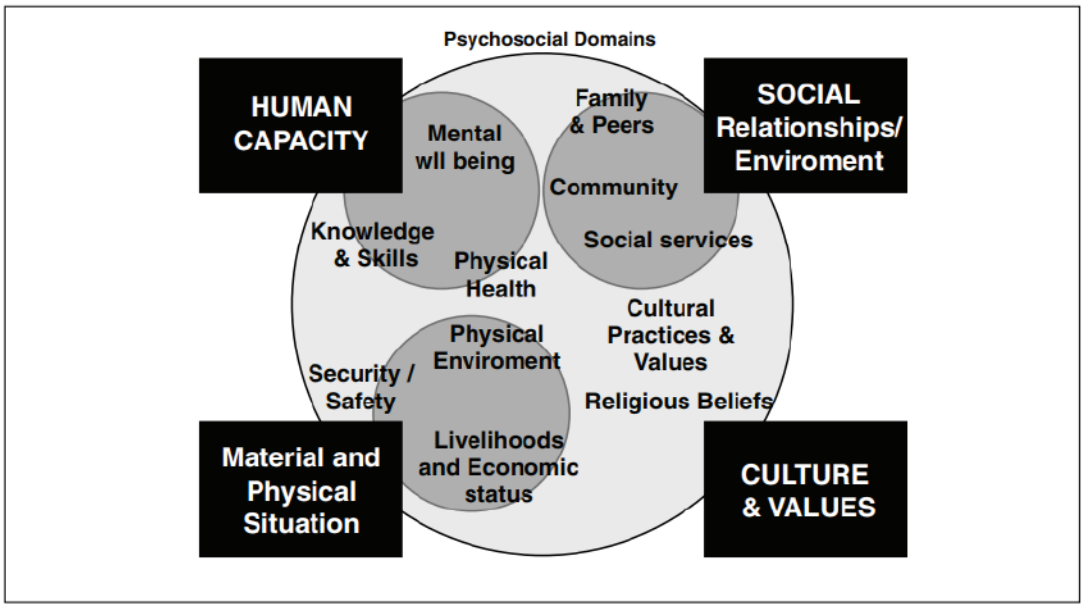
Social ecology or pattern of social networks in a group of people enables them to function as a community (Strang and Ager 2003). Social ecology involves social relations within families, peer groups, between ethnic groups and religious and cultural institutions, as well as links with civic and political authorities; all of which can become resources that strengthen the wellbeing of the individual and the group. These social connections are also support systems in a community and are seen as important complementary dimensions of psychosocial wellbeing. Conflicts can often lead to the disruptions in the social ecology of a community where relations between families and peers change and religious and civic organizations cease to function. In the absence of such support systems, the individuals of the community may be subjected to discrimination, social withdrawal, and apathy and hence a depleted psychosocial wellbeing. Therefore, addressing the damage to the social ecology is important in promoting psychosocial wellbeing of the community.

The culture and values component includes cultural values, beliefs, practices, and human rights, which in their own right are considered as a key element of psychosocial wellbeing. As social ecology, conflicts often disrupt the culture and values of a community when human rights are violated and common values are challenged. Culture and values are important in a community as they provide a sense of identity, unity, and comfort among individuals (Strang and Ager 2003). Violating or challenging human rights, undermining cultural values and practices, and the lack of space or freedom to practice religious beliefs can disrupt the psychosocial wellbeing of an individual and community.

This framework provides a tool to map the way individuals and communities are impacted by events and to understand risk and protective factors. The framework is broad in its focus and directs to appraise the disruption of human capacity, social ecology, and culture and values in a post-conflict context.

Despite the PWG framework's holistic nature and the ability to address multiple factors through one model, Galappatti (2003) states that many psychosocial workers (who work with diverse individuals and communities in Sri Lanka) felt that in the context of Sri Lanka, the framework fails to address the issue of material wellbeing, which is intimately and inextricably linked to the other domains and the overall wellbeing of the individuals and the community. They also felt that cultural beliefs and practices help construct the significance and meaning of all other domains and their components. In order to amend the above discrepancies, one group of psychosocial workers has developed a draft variation on the PWG framework that aims to capture psychosocial wellbeing in the Sri Lankan context (see Figure 2) (Galappatti 2003).

Figure 2: PWG Psychosocial domains adapted in Colombo, April 2003



Source: Galappatti, A. 2003. "What is a psychosocial intervention? Mapping the field in Sri Lanka" *The International Journal of Mental Health, Psychosocial Work and Counselling in Areas of Armed Conflic*t 1(2), 3-17.

In this variation of the PWG framework developed by psychosocial workers in Sri Lanka, in addition to the original components of Human Capacity, Social Ecology (renamed as Social relationships/ Environment) and Culture and Values, there is a new component named "Material and Physical Situation". This component includes factors such as safety/security, physical environment, and livelihood and economic status which are identified as equally important to the achievement of psychosocial wellbeing.

The broadened focus of the PWG framework as adapted in Colombo offers the opportunity not only to identify specific factors which may affect the psychosocial wellbeing of an individual or community, but also to identify the specific areas in which interventions should aim to have an impact. According to Galappatti (2003), the value of a mapping tool like the PWG framework is that it can be used to trace the location of the causal factors, psychosocial effects, and develop interventions and evaluation schemes in the relevant domains.

Therefore, this paper heavily draws on the above mentioned variation of the PWG framework in order to identify, analyse, and discuss the psychosocial issues prevalent in the ex-combatants and their communities in Sri Lanka. Even though interventions were not conducted at this stage, this paper serves as a basic understanding of the issues pertaining to psychosocial wellbeing in a war-affected community in Sri Lanka.

Guided by the domains described in the PWG model adapted in Colombo (2003), this paper discusses its findings under three major themes, namely Material and Physical Situation, Human Capacity, and Community Life. Under the theme material and physical wellbeing, findings related to security/safety, employment, livelihood opportunities and economic status are discussed. Under the theme human capacity, findings on psychological wellness, physical wellness, knowledge and skills are discussed. The two domains in the framework "culture and values" and "social relationships/ environment" are merged and discussed under one theme named as Community Life. Under this theme, the ex-combatants' family relationships, community dynamics, and cultural and religious practices are discussed.

Section Four: Findings

The data collected from key informant interviews were analysed according to the concepts presented in the PWG Psychosocial domains adapted in Colombo (see Figure 2). The framework is useful in understanding exactly how a community and its members have been affected by events, and thus how they might be best supported. Accordingly, the findings are discussed in this section under three themes: Material and Physical Situation, Human Capacity, and Community Life. Findings under each of these components are important to understand specific areas that could be impeding psychosocial wellbeing of individuals/communities that need interventions.

Material and Physical Situation

The material and physical situation, or the environment in which an individual lives, is a key determinant of psychosocial wellbeing. If material factors and the physical environment are not conducive, that could result in low levels of psychosocial wellbeing. This section is a presentation of the material and physical situation of the ex-combatants and how the same have affected their lives. Following the definition in the PWG psychosocial domains adapted in Colombo, material and physical situation is presented under two sub themes: Security and Safety and Physical Environment and Economic Status.

Security and Safety

Feeling safe is a key determinant of the general wellbeing of any person. If a person does not feel safe in the environment he/she lives in, fear and uncertainty could take over and constrain the life. This section presents the status of security of the environment the ex-combatants live in and how it has affected their assessment of personal safety based on the opinions of both the government and non-government representatives.

One of the common concerns and criticisms of all civil society and community representatives was the heavy militarization in the North and persistent surveillance the military exercises on the ex-combatants. According to them, the surveillance (by multiple groups) currently faced by the ex-combatants is far beyond national security needs. One reason for the constant surveillance of ex-combatants is the widespread belief that they still pose a threat to the society (Usoof-Thowfeek 2018). This prevents ex-combatants from maintaining day-to-day social interactions and engaging in economic activities, as ex-combatants are afraid of being monitored, and the others are afraid of associating with a group of people that is being monitored. Civil society and community representatives identified this as a tool used to harass and to limit the social life of the ex-combatants and to isolate them in the society. The respondents commonly suspected this to be a military strategy to suppress the voices of ex-combatants and to prevent them from engaging in any kind of upheaval. A Catholic priest who works closely with the ex-combatants in Kilinochchi voiced his concerns over the security condition in the North as follows:

> "*2019 marks 10 years of the end of the war. Unfortunately, heavy militarization in the North continues. Involvement of military in the day-to-day life of the people is increasing every day. Military presence badly limits the freedom of people and has created a widespread*

fear and threat. There are so many intelligence units operating in these areas always closely monitoring and questioning the people. Ex-combatants are one of the main targets of these groups. When there is crime or a clash, the first suspect to be arrested or to be questioned by the intelligence groups is an ex-combatant. They follow them even when they travel from one place to another." (Catholic priest, Kilinochchi)

Civil society and community representatives commonly shared that presence of military and their heavy surveillance as the biggest security challenge faced by the ex-combatants. Usoof-Thowfeek (2018) shows that constant surveillance not only prevent ex-combatants from maintaining normal social interactions, but it may also prevent their economic participation as fear discourages employers from hiring such individuals.

At the same time, the two members of the political party "Crusaders for Democracy"[7] shared their personal views and experiences as follows:

"*The military seems to be friendlier now with the ex-combatants when monitoring and asking questions, but their purpose is the same. Whenever there is a meeting, an intelligence agent will be there and sometimes we would be taken to their headquarters for further questioning. This is a very uncomfortable situation*." (Party members of Crusaders for Democracy, Jaffna)

Coordinating officers of BCGR and the military in the North emphasized the need for the presence of the military in the North to ensure national security and to support economic development and reconstruction. According to the coordinating officers of the BCGR, the rehabilitated ex-combatants are now a part of the general public, and from the government's point of view, they are no longer considered as offenders or threats to the society. However, they admitted that BCGR keeps a close eye on them as a part of the post-rehabilitation development programme in order to support the upward mobility of their lives and to prevent them from "radicalizing" again. Thus, any follow up that the BCGR does was reported to be for the benefit of the ex-combatants. They identify ex-combatants as a vulnerable group who needs continuous assistance of the government. Following is a statement of one of the BCGR staff:

"*We could rehabilitate only 12,000 ex-combatants who surrendered. This does not mean that all LTTE cadres were rehabilitated. There are many that escaped during the war who did not undergo any rehabilitation process. They are living in the society among the general public. These radical individuals want the LTTE back. Their main target in rebuilding the LTTE is the ex-combatants. They are trying their best to radicalize them again. On the other hand, ex-combatants are highly discriminated against by the Tamil society itself. One reason is their suppressive behaviour when the LTTE was ruling… People want to take revenge from the ex-cadres for harassing them when they were powerful. Due to all these reasons, we consider ex-combatants as a vulnerable group who need support in terms of security and rebuilding their socio-economic life. This is why the post-rehabilitation programme exists*" (BCGR staff, Mannar)

[7] Crusaders for Democracy – A political party formed and led by ex-combatants in the Vanni

Representatives of BCGR explained that the sole purpose of issuing the two certificates (as discussed in the section "Rehabilitation Programme for Ex-Combatants in Sri Lanka" to the "rehabilitated" ex-combatants was to minimize all security and bureaucratic hassles they could face in their day today life. In certain instances, the ex-combatants have faced issues in government institutions, as they have not produced the certificates. They mentioned that BCGR closely observes actual reintegration of the ex-combatants in order to help them during challenging situations. BCGR officers however admitted that they are not the only institution that monitors them. They mentioned that there could be many other government institutions and bodies monitoring the ex-combatants' behaviour for different purposes while admitting that they are not aware of all of them. According to them, there is no mandate for BCGR to coordinate with such institutions so that they were not in a position to comment on their work.

Previous research show that over-emphasizing security concerns is an increasing criticism of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programmes in countries as diverse as Cambodia, Mozambique, Angola, Sierra Leone, El Salvador, Liberia, among others (Lopez et al. 2015; Buxton 2008). In the case of Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu also, constant monitoring and follow-ups on ex-combatants seem to have overshadowed the facilitation of more productive agendas such as ex-combatants' participation in communal activities.

According to civil society and community leaders, heavy surveillance has affected the lives of ex-combatants in multiple ways. As they hold a feeling of being monitored throughout, ex-combatants seem to be living with a persistent fear, and it is a major concern that many civil society informants mentioned. Fear is a distressful emotion that can hinder the healthy function of an individual. Hobfoll et al. (2007) shows that promoting a sense of safety is essential in any sort of intervention that follows a disaster or mass violence. If a person is constantly governed by fear, there is little room for other positive emotions such as happiness. Therefore, experiencing fear continuously can directly affect a person's psychosocial wellbeing (Usoof-Thowfeek 2018). Due to this fear, ex-combatants find it difficult to integrate fully with the community and lead a normal life. An interview with an NGO representative in Mullaitivu revealed:

> "*They (ex-combatants) don't know complete freedom because of constant surveillance and military presence. They are always afraid that the CID will come and question them about what they do, where they go, who they meet, and so on. It seems like they are still not accepted as civilians. This kind of treatment makes the ex-combatants prefer staying at home over engaging in community activities.*" (NGO representative, Mullaitivu)

Being always afraid has come to limit their interaction and communication with outsiders. One female activist from Jaffna referring to the situation in Vanni described this as follows:

> "*Ex-combatants usually maintain inward relations in the society and show a reluctance to go out of their villages. They fear about people following them anywhere they go. It gives a feeling of fear and threat from such people and an uneasy feeling when others observe that they are being monitored. Thus, heavy surveillance on ex-combatants has limited their social and physical mobility and operates as a disintegrative factor.*" (Activist, Jaffna)

Furthermore, there is a culture of harassment that results from this kind of monitoring and questioning. Samarasinghe (2014) mentions that "female ex-combatants and women arrested

"under suspicion" under the Emergency Regulations (ER) and Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) are constantly asked to report to military camps. There is a systemic harassment of women who have been detained and subsequently released in the new settlement areas." (p. 379).

A female activist, who was an ex-combatant, recalled a similar incident of harassment by the Sri Lanka police:

> "*I took the bus from Mullaitivu to Colombo and got down in front of the Fort railway station. I was waiting for my uncle to come and pick me up. At that time a police jeep came and stopped right in front of me. About four police officers including a lady police officer got down and asked me to get in to the jeep. I asked them why I'm ordered to go to the police, but they didn't say anything and only shouted at me to get in. By this time, the other people in the railway station were looking at me and I was really scared and embarrassed. I didn't get in to the jeep. I told them that I am waiting for my guardian and that I will only come to the police station with him. The police threatened to arrest me, but I stood my ground. They had no considerations at all. I told them that they are wrongly making me a suspect in front of all the people. Fortunately, in about 5-7 minutes, my uncle came and it was only then the police calmed down and became reasonable. They asked me to come inside a room in the railway station and checked my bag, and finally let me go. They created all the havoc for no reason at all. It only made me scared and look like a criminal in front of all the people. Imagine what would have happened if my uncle was not there? I would have been arrested and nobody would even know!*" (Female activist, Mullaitivu)

Surveillance has also created deep-rooted suspicion within ex-combatants and among people around them. It was common to hear from most of the civil society groups that ex-combatants suspect other ex-combatants in the community. As they explained, many intelligence groups keep following them. To minimize this hassle, some ex-combatants opt to operate as informants to such intelligence groups and in some instances they have allegedly provided wrong information about other ex-combatants as a way of being in the "good books" of such intelligence units. This has created division and mistrust among ex-combatants.

A civil society activist from Mullaitivu who works closely with the ex-combatants pointed out how surveillance had created dissociation of the general public from the ex-combatants. According to him, the Tamil community in general has a negative perception of the ex-combatants due to their perceived close links with the military. Due to these perceptions, ex-combatants are seen as a group of people always being followed by the intelligence agencies. While people in general tend to consider mingling with ex-combatants as an "unnecessary trouble" to fall into, ex-combatants' social life deteriorates. He shared the following:

> "*Most of the time people discriminate the ex-combatants due to their relations with the military. Ex-combatants have spent a long time in military-run rehabilitation camps. Some of them work for military-run farms* [i.e. CSD farms]. *Due to these reasons, people who oppose the militarization in the North consider the ex-combatants as betrayers of their community. This puts the ex-combatants in a very uneasy condition as they have no choice other than showing loyalty to the military because of being vulnerable to heavy surveillance*." (Activist, Mullaitivu)

A study conducted by Lopez et al (2015) with ex-combatants in Colombia, identify fear of rejection and discrimination as one of the most important obstacles to reintegration within the particular social context. The ex-combatants who were interviewed in this study say that they deliberately disconnect or distance themselves from other demobilized persons because they fear being judged and sanctioned by the larger community.

The nature of safety and security of the ex-combatants in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu is a problematic area. Previous research also acknowledges the fact that ex-combatants may possibly become targets of violence after their demobilization or returning to civilian life (Nussio 2011). Nussio (2011) argues that in the case of former paramilitaries in Colombia, when confronted with threats, the demobilized ex-combatants become more vulnerable as they do not have the protection they counted on before, such as weapons, comrades, or their uniform. Therefore, issues pertaining to safety and security concerns of ex-combatants in Sri Lanka also need immediate attention and intervention in order to facilitate better psychosocial wellbeing.

Physical Environment and Economic Status

This section is a presentation of the economic status of the ex-combatants. It also presents an overview of the economic environment of the two districts to understand how far the external environment could affect the economic life. According to available data, Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu districts show high levels of unemployment and poverty above the national averages. This is an indicator of limited opportunities and many economic challenges people in the districts face in general.

As per 2016 Household Income and Expenditure Survey data from Department of Census and Statistics, the Northern Province reports the highest level of poverty headcount in the country. While the national level poverty head count is as low as 4.1%, the same in the Northern Province was 7.7% in 2016. Out of all the districts of Sri Lanka, Kilinochchi (18.2%) and Mullaitivu (12.7%) districts report the highest and second highest poverty head count indexes respectively. This indicates an alarming situation of the economic conditions and opportunities available. Highlighting ex-combatants as a highly vulnerable group, all key stakeholders interviewed in this study commonly shared adverse economic conditions as one of the biggest impediments to psychosocial wellbeing among them.

All key stakeholders shared that the unemployment rate is high among the ex-combatants and this has led to a persistent frustration and feeling of uncertainty of life. They also mentioned that most of the employed are also under-employed and are underpaid. As per the latest statistics from the Department of Census and Statistics (2017), Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu districts reported unemployment rates of 6.1% and 4.8% respectively. Kilinochchi is ranked as the district with the fourth highest unemployment rate in Sri Lanka.

Thus, opportunities are extremely limited in the two districts to seek employment and livelihood opportunities. BCGR officers in the districts as well as the Commissioner General of Rehabilitation emphasized that lack of livelihood opportunities for the ex-combatants is the biggest challenge faced by the post-rehabilitation programme.

According to a staff member of BCGR Mullaitivu,

"*If we can provide job opportunities and more livelihood options for the ex-combatants, most of the problems they are facing will be gone. When you look at the environment of these areas you can see what livelihood opportunities are available. There has not been enough rain for last two years. There is no water even for the cattle. No private companies come here and establish their factories here as resources are very limited. Our target is to provide the ex-combatants employment and good livelihood opportunities as much as possible.*" (BCGR staff, Mullaitivu).

The following tables summarize the livelihood activities of the ex-combatants in the two districts as per data gathered by the SEWCORBs in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu.

Table 7: Livelihood statuses of ex-combatants in Kilinochchi (2017)

Occupation	Karachchi	Kandavalai	Poonakary	Pachchilaipalli	Total
Farming	138	52	50	14	254
Labour	236	81	78	39	434
Driver	63	23	21	10	117
Trade	80	27	26	14	147
Electrician	12	05	04	02	23
Garment sector	31	11	10	05	57
Civil Security Department (CSD)	162	60	56	20	298
Private sector	87	30	29	15	161
Fisheries	04	15	60	42	121
Masonry	105	36	35	18	194
Carpentry	40	14	13	08	75
Computer operator	02	01	-	-	03
Foreign employment	151	51	48	27	277
Animal husbandry	02	01	01	01	05
Teaching	08	03	03	02	16
Government sector	58	20	19	11	108
Motor mechanics	13	05	04	03	25
Deceased	02	02	01	01	06
Senior citizens	28	10	09	05	52
Unemployed	52	18	17	09	96
Army/Navy/Air Force	03	01	-	-	04
Clergy	03	02	03	01	09

Self employed	10	04	03	02	19
University students	04	02	02	01	09
Barber	03	01	01	01	06
Housewives	05	02	03	02	12
Bomb disposal	32	11	10	07	60
Widows	12	05	04	02	23
Studying	03	-	-	-	03
Total	**1349**	**493**	**510**	**262**	**2614***

Source: SEWCORB Kilinochchi 2018

* The livelihood details of the remaining 631 ex-combatants in Kilinochchi were not recorded.

Table 8: Livelihood statuses of ex-combatants in Mullaitivu (2017)

Occupation	Maritime-pattu	Puthuk-kudiyirup-pu	Oddusuddan	Manthai East	Thunukkai	Total
CSD	07	117	12	05	10	151
Farming	55	84	64	26	46	275
Labour	176	262	122	43	77	680
Driver	32	34	16	01	08	91
Trade	37	60	18	08	06	129
Sewing/Garment sector	06	11	13	03	04	37
Bomb disposal	03	03	01	-	-	07
Private sector	20	11	06	07	05	49
Fisheries	96	13	03	04	-	116
Masonry	59	93	20	05	15	192
Carpentry	24	32	01	04	01	62
Abroad	97	54	27	15	17	210
Animal husbandry	02	08	03	02	-	15
Teaching	07	05	01	02	01	16
Government sector	27	13	14	03	13	70
Motor mechanics	11	04	02	-	02	19
Electrician	08	05	01	02	01	17
Self employed	04	10	02	01	02	19
Clergy	-	02	-	-	-	02
Barber	02	05	01	02	-	10
Welding	03	06	05	-	06	20
Painting	02	05	-	-	-	07
Pre-school teaching	02	01	02	-	02	07
Aluminium work	03	03	-	-	-	06
Bakery	02	03	01	-	-	06
Beauty culture	-	02	-	-	-	02
Printing	-	01	-	-	-	01
Plumber	01	-	-	-	-	01

Lathe machine operator	-	-	01	-	-	01
Tinkering	-	01	-	-	-	01
Army/Air Force	07	01	03	-	01	12
Photography	02	02	02	-	03	09
Studying at universities/ pursuing higher studies	04	03	01	02	01	11
Deceased	03	05	-	01	01	10
Housewives	48	68	40	10	19	185
Unemployed	33	09	11	07	11	71
Total	**783**	**936**	**393**	**153**	**252**	**2517***

Source: SEWCORB Mullaitivu 2018

*The livelihood details of the remaining 188 ex-combatants in Mullaitivu were not recorded

At the time of this study, a total of 167 ex-combatants from the two districts were unemployed. In both districts, the highest number of ex-combatants is engaged in labour work; 27% in Mullaitivu and 16 % in Kilinochchi. It is also important to notice a significant number – 449 ex-combatants of both districts are employed by the military-led Civil Security Department (CSD). In addition, 281 ex-combatants have gone abroad for jobs.

BCGR officers mentioned that they hold continuous negotiations with the CSD to recruit more from the ex-combatant groups as that is the best employment opportunity available in these districts. Entitlement to the government pension scheme is one of the key advantages. According to them, the ex-combatants are prioritized for joining the CSD as it is a permanent job with a fixed monthly salary that qualifies them to apply for loans when needed. According to them, no other livelihood activities available in the district can empower them to the same level.

Many civil society and community representatives questioned the ethics of the government providing job opportunities to ex-combatants in military-led CSD farms. The CSD farms employ both ex-combatants and civilians. In Kilinochchi there are 298 ex-combatants, and in Mullaitivu there are 151 ex-combatants working in CSD farms. According to civil society and community representatives this is a well-planned strategy to justify military presence and their involvement in business in the North and to make the ex-combatants dependent on the military.

The ACPR and PEARL (2017) report reiterates the voices of community representatives. The report argues that through the CSD, the already vulnerable ex-combatants have become economically

dependent on the military and that their lives are no better than before they started working for the CSD. Working at CSD farms have further led to the suppression of ex-combatants’ political activities, destruction of community identity and cohesiveness, and marginalization (ACPR and PEARL 2017). Locals recruited to the CSD also report facing mistrust and contempt within their communities and further alienation as they are perceived as military personnel (SACLS 2018) Even though the BCGR presents employment at CSD farms as the best option for the ex-combatants, this may not be the case in reality.

According to the BCGR, the ex-combatants in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu have received many socio-economic and welfare benefits through government organizations, NGOs, and INGOs (See Table 9). They have been assisted by government organizations including the Sri Lanka Security Forces, BCGR, NCPA, government banks, and the Sri Lanka Eye Donation society. They have also been assisted by NGOs/INGOs including CARITAS, CPPHR, IOM, ICRC, UNICEF, Foundation of Goodness, NRC, and DRC.

Table 9: Socio-Economic and Welfare assistance provided for rehabilitated ex-combatants by government organizations and NGO/INGOs (2017)*

No	Donation	District	Government (No. of units)	NGO/INGO (No. of units)	Total (No. of units)
1	Housing projects	Kilinochchi	48	182	230
		Mullaitivu	113	118	231
2	Sewing machines	Kilinochchi	25	67	92
		Mullaitivu	16	39	55
3	Self-employment loans	Kilinochchi	402	146	548
		Mullaitivu	430	156	586
4	Bicycles	Kilinochchi	39	75	114
		Mullaitivu	61	345	406
5	Livestock	Kilinochchi	-	52	52
		Mullaitivu	-	33	33
6	Agricultural equipment	Kilinochchi	3	88	91
		Mullaitivu	-	71	71
7	Water pumps	Kilinochchi	18	375	393
		Mullaitivu	10	338	348
8	Roofing sheets	Kilinochchi	20	-	20
		Mullaitivu	02	-	02
9	Spectacles	Kilinochchi	450	-	450
		Mullaitivu	-	-	-
10	Chicks	Kilinochchi	45	-	45
		Mullaitivu	40	-	40
11	Fishing equipment	Kilinochchi	-	22	22
		Mullaitivu	-	38	38

12	Welding equipment	Kilinochchi	-	08	08
		Mullaitivu	-	06	06
	Total		**1722**	**2159**	**3881**

Source: Statistics collected from the Bureau of the Commissioner General of Rehabilitation (2018)

*Term used by BCGR

While admitting lack of resources for better livelihood and employment opportunities in the two districts, BCGR officers from both the districts complained about the passivity of the ex-combatants in seeking livelihood opportunities. As per their explanation, ex-combatants show a strong backwardness and hesitance to migrate out of the North to seek better employment opportunities. Given that many of them have received vocational training during the rehabilitation programme, there is possibility for them to seek job opportunities in Colombo and other developed areas like Kurunegala and Gampaha districts. However, the ex-combatants seem to be reluctant to go outstation. A commonly-shared perception by all BCGR officers was that this passivity is a cultural factor. A staff member of BCGR Kilinochchi shared the following statement:

> "*What they need is government jobs. They always demand that. This is because government jobs are highly recognized in the Tamil culture due to fixed salary and the pension. They do not understand the fact that government jobs require certain levels of educational qualifications. Most of the ex-combatants' education was disturbed during the war and they do not hold even minimum educational qualifications to apply for government jobs. They know that, but still they demand it. The only government job most of them are qualified for is joining as the cadres of the Civil Security Department. This is why we have arranged many opportunities there*". (BCGR staff, Kilinochchi)

Research shows that there is a tendency for ex-combatants to have fewer opportunities to find stable jobs than other members of society, as they often lose their jobs due to their ex-combatant status (Lopez 2015; Banholzer 2014; IRIN news 2016). Similarly, BCGR officers stated that even the private sector in the two districts discriminates against the ex-combatants in recruitments. In such a context, one alternative way of providing earning opportunities in Sri Lanka has been recruiting the ex-combatants to the development and construction projects implemented by the Army in the North. To this end, ex-combatants have been working in many constructions projects in Jaffna and Mullaitivu. As explained by the BCGR officers, such joint projects are also ways to strengthen the relationship between the army and the ex-combatants.

Currently, vocational training is given to ex-combatants and even to their family members by institutions like the National Apprentice and Industrial Training Authority (NAITA), Civil Security Department (CSD), and Vocational Training Authority (VTA) in Sri Lanka. The Vocational Training in the North and East Sri Lanka (VTN) project provides training in several fields up to the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) levels, and targets especially those who were affected by war such as ex-combatants, war widows, and family members of ex-combatants. Two employees of the VTA in Mullaitivu told us that a sum of 10,000 rupees per month (for six months) is given to those who attend these vocational training courses. Officers of the SEWCORBs also confirmed this. According to them, this is an incentive to attract more ex-combatants to vocational training in order to open

up employment opportunities for them. However, they complained that motivation among the ex-combatants to follow these courses is very low even if they are paid 10,000 rupees per month. Two officers of the VTA presented the following reasons for the low motivation level:

> "*We pay 10,000 rupees for the ex-combatants and even their close relatives if they follow the courses. We have introduced practical courses recently. For example, we recently introduced aluminium technology. However, motivation among these people to join the courses is very low. Public transport facilities are extremely poor in Mullaitivu District. A student living 40km away from the centre has to spend nearly three hours to travel one way because the buses take the longer routes. Who wants to spend six hours on the roads and follow a course here? It is not always safe to travel in the evening. Although we provide good training, the pass outs can hardly find a job or self-employment opportunity in the North. If they want to utilize their training and earn money, they have to migrate out of this area, mostly to Colombo or Kurunegala. Due to past experiences of disappearances of young people who migrated to Colombo and due to the fear of persistent surveillance by the military, they prefer to stay here with their families with the little income they can earn here*." (Officers of VTA, Mullaitivu)

Even though the VTA presents 10,000 rupees per month as an incentive, this amount is not sufficient to attract participation to the training courses. If an individual is to spend the whole day travelling and engaged in training, he/she would not have time to earn a living or engage in farming, and 10,000 rupees is not enough to meet the monthly household and nutritional needs. Furthermore, with the transportation hassles and lack of employment opportunities to follow vocational trainings, the ex-combatants or their relatives do not seem too eager to participate in such training programmes.

Grama Niladhari officers interviewed in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu also confirmed that the poor transportation services available in the two districts was a barrier for economic growth in the area. Civil society and community representatives reiterated that heavy surveillance and past experiences of disappearance are the main reasons that demotivate the ex-combatants from migrating out of the two districts to seek better livelihood/employment options. They disagreed with the statement that the passivity is a cultural factor while criticizing the failure of the government to demilitarize the North and to deal with the past. They highlighted that the fear to migrate out of villages is a serious issue that needs to be addressed immediately by the government.

Many civil society and community representatives also criticized the vocational training provided during the rehabilitation programme. As per their view it had been insensitive to physical abilities of the ex-combatants and incompatible with the resources available in the area. Further, all the trainings provided to them had been on traditional industries which can generate only little money. There had also been gender stereotyping in the training programmes. Thus, the training they received had been much poorer than certain livelihood and life skills they received as LTTE cadres in the past. Denissen (2010) argues that it requires a set of coherent policies and measures instead of a multitude of reintegration projects such as economic productive projects to increase the success of reintegration of ex-combatants. Similarly, many civil society representatives pointed out that weaknesses in the vocational training component have created a high level of underemployment among the ex-combatants. Further, there has been no assessment of their human capital when material and financial resources were distributed among them to start small-scale livelihood

activities such as animal husbandry, crafting and farming. Due to these reasons and the lack of a good market, such investments have been wasted.

When the authors asked how the ex-combatants who have not been able to find a job earn enough to survive, a common answer was that their needs are mainly taken care of by their family members, relatives or friends. Many civil society representatives that were interviewed mentioned that this has become an extra burden to such hosts. This in turn has led the ex-combatants to feeling of dependency and indignity, as they have to depend on their loved ones. A common concern of both the government and civil society representatives was that the disabled and women ex-combatants receive the least attention of any livelihood interventions. Discrimination they face in seeking employment opportunities is much higher than any other groups in the society. Due to the high number of abandoning and divorces, many female ex-combatants have become single mothers and face higher levels of economic difficulties with double the burden.

Thus, unemployment, scarce resources, harsh environment, lack of infrastructure, limited livelihood opportunities, underemployment, insensitivity of most of the livelihood and development programmes, and social discrimination have resulted in extremely vulnerable and poor economic conditions among the ex-combatants. This has also led to persistent mental conditions such as frustration and feeling of uncertainty. These findings show that addressing the issue of the economic and employment status of ex-combatants is imperative as it is one of the basic needs of an individual in a society, and has the potential to affect other domains of psychosocial wellbeing as well.

Human Capacity

This section discusses the domain of "human capacity" of the ex-combatants in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu. The section is divided into three sub sections: psychological wellness, physical wellness, and knowledge and skills. The PWG framework identifies this component as one of the key domains in psychosocial wellbeing.

Psychological wellness

Psychological wellness is a key aspect that needs to be looked at when dealing with vulnerable groups of people. According to the WHO (2014), mental (psychological) wellbeing is defined as "a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community." Unfortunately, the psychological distress caused by war is not well documented. It is only recently that the mental health consequences of war have been identified as a risk factor in an individual's life (Somasundaram 1993, 1998).

The paper "Psychosocial Consequences of War: Northern Sri Lankan Experience" by Somasundaram and Jamunanantha (2002), discusses the phenomenon of "Collective Trauma" (see also Somasundaram 2007). Collective trauma is basically tragic psychological distress and general social disintegration shared by a group of people or an entire society (Usoof-Thowfeek 2018). The situation of the ex-combatants in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu is an example of collective trauma. These two districts were the worst war-affected areas in the country and the people who live in these areas were

exposed to war for a prolonged period of time. Even though they were given the chance to integrate into a civilian society after the war, their memories of war and effects of war trauma should not be ignored (Banholzer 2014; Murthy and Lakshminarayana 2006).

The interviews conducted with key informants revealed many concerns related to the psychological wellbeing of ex-combatants. The psychiatrists in Vavuniya and Jaffna said there had been many suicides among ex-combatants but that it was difficult to provide sufficient statistics to prove the incidence of suicide among ex-combatants. Reflecting on their experiences, they also mentioned that ex-combatants have psychological disorders like complex PTSD, depression, anxiety disorder, dissociation, and somatization. A systematic study into the prevalence of psychological disorders in ex-combatants in Sri Lanka has not been conducted so far to the best of our knowledge.

The Consultation Task Force (CTF) final report published in 2016 talks about mental health as a prevailing concern among ex-combatants. The report’s findings, which are based on focus group discussions, show that ex-combatants are concerned about the lack of mental health services to help with problems such as stress, alcoholism, and mental illnesses prevalent among many ex-combatants. They also raise the need for counselling and proper psychosocial support in the North (Secretariat for Coordinating Reconciliation Mechanisms 2016a). Similarly, Maedl (2010) shows that many ex-combatants suffer from mental health issues caused by repeated exposure to severe psychological distress, and that it makes reintegration to civilian life difficult without specific and targeted mental health interventions and dissemination methods.

Despite a vast array of evidence pointing to the importance of addressing psychological needs of vulnerable groups of people, it does not seem like the rehabilitation programme addressed the issue of psychological distress among ex-combatants. There is no mention of any sort of screening/testing/diagnoses to assess the psychological status of ex-combatants. According to a BCGR officer, unless ex-combatants showed severe and disturbing symptoms, they were not referred to any psychiatrists. One psychiatrist from Vavuniya said that no psychological evaluations were conducted during the said rehabilitation programme, but that they only did an awareness workshop in the Poonthottam camp.

One officer responsible for rehabilitation said that “*there were no exceptional cases like PTSD*”. In our interviews, other BCGR officers reiterated the fact that the ex-combatants do not have any serious psychological issues and admitted that psychological tests were not conducted at any stage of rehabilitation or post-rehabilitation. However, they mentioned that ex-combatants seemed to be frustrated, passive, and hopeless about the future and were not actively engaging in any task. It seems that there is a lack of awareness among officials regarding the prevalence of mental health issues in vulnerable groups of people. This could be a reason why no psychological screening was done during rehabilitation.

According to the interviews with the BCGR and GN officers, any psychological issues faced by ex-combatants were the effects of economic problems rather than psychological ill-health. They explained that any kind of psychological distresses that ex-combatants might be feeling were due to the lack of money, lack of livelihood opportunities, and passivity towards life. The following is a statement made by a BCGR officer:

> "*They [ex-combatants] don't have any psychological problems. They are very happy now. The only problem they have is not having a good job to earn an income. Because of this they are upset and frustrated. They don't like to go out of the village or try new ways of making an income. They think the government should provide everything to them. But this does not happen, and they end up being upset*." (BCGR officer, Colombo)

These officials are of the opinion that adequate resources to fulfil the ex-combatants' basic needs and a strengthened economic status can alleviate any psychological concerns they have. It was only the psychiatrists, members of civil society, and research institutes that voiced the need for proper psychological interventions.

Both civil society representatives and government officials suggested that changes in lifestyle are a factor causing frustration among ex-combatants. This is especially a concern for female ex-combatants. As per a member of NGO in Kilinochchi, the female ex-combatants were used to a certain lifestyle of active participation in combat and not necessarily keeping house for the male combatants. Richards (2014) in the report on "An Institutional History of the LTTE" says that the LTTE came to realize that female cadres offered a tactical advantage, in that women often generated less suspicion and had greater freedom of movement than young Tamil men (p. 26). Therefore, all female combatants were given military training, basic weapons training, and training in intelligence gathering activities. The increase in the numbers of female combatants and their successes in combat resulted in the appointment of female LTTE commanders who controlled women's military units and training. However, during the rehabilitation programme the trainings female ex-combatants received were mostly oriented around very traditional gender roles.

Members of two civil society organizations shared their concerns regarding the change in lifestyle and the frustration it causes:

> "*They [female ex-combatants] were used to a lifestyle of active participation and power. They were brave and independent. But now, they can't go anywhere alone without being afraid. Most of these female ex-combatants are in the kitchens and facing harassment wherever they go*." (Members of two civil society organizations , Kilinochchi)

Interview with a GN in Kilinochchi revealed similar concerns:

> "*The female ex-combatants who had a top-level position with the LTTE are harassed and pressurized by the community because now they don't have the power to fight back. Some people in the community want to take revenge and they make these women's life difficult. Some of the female ex-combatants want to get married and have a family, but nobody likes them because of their past. And any partner would be afraid to be associating a former combatant*." (GN, Kilinochchi)

Now that the war is over, the female ex-combatants are back in society and are expected to live the life of a stereotypical woman. Such a change in lifestyle can cause confusion and frustration. As Friedman (2018) highlights in her paper on "Remnants of a Checkered Past: Female LTTE and Social Reintegration in Post-War Sri Lanka", "The state's refusal to recognize women's diverse personal motives and experiences, as well as former female LTTE's silences about their prior involvement in turn dampens female LTTE's social reintegration." (p. 10). Friedman (2018) further states that in

contexts where female ex-combatants' wartime skills, experiences, and motivations were taken in to account they fared better psychologically, socially, and economically. Therefore, lifestyle changes need to be acknowledged as a factor that can cause distress especially in female ex-combatants. The respondents who work closely with female ex-combatants also mentioned that this dramatic change in lifestyle is a major psychological issue for the ex-combatants, and sadly, there does not seem to be a way to resolve this issue.

As discussed previously, recent research has identified psychological wellness as an area that is profoundly affected due to conflict. The findings under each component in this study point to the fact that the ex-combatants' psychological wellness is challenged in many different ways, be it due to concerns of safety, lack of employment opportunities, trauma, change in lifestyle, physical disabilities, lack of education and skills, discrimination, harassment, lack of cordial relations with the family and community, denial of the space for remembrance and memorialization, and so on. All the challenges that ex-combatants encounter can in turn affect their psychological wellness and hence the overall psychosocial wellness, in the absence of a sound support system. Therefore, the component of psychological wellness is in immediate need of attention and interventions.

Physical Wellness

Physical wellness is important in achieving psychosocial wellbeing. If a person is disabled, which is quite common for those who were in war zones, he/she could face problems in dealing with everyday activities. This is the unfortunate situation for those ex-combatants disabled due to war. According to the BCGR statistics in 2018, there are **434** disabled ex-combatants in Kilinochchi and **290** disabled ex-combatants in Mullaitivu.[8] Their disabilities are mainly due to shrapnel in the body, right/left leg removed from the knee down, one leg removed completely, and complete and partial disabilities (see tables 10 and 11).

Table 10: Details of disabled ex-combatants in Kilinochchi (2017)

Details of disabilities	Number
Complete blindness	04
Partial blindness	21
Missing one arm	12
Partial deafness	05
Missing one leg	69
Other wounds	28
Psychological breakdowns	04
Minor disabilities	211
Complete disabilities	68
Non-communicable diseases	12
Total	**434**

Source: SEWCORB Kilinochchi

[8] Statistics collected from SEWCORBs in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu (2018)

Table 11: Details of disabled ex-combatants in Mullaitivu (2017)

Details of disabilities	Female	Male	Total
Blind	1	2	3
Blind in right eye	3	6	9
Low vision in right eye	1	3	4
Blind in left eye	1	10	11
Both arms amputated below elbows	1	-	1
Right arm amputated from elbow	1	8	9
Right arm amputated from shoulder	2	-	2
Right arm paralyzed	1	3	4
Right hand amputated	1	1	2
Right hand paralyzed	1	1	2
Amputated fingers in right hand	1	2	3
Short left arm	-	1	1
Left arm paralyzed	3	3	6
Two fingers paralyzed in left hand	1	4	5
Both arms paralyzed	-	1	1
Right leg amputated from thigh and left leg amputated below knee	-	1	1
Complete amputation in left leg	-	2	2
Left leg amputated from thigh	-	3	3
Left leg amputated from knee	4	35	39
Left leg paralyzed	-	3	3
Complete amputation in right leg	-	8	8
Right leg amputated from knee	4	43	51
Right leg amputated from knee and left hand amputated	-	1	1
Right leg paralyzed	3	5	8
Right leg amputated from ankle	1	2	3
Scars	2	6	8
Psychological breakdowns	-	4	4
Non-communicable diseases	-	2	2
Short right leg	1	10	11
Short left leg	2	11	13
Other disabilities in legs/arms	1	19	20
Minor disabilities (one or two fingers amputated)	-	6	6
Paralyzed below waist	1	4	5
Partial disabilities	-	2	2
Left arm and leg paralyzed	-	1	1
Kidney removed	-	1	1
Shrapnel in the body	9	25	34
Broken left hip bone	-	1	1
Total	**50**	**240**	**290**

Source: SEWCORB Mullaitivu

Based on the information received from key informants, it does not seem that disabled ex-combatants are given due care. A member of the political party "Crusaders for Democracy", who is also a former combatant disabled in war, told us that they were kept separately from others and that no training was given to them during rehabilitation because of their disabilities.[9] This respondent also told us that one of the main objectives of their political party is to take care of the disabled ex-combatants and to voice their concerns.

The Rana Viru Seva Authority (RVSA) is an organization dedicated to providing services to disabled servicemen and their families of the Sri Lanka military, but it does not provide any services to ex-combatants of the LTTE. In the immediate aftermath of the war in 2009, Handicap International, The Meththa Foundation, and Jaffna Jaipur Centre for Disability Rehabilitation provided services for those who were disabled, both civilians and ex-combatants. Unfortunately, the authors were unable to find any such organizations currently working specifically with the disabled ex-combatants.

Both the BCGR/government officers and civil society representatives voiced their concerns that the government does not do much to help the disabled ex-combatants. Both parties agreed that the disabled ex-combatants are the most disadvantaged group of people and that they do not receive much assistance. The details on socio-economic and welfare assistance provided for ex-combatants in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu (see Table 9) show that there is no mention of assistance/facilities provided for disabled ex-combatants, except for spectacles.

As a consequence of this lack of support, disabled ex-combatants have become highly dependent on their families and are sometimes discriminated against because of their disabilities. Respondents remarked that these ex-combatants lack basic needs such as wheelchairs, crutches, and special toilets, and are of the view that disabled ex-combatants are more prone to psychological and social issues because their needs are not addressed properly. They recommend that there should be special programmes for the disabled ex-combatants in order to avoid being neglected by shared programmes and assistance provided for all the members in a community. Lack of rehabilitative care and special support to manage physical disabilities can affect the psychosocial wellbeing of the ex-combatants.

Knowledge and Skills

According to Richards (2014), education was an important sector for the LTTE. From 1991 the LTTE began to develop Field Medical Systems for injured combatants. Approximately 70 individuals were recruited into the LTTE's nascent medical division in 1992, and in 1993 the LTTE inaugurated its first Medical College. Furthermore, prior to the 2002 ceasefire, the LTTE established the Tamil Eelam Education Council (TEEC), which was similar to the Sri Lankan Ministry of Education. The TEEC established committees composed of parents and educators and tried to regulate and supplement the education provided in government-run schools, especially when there were staff or material shortages. The LTTE also developed its own Economic Development Department (EDD) which was responsible for agriculture, fisheries, industry, and environmental matters.

[9] This was in the Omanthai camp, and may/may not be the same in other rehabilitation camps.

Despite these attempts at education, the details received regarding the education levels of ex-combatants do not seem too promising. Almost all the respondents, including both BCGR/ government officials and civil society representatives, mentioned that ex-combatants' education levels are low; they do not have skills, qualifications, or experiences. A BCGR officer in Kilinochchi mentioned that during rehabilitation, child ex-combatants were given classes in certain subjects and the chance to sit for the Ordinary Level and Advanced Level exams. In the interview with Prof. D. Somasundaram, he mentioned that the government has paid special attention to the education and reintegration of the child ex-combatants, and that their rehabilitation was more successful. Adult ex-combatants were given only training in various livelihood opportunities as discussed in the section Rehabilitation Programme for Ex-Combatants in Sri Lanka. The authors were able to obtain statistics of the education levels of ex-combatants in Kilinochchi in 2017 (see Table 12). In Mullaitivu, statistics of the education level of a total of 127 child ex-combatants in 2017 were obtained (see table 13).

Table 12: Details of education levels of ex-combatants in Kilinochchi (2017)

Education level	Total
Entered University	24
Passed Advanced Level	170
Passed Ordinary Level	223
Passed grades 5 to 10	1656
Total	**2073***

Source: SEWCORB Kilinochchi

*Information of the remaining 1172 ex-combatants was not stated.

Table 13: Details of education levels of child ex-combatants in Mullaitivu (2017)

Education level	Female	Male	Total
Passed grade 8	04	10	14
Up to grade 9	02	07	09
Up to grade 10	06	19	25
Up to grade 11	-	02	02
Up to Ordinary Level	27	30	57
Up to Advanced Level	06	10	16
Currently at University	-	01	01
No education received	01	02	03
Total	**46**	**81**	**127**

Source: SEWCORB Mullaitivu

Developing knowledge and skills of ex-combatants is important because it is a means to better employment and improving one's social status in a community (PADHI 2008). Having better employment means that the individual has the capacity to meet the personal and familial needs and do not need to depend on others. One of the main reasons for unemployment and lack of better

employment among ex-combatants is their lack of educational qualifications and skills. Due to this issue, ex-combatants also face discrimination, harassment, and are subjected to dependence from others in the family or community which in turn cause frustration and hopelessness. Therefore, improving knowledge and skills can enhance multiple components of psychosocial wellbeing.

Community Life

Community life is another dimension of psychosocial wellbeing of an individual or a group. This section discusses the sub-sections: family relationships, community relationships, and cultural and religious practices. This component acknowledges that individuals are usually rooted in a network of social relations. Relationships with family, peers, and community are central to one's construction of identity and sense of belonging. Social relations also usually facilitate access to resources and enable the practice of one's cultural and religious rituals (PADHI 2008). Therefore, having healthy social relations is vital to maintain psychosocial wellbeing of an individual and community.

Somasundaram (2014) has redefined the WHO definition of "Health" including the said elements as follows:

> "Health is a state of complete physical, mental, [familial,] social, [cultural,] [spiritual,] and [ecological] wellbeing, and not merely an absence of disease or infirmity." (p. 93)

The words within brackets are additions made by Somasundaram because elements such as family unit, spiritual and cultural wellbeing are paramount and essential parts in the traditional Tamil society (Somasundaram 2014). Therefore, it is necessary to look at these elements when understanding the psychosocial wellbeing of ex-combatants as well.

Family relationships

One of the main issues that both BCGR/government officials and civil society representatives mentioned was divorce and abandonment of spouses among ex-combatants in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu. A GN in Mullaitivu raised this issue as follows:

> "*Family problems such as divorce and neglecting spouses are common among ex-combatants. They find it difficult to take care of families after returning from rehabilitation because they were not used to a domestic kind of lifestyle. They find it too much pressure and responsibility to take care of families.*" (GN, Mullaitivu)

A staff member of BCGR also said that "*Men could not get married to more than one woman when they were with the LTTE. But now men are neglecting their wives and are having affairs with mistresses. There are a lot of family problems because of that.*" (BCGR staff, Kilinochchi)

According to the respondents' views, the ex-combatants were more focused on combat activities rather than domestic affairs and responsibilities while under the LTTE. This change in lifestyle was an issue discussed in the previous section as well. The ex-combatants did not have to take care of wives, children, or educate them, or make sure there is food every day for the family. But now, they are faced

with these responsibilities and it seems that they struggle with such tasks. A civil society member involved in the mental health sector said that being domestic is very foreign to the ex-combatants, and that they were not used to living in a loving, happy, and peaceful family environment. The respondents believe that as a result, the ex-combatants seem to resort to abandoning or divorcing the spouses and family.

However, previous research shows that not being able to function positively in a family unit is closely related to war trauma and psychological distress. Several studies have shown that combat trauma can negatively impact family and marital relationships. Jordan et al (1992) show that male veterans with PTSD are more likely to report marital or relationship problems, higher levels of parenting problems, and generally poorer family adjustment than veterans without PTSD. Other studies done on the psychosocial effects of landmine injuries and torture show their negative impacts on family life. A study done by Gunaratnam et al (2003) shows that 63% of the 67 victims of landmine injury had more than one relationship problem. The study also discusses psychological effects such as anxiety, depression, somatization, stress, and PTSD, which all lead to dysfunctional family behaviour.

The study on torture survivors of the Ex-Detainees Rehabilitation Organization in Vavuniya by Doney (1998) shows that those who survived torture and returned home were not able to function as before. They were socially withdrawn and had difficulties with intimate relationships. Of the 160 torture survivors, 38% had behavioural changes leading to social withdrawal, 50% had extreme mistrust and suspiciousness, and 66% reported extreme fear. Even though there is no hard evidence of torture of ex-combatants (other than personal stories), torture is nevertheless a part of war and its consequences should not be disregarded (Secretariat for Coordinating Reconciliation Mechanisms 2016b).

According to respondents, another reason ex-combatants face difficulties integrating into domestic life is discrimination faced within the family and the lack of family's support. While some families are supportive towards the former combatants who return, others seem to perceive these ex-combatants as "unnecessary burdens". An activist in Jaffna mentioned that "*Some families do not support the family members who are ex-combatants. They accuse them of being involved with the LTTE and later with the military during rehabilitation and don't want anything to do with the ex-combatants. They also want to keep their distance because they are afraid of surveillance.*" (Activist, Jaffna). Similar instances of lack of family support were reported by the government respondents as well.

According to Somasundaram (2014), the family unit in the Tamil culture is extremely important. In the event of a threat or trauma, Tamil families tend to function and respond together rather than as individual members. During traumatic experiences, the family comes together as a unit and provides mutual support to its members (Somasundaram 2014). Since the findings in this paper are contrary to the above scenario, it would be worthwhile to analyse the causes for disruptive family relationships among ex-combatants more thoroughly.

Community Relationships

Overall sentiments in the community in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu towards the ex-combatants seem to be diverse. Respondents gave different remarks when it comes to the community life of ex-combatants. Their status as "ex-combatants" seems to be highly stigmatized and causes former combatants distress. Many respondents mentioned that being former members of the LTTE, they find difficulties when it comes to marriage outside the ex-combatants group, going abroad, finding employment, working with civil services, and other day-to-day activities. Both civil society representatives, government/BCGR officers also mentioned that discrimination faced by ex-combatants comes from their own communities.

Members of a civil society organization in Kilinochchi mentioned that "*The society is not yet ready to integrate with them, and to sit and talk with them mainly because of the fear of CID. People use the tag "ex-cadre/ ex-combatant" as an excuse for harassment, divorce, violence, threats, and persecution. Stigma is very high in Jaffna, Kilinochchi, and Mullaitivu.*" (Members of a civil society organization, Kilinochchi)

A Catholic priest in Mullaitivu shared the same concerns:

> "*Their [ex-combatants'] own community creates problems for ex-combatants by giving false information to intelligence officers. They want revenge for what these cadres did during the war. Others in the community ostracize them because they fear that any involvement with ex-combatants would make them liable to surveillance and interrogation.*" (Catholic priest, Mullaitivu)

Somasundaram (2014) addresses the same issue through narratives of ex-combatants in *Scarred Communities*: *Psychosocial Impact of Man-made and Natural Disasters on Sri Lankan Society*: "Many LTTE members are struggling with guilt and difficulties of reintegrating with their family and community. Some have committed suicide.... People are afraid to associate with [ex-combatants] due to potential repercussion from the state forces. (p. 192)"

At the same time, some respondents in our interviews mentioned that ex-combatants are now more accepted by the society than when they were first settled in the society after rehabilitation. A GN in Mullaitivu mentioned that "*Most have a smooth life now. No segregations in the society as before. At the beginning, the others were scared to talk or mingle with them. But now they live side by side with the other people in the society.*" (GN, Mullaitivu)

Unfortunately, female ex-combatants are more at risk of distress and are facing various social problems. One such alarming issue that was commonly shared by BCGR/government officers and civil society representatives was their inability to secure marriage prospects. There seems to be two reasons behind this issue. One is the stigma that comes with being an ex-combatant (which is common to both genders). People also do not want to be associated with a former combatant out of fear of being subjected to surveillance. The second reason is more disturbing. The people in the society including other male ex-combatants seem to be under the impression that all female ex-combatants were sexually abused at one point in their life, and especially during rehabilitation and in CSD farms.

The ACPR report on "Civil Security Department: The Deep Militarization of the Vanni" by Jegatheeswaran (2017) highlights this same issue. Their interviews with CSD farm employees[10] shed light on these women's dependency on the military and the risk of gender-based violence and stigmatization. The military has conducted HIV/AIDS tests on all employees in at least two CSD farms in May 2017. The women employees have shown great embarrassment and shame over this incident because the others in the society generally perceive such tests as an indication that all women in CSD farms are having sexual relations with soldiers or other employees. Such unguided and arbitrary practices only result in aggravating the prevailing negative attitudes towards women and cause them unnecessary distress. Those who are responsible have taken no actions to clear the claims on sexual abuse or to state otherwise.

Based on the perspectives of the civil society representatives, it appears that there is an informal form of exclusion of ex-combatants in participating in civic or political activities in the community. Many respondents said that ex-combatants do not have any special groups or societies (not even support groups), and that there does not seem to be any active participation in communal activities. Jegatheeswaran (2017) highlights the issue of inability to participate in communal activities, and that the CSD employees have a clear reluctance in participating in any kind of civic or political engagement whether it is attending local political party meetings or protests by families of the disappeared.

However, the political party "Crusaders for Democracy" formed and led by ex-combatants in the Vanni, is headed by Sivanathan Navindra alias Venthan, who is a former combatant of the LTTE. The members of the party that the authors interviewed said that they identify as a group for ex-combatants. Other than the usual interrogations and surveillance by the intelligence and other security forces, they mentioned that they did not encounter any prohibitions when establishing the party or conducting meetings.

Somasundaram (2014) while acknowledging the importance of collectivism and communal relationships in psychosocial wellbeing, mentions that events such as chronic war and displacement can lead to depletion of community relations and create negative dynamics like scapegoating, marginalization, exclusion, ostracism, and stigmatization of some individuals, families, castes or groups within a community. At the same time, Kaplan and Nussio (2018) suggest that more socially and politically aware ex-combatants in more participatory communities are likely to have a smoother social integration. Therefore, the relationships in communities have the potential to impact the psychosocial wellbeing of its members.

Cultural and Religious Practices

In *Scarred Communities*, Somasundaram (2014) discusses at length the importance of cultural and religious practices in the process of healing and coping with war trauma. Different social groups or cultures have different rituals and traditional functions to deal with trauma. For example, funeral rituals, celebrating anniversaries, and erecting monuments are powerful ways of helping in grieving and giving comfort to those who are affected by war trauma.

[10] Majority of the CSD farm employees is female ex-combatants and war-affected women from female-headed households.

> “Funeral rites and similar anniversary observances are powerful social mechanisms to deal with grief and loss. The gathering together of relations, friends and the community is an important social process to share, work through and release deep emotions, define and come to terms with what has happened and finally integrate the traumatic experience into social reality.” (Somasundaram 2014: p. 118).

Unfortunately, for the ex-combatants in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu such cultural and religious practices are not available, and in some cases not allowed as well (PEARL 2016). Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu districts are especially sensitive areas because the final battles of the armed conflict were fought in these two districts and the people in these districts were affected the most. Mullivaikkal in Mullaitivu was the final site of the battle where a lot of civilians and combatants of both sides lost their lives. Hence, these areas are equally important to the Tamil people as it is to the Sri Lankan armed forces in terms of commemorating and memorialization. Civil society representatives and psychiatrists voiced their concerns that the ex-combatants do not get to share their experiences and grievances.

A Hindu priest in Mullaitivu remarked that “*The ex-combatants are prohibited from organizing any kind of event that endorses the LTTE and its leaders and members. This is ok, but the ex-combatants and other civilians in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu are also not allowed to remember their dead publicly. The Sri Lankan military erects monuments and holds celebrations to commemorate their dead. You don’t see any restrictions made to celebrations in places like Colombo.”* (Hindu priest, Mullaitivu)

BCGR representatives shared the following statement regarding commemorations:

> “*There’s hardly any memorialization or commemoration events organized publicly, but the ex-combatants mostly engage in commemorations privately*.” (BCGR officers, Colombo)

As per civil society representatives and activists, the military continuously oppose and suppress any memorialization monuments or events organized by community members in the North. Below is the only monument in the North Sri Lanka (Mullivakkal, Mullaitivu) that represents the sufferings of the general public.

Figure 3: Monument depicting the suffering of war victims in Mullivaikkal (2018)

Source: Authors

The monument depicts a Tamil victim family, and it represents all those who suffered and lost loved ones in the war. In 2017, the people in Mullaitivu organized a memorialization event on May 19th for all those who suffered from war, including the ex-combatants. The people wanted to carve the names of their loved ones who died in war in stones and display them in the surrounding area of the monument. However, prior to the event the Sri Lanka police obtained a stay order from the Mullaitivu Magistrate's Court against this event. Even though the stay order was later challenged in court, the repression of such memorialization events by the police shows a great lack of consideration and respect by the government to fundamental rights of the people.

By the time that the authors visited the monument in 2018, it was clear that the people had not tended to the area as a place of reverence, possibly due to fear of surveillance. The stones with the names were not spread throughout the area as intended but collected at the foot of the statue (see below).

Figure 4: Stones with the names of loved ones lost in Mullivaikkal (2018)

Source: Authors

When looking at the Vanni area, there are many constructions of war memorials celebrating the military's victory over terrorism. The "victory monument" in Puthukkudiyiruppu, Mullaitivu featuring an army officer holding the Sri Lanka flag and the victory monument in Kilinochchi depicting a lotus flower blossoming from the cracks of a bullet wound are two examples of monuments celebrating victory. But these memorials tell only one side of the story. The story of lives lost and disappeared due to war is eliminated.

The key informants who discussed the psychosocial issues of the ex-combatants told us that the ex-combatants are not very keen on engaging in cultural and religious practices.

A Catholic priest shared his views as follows:

> "*Most ex-combatants think going to church is useless. Very few believe in God and religious practices. And they don't have the freedom to commemorate death of their family members.*" (Catholic priest, Mullaitivu)

A Hindu priest shared same sentiments: "*For some, religious practices are personal. But we don't see a lot of ex-combatants going to the temples. And they don't participate in any religious activities.*" (Hindu priest, Mullaitivu)

This issue is discussed in the report "Normalizing the Abnormal: The Militarization of Mullaitivu" by ACPR and PEARL in 2017. In this report, interviews with ex-combatants and other activists reveal that constant surveillance and unnecessary encroachment of the security forces in civic activities (as discussed previously) have led to further isolation and stigmatization of the ex-combatants in the

community. Such interferences have also made the people afraid of taking part not only in cultural/ religious activities but also in any kind of civic or political activism in the area.

However, Somasundaram (2014) highlights the importance of having community monuments, religious rituals and commemorations in enhancing psychosocial wellbeing of a community: “Community gatherings, meetings and religious ceremonies will allow for communal release of feeling, reviewing, and coming to terms with the collective trauma, socially define and interpret their experiences, as well as re-establish social relationships and plan for the future”. (p. 121-122). Lötscher (2016) also shows that social reintegration activities are just as crucial for the reconciliation process and peace building in general as economic reintegration projects (p. 20).

The findings discussed in this section show that the ex-combatants (and possibly the other citizens in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu) have lost their sense of communality and agency in the post-war environment. They have become passive, resigned and excluded from the larger community. Their lives are mostly determined by fear of reprimand from the security forces. Even though many studies show that remembrance, commemoration, and communal participation are important in achieving psychosocial wellbeing, the ex-combatants clearly don’t have the freedom to engage in these activities and experience their positive outcomes (see also PEARL 2016). Therefore, culture and religious practices is an area that needs to be improved in order to enhance overall psychosocial wellbeing.

Section Five: Conclusion

As the key informant interviews were analysed, there was an inclination towards the BCGR/ government authorities and the civil society/community representative groups to voice contradictory interpretations regarding causes and effects of certain domains in the psychosocial wellbeing of the ex-combatants in Sri Lanka. For example, both parties commonly shared the view that domains such as employment, disability, knowledge and skills, family relationships, physical environment, and economic development cause distress in ex-combatants and that further work needs to be done to improve the psychosocial wellbeing along these areas. However, for domains such as safety and security, psychological wellbeing, and community life, the two parties had different interpretations. While both parties admitted that there is an overt military presence in the areas, that there is visible frustration among ex-combatants, and that their community life is limited, the two parties had different interpretations as to the causes, and the effects those domains have in the overall psychosocial wellbeing of ex-combatants. Despite the different interpretations, the overall analysis of interview data and existing literature shows that there is reason to believe that the psychosocial wellbeing of ex-combatants in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu is challenged under each and every domain of the PWG psychosocial framework adapted in Colombo (2003).

For example, militarization in the North was identified as a factor that potentially challenges the safety and security domain of psychosocial wellbeing of ex-combatants. On the one hand, the civil society groups were strongly critical about overall militarization, high level of surveillance, and monitoring exercised on ex-combatants. While questioning the ethical and legal justification of military involvement in rehabilitation, civil society groups identified the post- rehabilitation programme as a strategic way of constraining and controlling the civic life of the ex-combatants. On the other hand, the BCGR and military informants, while admitting the military presence in the North, justified the importance of having intelligence agencies in the area in the interest of national security. However, by analysing the interview data and other existing literature, it can be concluded that there is an overt presence of the military in the North and that security concerns seem to continue causing distress to the ex-combatants even 10 years since the end of the war and thus continue to affect their psychosocial wellbeing. Being in constant fear of being monitored seems to lead the ex-combatants to be withdrawn, passive, and desolate.

When it comes to the psychological wellbeing of ex-combatants, findings of this study show that it is a key domain that needs immediate attention as it affects other domains of psychosocial wellbeing as well. Civil society groups assert that neither the rehabilitation programme nor the post-rehabilitation initiatives had a significant focus on the psychological needs of the ex-combatants. They mentioned that a significant number of ex-combatants are suffering from psychological issues which require immediate psychological and psychiatric assistance. In contrast, BCGR and military representatives denied the prevalence of any major psychological issues among ex-combatants, but admitted that there is considerable distress and frustration among ex-combatants caused, as per their interpretation, solely due to lack of economic and livelihood opportunities. However, recent research acknowledges psychological distress due to conflict as an area that needs special focus when designing rehabilitation and interventions for vulnerable groups of people. The key informant responses point to the fact that there is a lack of knowledge among stakeholders and lack of necessary resources to address the issue of psychological distress of ex-combatants.

Along with the lack of psychological wellbeing, unemployment of ex-combatants was identified as one of the biggest challenges to their psychosocial wellbeing. Unemployment and lack of better employment not only leads to increased poverty levels but also to dependency, lack of status in the community, and discrimination. BCGR coordinating officers admitted that the commission does not have the capacity to provide livelihood opportunities to all the ex-combatants but that they are utilizing all available resources to provide everything possible. The respondents also mentioned that the geographical and economic environment is not conducive to generating many other livelihood and employment opportunities. In such a context, BCGR's attempt to provide a government job with pension entitlement at CSD was identified by the respondents as a major step in addressing the issue. However, civil society representatives and existing literature on the topic show that employment at CSD does not significantly improve the lives of ex-combatants and that it can potentially cause more problems.

Disabled ex-combatants and female ex-combatants were identified as the most vulnerable groups of people in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu. When it comes to disabled ex-combatants, other than providing some equipment to help with their physical conditions, no special programmes focusing on their level of vulnerability and special needs have been implemented. It should be noted that this is not an issue faced only by the disabled ex-combatants. According to Samararatne et al (2018) and Vanniasinkam and Vitharana (2019), war-affected disabled communities remain the most helpless and vulnerable and the least supported by the government and non-governmental reconciliation programmes. The status of the disabled ex-combatants show that more informed interventions are needed to improve their physical wellness and hence the overall psychosocial wellbeing.

The female ex-combatants also show very poor levels of psychosocial wellbeing. The burdens that they bear are twice that of the men in terms of security, stigma, discrimination, unemployment, and livelihoods. The stories of being sexually abused by the military during rehabilitation affect their psychological and social wellbeing. Female ex-combatants also seem to struggle with sustaining a livelihood as there is a lack of proper vocational training and inability to use the training they received during rehabilitation in common livelihood practices. Findings of the study show that female ex-combatants need special care and services in order to help them achieve better psychosocial wellbeing.

Discrimination came up as a key impediment to psychosocial wellbeing of the ex-combatants throughout this study. The community-level factors that discriminate the ex-combatants and limit their social lives are associated with issues pertaining to security and surveillance. Feelings of insecurity due to strong surveillance, discrimination faced at government institutions, and limited opportunities to find employment and livelihood opportunities are some structural factors hampering them moving forward with others in the society. Trauma, stigma, fear, suspicion, and feeling of uncertainty are amongst the psychological factors that discourage them from coming out and building relationships with others. The family and the community seem to avoid ex-combatants at large mainly due to heavy surveillance on them and this is a major impediment to the development of their psychosocial wellbeing.

The findings show that the ex-combatants' presence and active participation is very limited during public events and in the political arena. Even though funeral rites, memorialization, and grieving are well-documented social mechanisms to deal with post-war trauma and enhancing psychosocial

wellness, such practices are rarely seen among ex-combatants. Thus, community life remains another serious area of poor psychosocial wellbeing of the ex-combatants.

All in all, it seems that the psychosocial wellbeing of ex-combatants is a problematic area. It is apparent that the government spends a lot of money and other resources on behalf of ex-combatants in Sri Lanka, but the manner in which this is done seems questionable. It seems that there is no systematic understanding of what successful reintegration and psychosocial wellbeing is for a vulnerable group of people in a post-war setting. This study explores the wellbeing of ex-combatants in a post-conflict and post-rehabilitation setting, and the overall findings of the study point to the conclusion that the psychosocial wellbeing of ex-combatants in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu, Sri Lanka is not addressed as per the PWG framework adapted in Colombo (2003). This study can be complemented with more detailed research that can provide more specific insight into the lives of ex-combatants with the aim of developing better-suited interventions and support systems.

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From "Combatant" to Civilian": The Psychosocial Wellbeing of Ex-combatants in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu, Sri Lanka

Viyanga Gunasekera and Kasun Pathiraja

After the end of a nearly three-decade civil war in 2009, the "combatants" of the LTTE were enrolled in a rehabilitation programme conducted by the Sri Lanka Army to train and provide means for the ex-combatants so that transition to civilian life would be smoother. Ten years since the end of the war, it is doubtful whether the reintegration into communities is successful despite the efforts of the government. This study was conducted to explore the current psychosocial wellbeing of the ex-combatants, specifically in the Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu districts. Using information and statistics gathered from the Bureau of the Commissioner General of Rehabilitation (BCGR) and other focal points who all work closely with the ex-combatants in the North, the study concluded that ex-combatants face numerous challenges in their day-to-day lives and that multiple domains of psychosocial wellbeing are severely affected. The findings discussed in this paper would be useful for understanding the prevailing circumstances of ex-combatants in Sri Lanka.

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