



YOUTH PERCEPTIONS:

Exploring Results from the Poverty and Youth Survey

Claudia Ibargüen
with the collaboration of Azra Cader

February 2005

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Acronyms

| | |
|------|---|
| AL | Advanced Level |
| CEPA | Centre for Poverty Analysis |
| CBOs | Community Based Organisations |
| DS | District Secretariat |
| JVP | Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (People's Liberation Front) |
| LTTE | Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam |
| NYS | National Youth Survey |
| OL | Ordinary Level |
| PYS | Poverty and Youth Survey |

Executive Summary

This report presents the main findings of a youth survey conducted by the Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA) in Sri Lanka. The study focused on revealing the opinions and viewpoints of young people on poverty and poverty related issues.

The Poverty and Youth Survey (PYS) was conducted throughout the island, although the Jaffna peninsula and 'uncleared' areas were excluded. The PYS interviewed 346 individual youngsters with a close-ended quantitative questionnaire, and 34 people using a longer, more in-depth, qualitative questionnaire. A stratified random method by clusters was adopted. The two strata used for the sampling were: the conflict and the non-conflict areas. The assumption was that youth who have grown up in the conflict areas, and those who have lived outside of this area, exhibit important differences that will influence the manner in which they perceive poverty. Stratifying offered the possibility of obtaining a large enough sample from the conflict zone allowing for better comparisons.

The interpretation of the results from the quantitative and qualitative components of the PYS will feed into the existing knowledge base about young people in Sri Lanka.

The main findings from the PYS are the following:

Youth talk about youth

The largest percentage of respondents believed youth begins at age 18 and ends either at 24, or 29 years of age. Only a minority said that youth extends up to the age of 35.

Most respondents argued that marriage was immaterial to whether a person is considered a youth or not. Nonetheless a sizeable group accepted that marriage marks the end of youth, although this is the case to a larger extent for women.

For the most part, respondents believe young women and young men face very similar problems. Overwhelmingly scarcity of jobs was seen as the most serious problem faced by young people. This response surpassed all others by a wide margin. The second and third most common answers: alcohol consumption, and lack of educational opportunities, trailed far behind.

Poverty and development

The PYS explored the viewpoints of young people about poverty, not only in the sense of economic constraints but also in terms of limited opportunity structures. In comparative terms, youth are optimistic that their lives will be better than those of their parents. The optimism seems to be more prevalent with youth in the conflict zone.

In terms of income, the largest percentage of young people believes that an income between Rs4000 and Rs6000 is enough for a family of four to be above poverty. However, education, gender and place of residence were found to have a significant impact on responses. Men believe a higher income is necessary. Similarly, youth in the non-conflict region and the cities reported higher required incomes than their peers in the conflict and rural areas.

For the most part, survey respondents characterised poverty as a state of precarious or low income. When asked how they would identify a poor household the majority pointed to economic concerns such as unemployment of the principal earner, or the lack of land or house. A smaller, but still important number, referred to behavioural aspects, for instance, alcoholism or not sending children to school. Issues of powerlessness such as not having the right connections and political favouritism were mentioned by only a handful of respondents suggesting that these elements are not linked in young people's minds to poverty.

A majority of young people believe that poverty in Sri Lanka, as well as in their immediate locality, is either 'somewhat' or 'very serious'. More than half of survey respondents acknowledged that certain groups are more vulnerable to poverty than others. Vulnerability was defined, basically, as families or groups who have insecure income sources, such as wage labourers or the unemployed. Intrinsic characteristics like gender, sex or caste were not seen as particularly relevant. In fact, most respondents indicated that women are not any more vulnerable to poverty than men.

Most young people define their future aspirations in terms of their communal and societal responsibilities.

In keeping with most young people everywhere, youth in Sri Lanka were found to be optimistic, stating that poverty is not an inescapable condition. A few cautioned, however, that obtaining a job was indispensable for youngsters to move out of poverty.

"Available opportunities" to move out of poverty were characterised mainly as livelihood options. Slightly more than half of respondents stated that in their locality opportunities for young people do exist. Surprisingly, youngsters living in rural areas, as opposed to those in cities, were more inclined to believe this.

The largest proportion of respondents considered 'working hard' as the best specific strategy that youth can put into practice to move out of poverty. 'Getting a good education' and 'getting a job' came close behind. Having the right connections was perceived as an important strategy by a very small minority. When asked what strategies, if any, they themselves had put into practice in the recent past, the largest number reported they had started a self-employment venture.

A little over half of those interviewed said that they would consider migrating as a strategy to move out of poverty. There were important differences among men and women however, with almost three-quarters of men stating they would migrate but only one-third of women.

Young people consider the government as the principal entity responsible for helping young people move out of poverty. At the same time the qualitative questionnaire revealed there is a widespread and deep-seated mistrust of politicians. The government's responsibility according to young people is to "give" or create jobs.

Employment and education

For those who did not finish their A/L, economic difficulties, followed by failure to pass examinations were the two most often repeated reasons.

More than half of those interviewed with the qualitative instrument expressed dissatisfaction with the manner in which the system prepares people for the job market. A considerable number of responses, however, pointed that the education system was improving and that recent innovations and reforms were contributing to make education more practical oriented.

A number of responses talked of the futility of education arguing that bribing politicians, or having the right connections were the best avenues for securing a job and not the quality or quantity of education they received.

When comparing themselves to other youth, and to their parents, PYS respondents were confident that their future employment perspectives were somewhat better. There were no appreciable differences between young people in the conflict and non-conflict areas or among youth in the cities and countryside.

In line with past studies the majority of PYS respondents mentioned the government as their preferred sector of employment. The reasons for favouring the government are related basically to job security and an improved social standing. This preference was much more intense in the conflict area. There, 60% of respondents, in contrast to 37% in the non-conflict area, stated that they preferred government employment. An appreciable number of youngsters, particularly from the non-conflict region are inclined towards the private sector. The most often cited reasons are the higher pay and the prevalent corruption in government job dispensation.

When asked if they could have any job they wanted what would it be (instead of their preferred employment sector) surprisingly only a very small minority, of less than 3%, mentioned a government job. In the non-conflict region the highest number indicated that their “dream job” would be to have a business. In the conflict region, teaching was most desired, followed by having a business.

When recounting success stories (young people who had overcome poverty) most examples revolved around youngsters who had established self-employment ventures. Self-employment was seen in a very positive light suggesting that it is becoming not only acceptable but also admired.

The principal attributes of a good job, according to young people, are: sufficient pay, benefits and acceptable working hours. Only a small minority mentioned job satisfaction or personal interest as important features.

Politics and participation

Participation of sample respondents in community organisations such as youth organisations, community based organisations (CBOs) and micro-finance groups was found to be low.

Voting among young people in Sri Lanka is widespread. More than three-quarters of eligible respondents indicated they had voted in the last election.

The majority of respondents stated that there are no avenues for young people to present their demands to the government. A substantial number of respondents argued that their involvement is only sought during election time, when politicians need the youth vote. The reason many young people willingly allow to be manipulated lies in the hope that their support will lead to a government job.

There is a fairly widespread attitude that the political structures of the country need to be reformed. This point of view was quite constant among youth in the conflict and non-conflict areas and men and women. Youth in the rural areas were, comparatively, more inclined than their urban peers to believe that political structures need to change.

Almost half of PYS respondents indicated that in cases of extreme injustice violence is justified. In cases of extreme poverty, only less than a quarter shared this viewpoint. Many equated 'injustice' to a political system that is seen as corrupt and non-responsive. From the qualitative interviews only a minority expressed that violence is never justified.

Conclusions

The final section of the study pulls together the findings of the PYS and analyses them along three dimensions. First, it compares some of the results with previous studies and surveys. Second it highlights the themes in which important differences and/or similarities emerged among young men and women, youth in urban and rural settings and youth in the conflict and non-conflict areas. Finally the conclusions pointed to policy areas, which appear to require closer attention or a change of strategy.

The findings from the PYS corroborated, at least partially, some previously held assumptions. Among them the thesis that unemployment is found more among the educated, and that young people prefer the government as an employment sector. However the PYS found that when isolating the aspirations from the obligations government is one of the least favoured choices for employment. That so many young people still search for government employment might be a results of a very engrained sense of their obligations and of doing what society expects of them.

Differences among rural and urban youth, and youth in the conflict and non-conflict area were not found to be as big as expected. This does not necessarily mean that young people are the same everywhere in Sri Lanka, but that on important issues such as jobs, and political participation they have very similar concerns and aspirations.

1. Introduction

1.1 Objectives and Background

In Sri Lanka the youth constituency has attracted a fair amount of interest and discussion. Nonetheless, data and information reflecting in a direct manner the viewpoints and opinions of young people is limited. An important step in overcoming this gap was the 1999-2000 National Youth Survey (NYS). The NYS focused on obtaining the opinions of Sri Lankan youth on issues ranging from politics, education, employment, values, culture, health etc.¹ The goal of this undertaking was to gather up-to-date, reliable information that could assist policymakers and development organisations. The Poverty and Youth Survey (PYS) conducted by The Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA) in 2003 was motivated by a similar rationale. The PYS sought to collect from young people themselves, their perceptions, attitudes and opinions on issues relating primarily to poverty, personal life chances, capacities, and future options. The purpose was to gather and analyse information that can support the work of policymakers, development practitioners and individuals/institutions working closely with youth and needing insight on how young people perceive and deal with poverty.

The present study is an analysis of the results from both the quantitative and qualitative component of the PYS. It is comprised of eight sections. The first section introduces the objectives, the conceptual framework and the methodology. The second offers a succinct review of recent debates on youth in Sri Lanka in order to set the PYS findings on a wider context. The third elaborates the demographic profile of the survey. The fourth explores perceptions on youth by youth, including aspects such as the criteria for labelling someone a “youth” and the main problems they face. The fifth focuses on youth perspectives on various dimensions of poverty. The sixth discusses questions related to employment and education. The seventh reflects on young people’s views of the political sphere, and their own political and civic participation. It also touches briefly on attitudes towards the war and violence. Finally, the conclusion attempts to assemble the most important trends emerging from the PYS. It also offers some areas where future youth policy could focus.

1.2 Conceptual Framework

The design and analysis of the PYS was influenced by the capability approach. In the past two decades Amartya Sen and other prominent thinkers have argued that a person’s well-being is not only determined by income or consumption. More importantly, well-being is influenced by a person’s capabilities to lead the kind of life he or she has reason to value (Sen 1999). In this sense, the existence of alternative life options and the capability and freedom to act on them, is essential (Sen 1999). From the perspective of this study, capability can be understood as the

¹ The NYS was a joint undertaking involving UNDP and six Sri Lankan and German institutions: The Centre for Anthropological and Sociological Studies of the University of Colombo (CASS), the Program for Improving Capacities for Poverty Research (IMCAP) at the Development Studies institute of the University of Colombo (DSIUC), the South Asia Institute of the University of Heidelberg (SAI), The Goethe Institute, Inter/Nationes, the Jaffna Rehabilitation Project of the GTZ and the Freidrich Ebert-Stiftung Foundation (FES).

ability and freedom of young people to choose and do things that are important to them, and to access the life choices they desire.

In the capability approach, poverty is not determined only by low income but, more importantly, poverty is the result of reduced or no capabilities. Not having a proper level of income can play a role in an individual having low capabilities. However, income is but one aspect that influences capabilities. Other aspects, unrelated to income, may play a more important role in constraining a persons' opportunity structure, and therefore his/her capabilities.² These can be, among others: individual (such as gender or ethnicity), geographical (living in a conflict area), societal (family expectations) or institutional/political (available avenues for political participation). The PYS seeks to understand how young people view their capabilities and the elements that restrain these capabilities.

The capability approach is particularly relevant when dealing with a young population segment as it focuses on abilities and, in this case, on perceived abilities (in the present) to choose life options (for the future). Most often, it is during youth that individuals seriously contemplate life expectations. At this juncture, young women and men evaluate their potential to achieve the type of life they would like to live and their actual capacity to make the choices that will take them there.

1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 Types of questions

The PYS was designed with the express interest of gathering information on what young Sri Lankans think about poverty. In contrast to the NYS, which had a wider scope of inquiry, the PYS concentrated on poverty-related aspects. However, other issues, indirectly linked to poverty, such as employment, education, political participation and migration were also explored in some detail.³

The PYS combined two types of questions; the first type dealt directly with the individual being interviewed. For example: Have you made any attempts to improve your economic condition? (From the quantitative questionnaire). The second type of questions urged young people to take a step back and give their viewpoints on the abstract group known as "youth". For example: Do you think poor youth themselves are doing enough to improve their living standards? (From the quantitative questionnaire)

The first category of questions expects respondents to put themselves at the centre of the inquiry, and perform a self-introspection in order to answer. The second category requires the young person to give their assessment on an abstract entity, that they might, or might not, consider themselves to be a part of. The two types of questions are interspersed throughout the questionnaires.

² For a complete discussion on this see Subramanian S.V, and Duncan. (2000). Capability and Contextuality. *HCPDS Working Paper Series.*" Volume 10, Number 10.

³ Please refer to Annex 1 for a full transcript of the qualitative and quantitative questionnaires

1.3.2 Sample size

The target population for the PYS was the totality of Sri Lankan youth. Youth were defined as men and women between the ages of 15 and 29. The PYS included both married and unmarried persons. A total sample size of 340 young people was established.

How was the sample size of 340 determined?

- Budget as well as staff limitations imposed a fieldwork time frame of 6 weeks.
- For 5 of the 6 weeks one team, of 3 to 4 enumerators would be out in the field.
- In 1 of the 6 weeks two teams would be out in the field simultaneously.
- A team of 3 to 4 enumerators could administer 10 quantitative and 1 qualitative interview in one day, provided all ten interviews were in the same site.
- Taking into account travel and rest time it was estimated that one team could complete around 40 to 50 questionnaires in one week.
- If only one team worked each week, it was realistic to expect 300 questionnaires to be completed in the six weeks of fieldwork. $6 \times 50 = 300$.
- During one of the weeks two teams would work simultaneously. Therefore, $300 + 50 = 350$.
- Taking into account unforeseen eventualities, it was determined that a feasible sample size was **340** for the quantitative component and around **34** for the qualitative component

As in any study, the sampling methodology of the PYS was designed to obtain the most reliable information while at the same time dealing with a number of constraints. The budget prevented a large-scale survey akin to the NYS, which had a sample size of more than 2500. It was estimated that with the available financial and human resources, as well as the disposable time period, the PYS could conceivably interview close to 340 individual youngsters with a close-ended quantitative questionnaire, and around 34 people using a longer, more in-depth, qualitative questionnaire.

Surveys allow for estimates on the characteristics of a wider (target) population to be made with a relatively small number of people interviewed. If particular conditions are met, a certain degree of confidence can be placed on the assumption that the responses from the sample will also hold, they will be representative, for the general target population.

When estimating sample sizes, the researcher has to establish a required accuracy and margin of error.⁴ Another important element that must be taken into account when deciding on sample size is the variance of the population. This is a measure of how much variation there is within the population in the value we are trying to estimate. In general, a larger sample is required to accurately estimate something that is very variable.

In addition, for the confidence intervals and levels to hold, and to be able to extrapolate the results of a survey to the target population, an essential factor must be met; the sample must

⁴ See Krejcie, R.V and Morgan D.W (1970), "Determining Sample Size for Research Activities," *Educational and Psychological Measurements*, vol. 30: 607-610.

be a genuine random representation of the population. In other words, the sampling method must ensure that each unit, in this case each and every youth, has the same chance, greater than zero, of being included in the sample.

In the case of the PYS, security and budget considerations hindered the fulfilment of this last criterion. Young people residing in Jaffna, Killinochchi, Mullaitivu and other District Secretariat (DS) Divisions marked as uncleared were excluded from the sampling. In other words, one important rule of survey methodology: that each person in your target population has a chance of being selected was not met. The results from the PYS, therefore, cannot be generalised to all Sri Lankan youth. Despite this shortcoming the information contained in this analytical report can be seen as indicative of general trends in the perceptions and viewpoints of young people in Sri Lanka.

1.3.3 Sampling method

Various sampling methods were considered during the design of the PYS. Carrying out a simple random sample was rejected as interviewing 340 dispersed units would have been almost impossible in logistical terms, and lists of individual young people to be used as a sample frame, are unavailable.

The PYS adopted a stratified random method by clusters. The sample was divided into two sub-populations (stratums): conflict⁵ and non-conflict⁶. Stratified sampling involves dividing the target population among some meaningful characteristic. This method is customarily used when the target population is very variable and heterogeneous, and when there are certain sub-groups that are more similar among themselves. At the same time, stratified sampling can prove cost and timesaving.

The decision to use stratified sampling was based on the assumption that youth who have grown up in the conflict areas, and those who have lived outside of the conflict area, exhibit important differences that will influence substantially the manner in which they perceive poverty. If the speculation were correct, then this would allow inferences to be made for youth in conflict areas and for youth in non-conflict areas. Stratifying also offers the possibility of carrying out rich comparisons between the two groups.

In stratified random sampling, the proportion of each stratum in the sample should mirror the proportion in the target population. However, when a certain group that wants to be studied in detail is too small, it is advisable to over-sample. Around 12% of the total population of Sri Lanka resides in the conflict area. This would have meant only 40 questionnaires for this group. To be able to make more compelling comparisons, 100 questionnaires were allotted to the conflict zone and 240 to the non-conflict area.

⁵ What is understood here as “conflict” areas are the districts that were more heavily affected by the ethnic war. These are: Jaffna, Killinochchi, Mullaitivu, Mannar, Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Vavuniya and Ampara. As mentioned earlier, Mullaitivu, Killinochchi, Jaffna and some DS Divisions in Trincomalee, Mannar and Batticaloa were excluded.

⁶ The non-conflict area is made up of the following seventeen Districts: Colombo, Gampaha, Kalutara, Kandy, Matale Nuwara Eliya, Galle, Matara, Hamabantota, Kurunegala, Puttalam, Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Badulla, Monaragala, Ratnapura and Kegalle.

In addition, it was considered important to capture the rural-urban divide in the non-conflict area. Therefore, from the 240 questionnaires in the non-conflict grouping, a further stratification was performed. Around 75% of the country is rural and 25% is urban. Therefore, from the total of 240 questionnaires in the “non conflict” stratum, 180 were fixed for the rural areas and the remainder of 60 to the urban areas.

1.3.4 Sampling frame

The sampling frame consists of a list of every unit in the population of interest. It was not possible to obtain a list with the name and location of every youth in Sri Lanka. Therefore cluster sampling was performed within each of the two strata. Cluster sampling is a means of gathering data in situations where complete lists of everyone in the population are not available, but lists of clusters of the population can be obtained.

At the time of conducting the PYS the information from the census of 2001 had recently been made public. It was decided to use census blocks as the clusters and perform a random selection of 17 clusters (census blocks). Subsequently one adjoining census block from each of the 17 census blocks was selected for a total of 34 census blocks. This was done in order to avoid an unmanageable geographical dispersion. In each cluster (census block) 10 quantitative and one qualitative questionnaire were administered.⁷

The conflict census blocks randomly selected were from the districts of: Vavuniya, Ampara, and Batticaloa. The non-conflict census blocks came from the districts of Colombo, Matara, Galle, Hambantota, Badulla, Kandy, Anuradhapura and Gampaha.

Once the census blocks were randomly selected, the selection of households and individual members within those households also had to follow a random method. In the map of the census block the enumerators were instructed to begin with the outer left hand side and draw a clockwise spiral line through the map of the census block. Starting with the first household, every fifth household would be visited. In cases where no young person resided in the selected household, the next immediate household was visited. If more than two young people resided in the same household, a random draw was performed.

1.3.5 Field work procedure

The PYS was administered between the months of March and April 2003. The fieldwork got underway with a visit to four sites in Matara and two sites in Hambantota.

The PYS research team was divided into three flexible sub-teams. One sub-team was out in the field each week (except one week when two teams went out simultaneously). A more field-experienced researcher headed each sub-team. Efforts were made to have at least one male in each sub-team and to ensure proper language skills depending on the site. In addition, the PYS field team underwent an intense one-day training at the end of February. The following day, a pilot test was carried out in a census block in an urban setting in Colombo. Subsequently, the team met and discussed the problems they had encountered. With this feedback final modifications were made to the questionnaires.

⁷ See Annex 2 for a list of the specific location of the census blocks.

Carrying out the fieldwork in rural areas presented certain challenges in terms of physical access to the site. However, the most challenging sites turned out to be those conducted in the urban areas. Despite the physical proximity and relative facility of access, people in urban settings tend to be much less co-operative with surveys of this nature.

1.3.6 The questionnaires

The PYS had two interrelated instruments: a quantitative, closed-ended questionnaire, and a qualitative open-ended questionnaire.

The study team allocated a fair amount of time to the process of questionnaire design. Writing relevant but simple questions is one of the most difficult tasks in survey methodology. If the questions are unsuitable for the group under study, or if they are confusing or formulated in a manner that misleads the respondent, then the information generated will be unreliable.⁸

In the case of the PYS, the questionnaire design process included more than 20 sample drafts. The content of the questions, the ordering, the language, and potential problems, were discussed extensively both within the team and with external resource persons.

The quantitative questionnaire was composed of 62 questions. The vast majority consisted of pre-coded answers recorded as numbers. It was organised within the following subheadings:

- **Identification.** Information on all members of the household including age, sex and educational attainment. Socio-economic proxy indicators: household building materials, electricity and Samurdhi.
- **Respondent's background.** Respondent's marital status, ethnicity, place of residence and main current activity.
- **Perceptions about youth.** Questions on how young people rank, define and evaluate the problems of youth. How do respondents define "youth."
- **Perception on poverty.** Its seriousness, geography and the groups that suffer most. Personal attempts to improve economic conditions.
- **Perceptions on youth and poverty.** How youth characterise a poor household and available opportunity structures.
- **Education and employment.** Reasons why youth opt to continue their education or decide to move into employment. How youth rate their employment opportunities and the preferred areas of employment.
- **Youth politics and public participation.** The types of civic and political participation youth are involved in. Whether extreme poverty or extreme injustice justify violence.

⁸ Questions should try to be valid (measure what the researcher intends them to measure), reliable (yield the same results if administered at different times or to different samples), and unbiased (people are willing and able to provide accurate answers). Doyle, J. (2001) *Handbook for IQP Advisors and Students*. Ch. 10: "Introduction to Survey. Methodology and Design." Available from www.wpi.edu/Academics/Depts/IGSD/IOPHbook/ch10.html [Accessed 28 April 2004]

The quantitative questionnaire followed a procedure to ensure that, as much as possible, randomness was followed in the selection of individual respondents. In contrast, the qualitative questionnaire was administered to the young person in each census block who, according to the study team, was most articulate and displayed a willingness to elaborate on the survey's topics.

The qualitative questionnaire was composed of 36 questions. The responses were recorded as text. The open nature of the questions meant that respondents were encouraged to explain their answers as fully as possible. The questions were usually linked to a line of inquiry in the quantitative questionnaire and sought to obtain a more complete explanation. Some questions explicitly asked the respondent to remember what they had expressed in the quantitative questionnaire and further explain their answer.

The analysis contained in the present study is based on both the quantitative and qualitative components of the PYS. The information from the quantitative questionnaires was combined and presented as figures. The qualitative information was used to illustrate particular arguments and give the analysis more depth. Whenever a quote is included this will have been extracted from the qualitative questionnaire.

1.3.7 Limitations

As any other survey, the PYS has certain limitations that must be kept in mind when analysing the results. First, is the relative over-representation of women. In most rural study sites more women than men were available to respond to the interview. Second, and as already mentioned, young people in uncleared areas and the Jaffna peninsula were excluded from the survey. This implies that when talking about the "conflict" area the viewpoints of young people in LTTE-controlled areas, arguably the most poverty stricken, are not captured. The third shortcoming is that the random sampling did not produce a single census block in the plantation sector. Young people in this sector exhibit distinctive sets of problems, but the PYS does not capture their voice. The exclusion of plantation youth is particularly unfortunate, as it has already been noted that information on this group of youngsters is scant. (Ibargüen 2004).

2. Setting the Context: An Overview of Sri Lankan Youth⁹

The following section sets out a broad synopsis of the principal arguments regarding youth in Sri Lanka found in recent literature. The purpose is to extract selected points from this body of knowledge and compare them with some of the main findings emerging from the PYS. The concluding chapter will discuss the issue areas where the PYS appears to corroborate, or challenge, some of these assumptions.

The literature on youth in Sri Lanka has revolved around a few recurring themes. These fall basically into two large interrelated areas. The first is connected to youth's involvement in unrest. The extent of youth's participation and leadership in the two insurgencies has drawn much attention and anxiety from both scholar and policy making circles eager to understand the phenomenon. The second is connected with the employment scenario and employment perspectives for young people. Other topics that have stimulated interest are the seemingly high levels of educated youth unemployment and the mismatch between the educational system and the labour market. A focused and purposive study on the manner in which young people perceive and understand poverty has not, to the knowledge of the author, been carried out. The hope is that the findings from the PYS will both feed into already existing knowledge as well as offer fresh insight on Sri Lankan youth.

2.1 Youth, Employment and Education

Youth and education has been explored from a number of angles. Some of the most prominent discussions have touched on the apparently entrenched notion that educational qualifications should automatically translate to a job, and the ensuing frustrations for young people when this is not realised. According to much of the literature, young people still believe that educational qualifications should, as a matter of course, result in a job. Academics have argued that this expectation can be traced to a State that for many years did, in fact, absorb a good percentage of the educated rural youth into its ranks.

In Sri Lanka youth face considerably higher unemployment rates than adults. According to some this is not particularly surprising as this is common throughout the world. What seems to be different in Sri Lanka is that it is young people with more education, rather than their relatively less educated counterparts, who suffer from the higher unemployment rates. The NYS also endorsed this argument. Their results showed that the unemployment rate among educated youth was much higher than among those with little or no education. (National Youth Survey Overview Report 2000) The concentration of unemployment in educated youth has attracted a great deal of analytical and policy level attention and has become one of the most established postulates in the literature on youth. (Presidential Commission on Youth 1990, Lakshman 2002, Mayer 2002)

The main theories advanced to explain the persistently high rates of youth unemployment in Sri Lanka revolve around three structural mismatches or imbalances.

⁹ Much of the following section is extracted from Ibarguen C. (2004), *Youth in Sri Lanka: A Review of Literature*, CEPA: Colombo.

1. The first argues that the system produces highly educated individuals but without the skills that are actually required in the workplace.
2. The second is related to the numbers of new entrants and the capacities of the economy. In other words, an economy growing at an average rate of 4% per annum is simply unable to absorb a labour supply growing at a much faster rate. (Alailima 1992)
3. The third resides in the expectations of youth. In particular, educated youth have immobile expectations and aspirations on the type of jobs they will take and are unwilling to accept manual or agricultural related jobs. (Jayaweera and Sanmugam 1992)

A Presidential Commission on Youth¹⁰ addressed the first mismatch. It criticised the role of the education system in preparing young people for the job market. It pointed to excessive centralisation, a lack of continuity in education policy between successive governments, inequality with regard to facilities between urban and rural, lack of a rounded education policy particularly at primary level, and a lack of opportunities for vocational training. Regarding necessary changes at the tertiary level the Commission pointed to an abundance of qualified people at the higher echelons of professions and too few with intermediary skills. (Presidential Commission on Youth 1990) Other authors have pointed to additional shortcomings of the system such as lack of English language instruction and more focus on applied skills rather than theoretical knowledge. (Gunawardena 2002, Mayer 2002).

The generally held assumption is that Sri Lankan youth have “immobile expectations” and prefer to wait until they get the job they want which is, most often, a job in the government bureaucracy. This strong inclination for state sector jobs has been explained with three interrelated arguments:

1. As a result of societal pressure. Having an occupation that is valued and prized by society is very important for Sri Lankan youth, particularly in rural areas. The “status of a job” is of prime consideration when searching for a job. In fact, this status is oftentimes more sought out than a job with higher remuneration but seen as more menial. (Presidential Commission on Youth 1990, Mayer 2002).
2. As an effect of economic calculations. Some authors explain the flight from agriculture as a pragmatic decision based on the low returns, poor profit margins and general stagnation of the sector. (Hettige 1992, Jayasena 1998, Mayer 2000). The results from the National Youth Survey appear to substantiate this argument as 50% of youth indicated a preference for agriculture if it could make a suitable income. (Fernando 2002).
3. It has also been suggested that the educational system bears the responsibility for detaching new entrants in the labour force from manual pursuits since the school curriculum does not give agriculture academic importance. (Lakshman 2002, Jayasena 1998)

¹⁰ This Commission, set up in 1990, had the objective of analysing what had prompted such large numbers of young people from joining the unrest.

Most authors agree that a job in the state apparatus is still by far the most sought after employment alternative for young people. Government employment offers stability that is lacking in agriculture, self-employed jobs and even those in the private sector. This security, in addition to the regular income, the assurance of a pension and the social prestige, explain its desirability. It has also been found that the predilection for government jobs is present across the board but more marked with educated youth and in the Northeast of the country.

The NYS found that overall, 50% of respondents preferred government jobs. When disaggregated, employment preferences in both urban, estate and rural areas are clearly for government employment. However, this inclination is more pronounced in the North and East provinces and in the rural hinterland.

2.2 Youth and Development

It has often been argued that development policies aimed at youth have been propelled more by fear of any further involvement in violence, and less as attempts to improve young peoples' opportunities.

The typical state youth development scheme has relied on reaching out through the promotion of employment in some guise. Mayer, (2002) has argued that the development predicament of youth goes beyond an inability to secure employment and should be understood in a broader context as a lack of life chances. Furthermore, government policies and responses rarely have connections with village based institutions or organisations. They do not involve youth as participants but merely as receivers. In other words, the policies make no effort to support youth in coming up with their own plans to address their own problems.

A consequence of this is manifested in an ingrained passivity. Although youth often state that they feel excluded, oftentimes young people in the rural areas would rather wait hoping for opportunities to be offered to them (mainly as a job and through the government) rather than become actively involved to create opportunities on their own. (Mayer 2002)

2.3 Youth and Politics

Studies on the participation of Sri Lankan youth in everyday political processes are generally overshadowed by an abundance dealing with their involvement in unrest. Learning how most young people experience conventional forms of political activity has not been sufficiently addressed.

One salient result from the NYS points to a general feeling of political apathy among Sri Lankan youth. (Thangarajah 2002) Also worth noting are the high levels of distrust expressed by youth towards most political institutions such as the bureaucracy, the judiciary, the police, and to a lesser extent, the military. Similarly, confidence for governing bodies, in particular provincial councils, was shown to be alarmingly low. (Fernando 2002).

A number of authors have explained that the political rules and mechanisms set in place after Independence promoted a political system in which having electoral power bases

was paramount to capture political power and control. This encouraged extreme political patronage. Politicians have viewed youth as prime targets for mobilisation and manipulation in their zeal to obtain the needed electoral majorities. Those who obtained these electoral majorities had to reward their supporters, leading to a culture of “winner takes all” where jobs go only to party supporters. (Mayer 2000) For youth, supporting the losing party, or not being involved in party politics has meant exclusion from jobs and other opportunities. The Presidential Commission found that this politicisation of employment was a main source for a great deal of resentment on the part of young people.

Other forms of civic and community participation, apart from voting, have been studied less. It has been found that being involved in youth organisations or clubs has a vital role on young peoples’ personal self-esteem and confidence in their effectiveness as a group. (Hart 2002, Kuruppu and Renganathan 2005).

2.4 Youth and Conflict

In Sri Lanka society in general characterise youth in negative terms. They are branded as troublemakers and inclusion into normal political and community processes is kept to a minimum, As opportunities for jobs become even more scarce, and young people vocally express their frustrations, the notion is reinforced. (Mayer & Hettige 2002)

Some authors have highlighted that despite their opposition in terms of final goal, the JVP and the LTTE share similar origins. Both emerged among dissatisfied, often rural, yet relatively well educated young people. And they were both expressions of youth dissatisfaction and struggle with a political establishment that was perceived to be exclusionary. (Kloos 2001, Hettige & Mayer 2002)

It has been argued consistently that youth radicalism is intimately linked to the unresolved contradictions of expanding educational opportunities and shrinking spaces for employment. Those who participated and spearheaded the two violent insurrections in Sri Lanka came, mainly, from the educated rural youth segment. The dissatisfaction and frustration of youth who had not been able to translate formal educational qualifications to “proper” jobs or a move up the social ladder has been advanced as one of the principal reasons for their attraction and involvement in anti-systemic social movements. (Hettige 1992, Uyangoda 2000, Hettige & Mayer 2002) Others have explained the tendency of turning to violence as a response to a sense of continuous abuse of political power from public institutions coupled with a strong feeling of social injustice. (Presidential Commission on Youth 1990, Hettige & Mayer 2002).

In order to gauge whether there is potential for a return of past violence the NYS asked youngsters if struggle leading to violence is a proper or not proper method for fulfilling people’s demands. In that instance, around a third of youth in the sample considered violence an appropriate method with Sinhalese and Tamil displaying similar percentages.

3. Demographic Profile of the PYS Sample

In total, the PYS interviewed 346 young people. From this, 100 interviews were carried out in the stratum defined as “conflict zone” and 246 in the “non-conflict zone”. The sample was also broken up into urban and rural. In this case, the totality of the conflict elements was included within the rural setting.

Table 3.1 Conflict/non-conflict

| Sector | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------|-----------|------------|
| Conflict | 100 | 28.9 |
| Non-Conflict | 246 | 71.1 |
| Total | 346 | 100.0 |

Table 3.2 Rural/urban

| Sector | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------|-----------|------------|
| Rural | 285 | 82.4 |
| Urban | 61 | 17.6 |
| Total | 346 | 100.0 |

Table 3.3 Sex

| Sex | Frequency | Percent |
|--------|-----------|---------|
| Male | 150 | 43.4 |
| Female | 196 | 56.6 |
| Total | 346 | 100.0 |

Of the total sample more than half (56.6%) were young women. The over-representation of young women can be ascribed mainly to the time of day, and in certain regions, the time of year, during which the research team carried out

the survey. During the day, more women than men were in the households. Men were either engaged in work or, if unemployed, roaming far from the household. Women, on the other hand, will have chores that will keep them near the home. Moreover, in many rural areas, particularly the most remote, it is common for young men to migrate either permanently or intermittently in search of jobs. This over-representation occurred only in the rural areas. In cities, an almost equal number of men and women were interviewed.

Age and Marital Status

The survey was administered to individuals within the age range of 15-29. The age of the largest number of respondents clustered around the mid-point of the age dispersion, between the ages of 21-23. More of the “younger youth,” between the ages of 15-17, was interviewed than the “older youth” in the bracket of 27-29. This is probably due to the fact that more young people between the ages of 15-17 are still attending school and therefore residing at home. Only three young men aged 28 and three aged 29 were interviewed. In contrast, for these two ages 11 and 10 women, respectively, were surveyed.

Table 3.4 Age

| | Frequency | Percent |
|-------|-----------|---------|
| 15-17 | 69 | 19.9 |
| 18-20 | 77 | 22.3 |
| 21-23 | 82 | 23.7 |
| 24-26 | 63 | 18.2 |
| 27-29 | 54 | 15.6 |
| 30 | 1 | .3 |
| Total | 346 | 100 |

Of the total sample, more than one quarter were married. Disaggregated by sex, 35% of women were married, and only 16.7% of men.

Table 3.5 Marital status

| | Frequency | Percent |
|-------------------|-----------|---------|
| Never married | 251 | 72.5 |
| Currently married | 93 | 26.9 |
| Other | 2 | .6 |
| Total | 346 | 100.0 |

Educational level

Similar to national figures in terms of educational attainment, the majority of PYS respondents were concentrated at “mid levels” with the highest proportion of young people interviewed, 38.4%, having Ordinary Level (O/L) qualifications and 34.4% having Advanced Level (A/L) qualifications. At both extremes, that is at levels of either very little or no education, or at a

Table 3.6 Highest level of educational attainment

| | Frequency | Percent |
|----------------------|-----------|---------|
| Never been to school | 3 | .9 |
| 3-4 years | 5 | 1.5 |
| 5-6 years | 14 | 4 |
| 7-8 years | 18 | 5.2 |
| 9-10 years | 35 | 10.1 |
| O/L | 133 | 38.4 |
| A / L | 119 | 34.4 |
| Diploma | 1 | .3 |
| Degree | 16 | 4.6 |
| Missing | 2 | .6 |
| Total | 346 | 100.0 |

higher level of schooling, the proportions drop dramatically. Those that completed school only up to grade 6 or below account for less than 6% of the PYS sample. Similarly, those with a university degree or higher qualification accounted for 4.6% of the sample. Typically, developing countries display large degrees of variance between the educational levels of city and rural dwellers. In Sri Lanka, however, this is not as marked. In fact, in the PYS sample no significant difference was found in the educational attainments of youth in urban and rural areas.¹¹ Moreover, the percentage of university degree holders is slightly higher in the rural area recording 4.9% as opposed to 3.3% in the urban sector. The educational attainment of young people in conflict and non-conflict areas show some difference, but arguably not a remarkable one. In the sample, 30% in the conflict area hold an O/L degree while in the non-conflict area this is marginally higher at 34%. When O/L, A/L and degree holders are combined in the conflict area 71% of the sample fall under this category. In the non-conflict region, the proportion is higher at a little over 80%. The proportion of university graduates in the conflict and non-conflict zones is almost identical, at around 5%.

In the PYS sample, the levels of schooling for males and females roughly reflected national trends. Although a higher percentage of women than men reported an Ordinary Level qualification, in terms of Advanced Level or degree qualifications, the men outperform the women. Almost 40% of men mentioned A/L as their highest educational attainment, but only a little more than 30% of women. The reasons for such a trend could lie in women postponing their education or discontinuing it in order to get married or seek employment to better the household's economic condition.

¹¹ Please refer to the Annex 3 for a statistical explanation.

Ethnicity

As can be observed in table 3.7, the proportions of respondents by ethnicity in the sample roughly correspond to the overall distributions found in the Sri Lankan population.¹²

Table 3.7 Ethnicity

| | Frequency | Percent |
|-----------|-----------|---------|
| Sinhalese | 248 | 71.7 |
| Tamil | 65 | 18.8 |
| Muslim | 31 | 9.0 |
| Malay | 1 | 0.3 |
| Other | 1 | 0.3 |
| Total | 346 | 100.0 |

As expected, of the total number of Tamils, 91% reside in the conflict area and only a minority in the non-conflict area. In almost the exact reverse, 92% of the Sinhalese respondents live in the non-conflict, and a minority of 8% in the “conflict” region. Similar to Tamil respondents, but in a smaller proportion, a majority of almost 65% of Muslims live in the “conflict zone.”

Table 3.8 Conflict/non-conflict * ethnicity cross-tabulation

| | Sinhalese | Sri LankanTamil | Muslim | Malay | Others |
|--------------|-----------|-----------------|--------|-------|--------|
| Conflict | 8 | 91 | 64.6 | - | 100 |
| Non-Conflict | 92 | 9 | 35.5 | 100 | - |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Main Activities

The most common activity of the young people in the PYS is full-time studies. Closely behind is full-time employment and housework. When disaggregated by gender it was found that more men than women are studying full-time. Similarly, and by a larger margin, more men than women are working full-time. The most common activity for young women, more than studying and working, is housework. More than 40% of women responded that this is their main occupation whereas it is only the case for 1.3% of male respondents.

In total, less than 10% of the sample recognised being unemployed. When this was cross tabulated with educational attainment it appears that at higher levels of education there is more unemployment among respondents. Whereas at primary, or lower, no respondent indicated being unemployed, this grew with secondary level up to 7% and climbed to 9% with O/L graduates. The highest unemployment was found among those with an education of A/L or more at 13.5%

¹² The figures from the Department of Census and Statistics are: Sinhalese 74%, Tamil 18%, Muslim 7%, Burgher, Malay, and Vedda 1%

Table 3.9 Current main activity

| | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Studying full-time | 101 | 29.2 |
| Working full-time | 83 | 24.0 |
| Housework | 83 | 24.0 |
| Unemployed / waiting for a job | 34 | 9.8 |
| Studying and working | 15 | 4.3 |
| Working part time | 12 | 3.5 |
| Studying part time | 10 | 2.9 |
| Other | 8 | 2.3 |

In terms of the primary occupation of the heads of households where the young people reside almost 30% of respondents did not answer. Of those that did, the largest percentage, or 25% of the respondents, reported that the head of their household was currently unemployed.

Table 3.10 Current main activity * educational attainment cross-tabulation

| | Primary | Secondary | O/L | A/L + |
|--------------------------------|---------|-----------|-----|-------|
| Studying full time | 16 | 25 | 26 | 36.3 |
| Working full time | 26 | 32 | 24 | 20.7 |
| Studying part time | 0 | 0 | 2.2 | 5.1 |
| Working part time | 5 | 1.7 | 4.3 | 3 |
| Studying and working | 0 | 1.7 | 3 | 7.4 |
| Unemployed / waiting for a job | 0 | 7 | 9 | 13.5 |
| House work | 37 | 29 | 31 | 12.5 |
| Other | 16 | 3.5 | .6 | 1.4 |

Socio-economic status

A number of proxy variables can be used to obtain an estimate of the socio-economic status of households. For example, availability or non-availability of electricity, material used for house construction (durable/non-durable), and Samurdhi beneficiary status were the variables identified. Samurdhi benefits, however, are not consistently targeted to the poorest of the poor making this variable imperfect. Lack of electricity or house construction with non-durable materials is more common in the income-poor households, whereas those who can afford electricity and have built their lodgings with more expensive and durable materials are usually non-income poor. These indicators, however, should also be seen as approximations. It could possible, for example, that families that have used temporary materials might be poor but they might also be displaced; although there is a high correlation between displacement and income poverty this is not always the case.

Of the total number interviewed, 103 or almost 30% live in households that receive Samurdhi benefits. The proportion is slightly higher in the conflict than in the non-conflict areas.

In terms of electricity, the differences between the two regions are pronounced. In the conflict area, more young people (55%) live in households without electricity than those that are connected to the grid. In contrast, in the non-conflict area, those that do not have electricity are a relative minority of 20%. These differences illustrate the more precarious provision of services in the Northeast. In some areas, even if the potential users are willing to cover the costs of connection, the outlay is not available. However, the much higher percentage of households without electricity might also indicate that more families in the conflict zone are in a situation of income poverty that makes it impossible for them to afford connection.

4. Youth Talk about Youth

4.1 Who is a Youth?

The PYS defined “youth” as a period between 15 and 29 years of age. This is also the range used in Sri Lanka by the National Youth Services Council.

The PYS asked youth what they considered to be the age range that most closely corresponds to the period called “youth”. The largest percentage of respondents believed youth begins at 18 with the end either at 24 or 29 years of age. A smaller percentage (17.6) was more in line with the range proposed by the PYS of 15 to 30. Only a minority of around 10% said that youth extends up to the age of 35.

Table 4.1 Age range of youth

| | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------|------------|--------------|
| 18-24 | 79 | 22.8 |
| 18-30 | 75 | 21.7 |
| 15-24 | 65 | 18.8 |
| 15-30 | 61 | 17.6 |
| 15-35 | 27 | 7.8 |
| 15-18 | 20 | 5.8 |
| Others | 11 | 3.2 |
| 18-35 | 8 | 2.3 |
| Total | 346 | 100.0 |

In addition to age, other elements impact on the way people conceptualise youth. In Sri Lanka, marriage is particularly relevant. The NYS, for example, defined youth to be unmarried men and women between the ages of 15 and 29. This definition reflected a commonly held view that youth ends when a person forms a new family unit. The undercurrent of this notion is that marriage brings responsibilities and obligations that propel the person to adulthood. The downside, of course, is this suggests that youth, until they are married, are inherently irresponsible and unstable.¹³

The PYS sought to verify from young people whether they also viewed marriage as a termination of youth. The qualitative questionnaire asked respondents: if someone is married should he/she still be considered a youth? And, are there any differences for men and women? A majority of respondents (24 out of 34) insisted that youth is conditional on age alone.

“Those who are in the age group of 18-25 are youth, no matter whether they are married or not.” (Female, 20 years, Vavuniya)

“Those who are between 18 and 30 are youth even if they are married because they think like youth.” (Male, 21 years, Anuradhapura.)

¹³ For a more thorough discussion of this idea see Ibarguen, C. (2004), *Youth in Sri Lanka: Literature Review*, Colombo: CEPA.

A number of responses highlighted that marriage has different implications for men and women.

“In Sri Lanka, for men, even when they are married they are considered youth but for women when they get married they become wives.” (Male, 26 years, Colombo)

Although in the minority, a number of respondents underlined the notion of marriage as the end of youth. Some also implied that youth is a phase that commands less respect than adulthood.

“After marriage, they become the head of the household and they will also have children. I don’t think they can be considered youth. After marriage they lose their youth status. They can be considered to be a step higher than the youth.” (Female, 16 years, Ampara)

4.2 Youth Problems

When questioned whether they think youth face problems, an overwhelming majority of 94.8% understandably responded in the affirmative. What is interesting to explore is the nature of these problems and if, and why, they are considered to be serious. At the same time, it is important to try to determine whether there are discernible differences between youth in the conflict and non-conflict area or between rural and urban youth.

The questionnaire requested interviewees to rank three serious problems faced by youth in order of importance. The question did not ask what was personally their most pressing problem but asked participants to respond, from experience and observation, what they believed to be the most serious problems for youth overall.

Of the total sample, a large proportion of 53% selected scarcity of jobs as the most serious problem faced by youth today. This response surpassed by a wide margin all other possible responses. The second and third most common answers: alcohol consumption, with 16%, and lack of educational opportunities with 6.4%, trailed far behind. Mobility constraints, a problem that would expectedly be more salient in the conflict area, was not perceived as a particularly serious concern for youth.

For the second most serious problem in the ranking, lack of employment still came out ahead at 15.9% of the total. It appears that those who mentioned lack of jobs as their first choice did not cluster on another problem for their second choice but spread out their selection. Lack of mobility, lack of educational opportunities and poverty each had around 10-13% of the total response rate. Violence, drugs and alcohol were each mentioned by around 6% of respondents.

It is interesting to note that contrary to what might be anticipated, the problem structure is viewed almost identically by young people in the conflict and non-conflict regions. Lack of job opportunities is seen as the most serious problem by 54% and 54.5% in conflict and non-conflict regions respectively, with alcohol consumption also showing a similar response proportion of 16% and 16.6%. Moreover, comparing responses from the rural and urban areas

reveals that a larger proportion of youth in the cities consider lack of job opportunities as the most serious problem. In the rural areas 51% ranked it as their first option, in contrast to 62% in the cities. The responses from men and women were also almost identical. Of those interviewed, 54% of the men, and 53% of women indicated that lack of job opportunities was the most serious problem.

Table 4.2 What is the most serious problem faced by youth?

| | Frequency | Percent |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Lack of job opportunities | 185 | 53.5 |
| Alcohol consumption | 57 | 16.5 |
| Lack of educational opportunities | 22 | 6.4 |
| Deteriorating moral values | 18 | 5.2 |
| Drugs | 17 | 4.9 |
| Poverty | 14 | 4.0 |
| Smoking | 8 | 2.3 |
| Violence | 8 | 2.3 |
| Lack of mobility | 8 | 2.3 |
| Other | 5 | 1.5 |
| Corruption | 4 | 1.2 |
| Total | 346 | 100.0 |

A cursory examination of the data exhibits that there is a correlation between increasing education attainment and selection of 'lack of job opportunities' as the most serious problem faced by youth. As can be seen in Table 3.3 although the sampled individuals that did not finish primary school was small, 37% mentioned lack of job opportunities first in their rank. However, for young people with high educational credentials, that is A/L or degree qualifications, 63% selected this option. This appears to concur with previous studies that argue that unemployment, or the sense of not having job opportunities increases as young people get more educated.¹⁴

The responses from this question reveal poignantly that throughout the country lack of job opportunities is recognised as the single most daunting problem faced by young people. The quantitative questionnaire indicated that place of residence and gender seems to have little impact on viewing this as the most serious problem. These results were further exemplified through the qualitative conversations.

"There are many youth who have qualified up to A/L but they don't have jobs, even some graduates don't have jobs." (Female, 16 years, Ampara)

¹⁴ Ibid.

Table 4.3 What is the most serious problem faced by youth * educational attainment cross-tabulation

| | Educational Attainment | | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------|-----------|--------------|------------|
| | Primary or less | Secondary | O/L/ Diploma | A/L/Degree |
| Alcohol consumption | 31.6 | 26.3 | 18.5 | 8.2 |
| Lack of job opportunities | 37 | 45.6 | 48.8 | 63 |
| Deteriorating moral values | 10.5 | | 5.9 | 5.9 |
| Smoking | | 5.2 | 2.2 | 1.5 |
| Violence | | 3.5 | 2.2 | 2.2 |
| Lack of mobility | | 1.7 | 2.2 | 3 |
| Poverty | | 3.5 | 2.2 | 6.7 |
| Lack of educational opportunities | 15.8 | 7 | 17.4 | 3.7 |
| Drugs | | 5.2 | 6.6 | 3.7 |
| Other | | 1.7 | 1.5 | 1.5 |
| Corruption | 5.2 | | 2.2 | |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

When asked if the problems that young people faced were the same or different for men and women, more than two-thirds acknowledged that they were different. It was not found that men were any less sensitive to these differences as only a marginally higher proportion of women, at 69%, as opposed to 65% of men, responded that problems were in fact different.

Table 4.4 Are problems for men and women different? * sex cross-tabulation

| | Male | Female |
|------------|------|--------|
| Yes | 65.3 | 69 |
| No | 30.6 | 27.5 |
| Don't know | 4 | 3.6 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

In the qualitative questionnaire, the problems that were more often referred to as male problems were economic problems and alcoholism whereas for women it was lack of dowry, and domestic violence. For both men and women, unemployment was mentioned repeatedly as a problem that they share.

*“For young women it is lack of job opportunities which results in a lack of dowry. For men it is a lack of jobs so they find it difficult to support a family.”
(Female, 29 years, Galle)*

5. Youth Perspectives on Poverty and Development

One of the main objectives set out by the PYS was to gather information on how young people perceive and assess poverty. The viewpoints of young people on this topic have been relatively less studied. This section explores how young people perceive, and characterise poverty and how they assess the opportunities available for overcoming poverty.

5.1 Perceptions of their Own Economic Situation

The questionnaire began by attempting to establish where, on an economic scale, young people placed their household. The vast majority of young people rank their families as 'average', with less than 10% placing themselves on the margins as either 'high' or 'very low'. In relative terms, young people in the conflict zone are more inclined to assess their household's economic situation towards the lower end of the spectrum. In the conflict zone, 47% of young people described their situation as 'low' or 'very low' compared to 28% in the non-conflict area.

Table 5.1 Assessment of own household's economic condition

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------|------------|--------------|
| Average | 222 | 64.2 |
| Low | 93 | 26.9 |
| Very low | 23 | 6.6 |
| High | 8 | 2.3 |
| Total | 346 | 100.0 |

Table 5.2 Assessment of own household's economic condition * conflict/non-conflict cross-tabulation

| | Conflict | Non-conflict |
|--------------|------------|--------------|
| Average | 51 | 69.5 |
| Low | 36 | 23.1 |
| Very low | 11 | 4.8 |
| High | 2 | 2.4 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

To get a feel of how young people anticipate their economic future, they were asked to consider how they foresaw this future, in comparison to the present condition of their parents or household. It is notable that a clear majority of 62.1% believes they will fare better than their parents. In the conflict areas, an even higher percentage of respondents foresee improved prospects, compared to their parents. In the conflict areas, only 7% thought that their future would be bleaker than that of their parents, as opposed to 17.4% in regions not affected by the conflict. This relatively more optimistic outlook in the conflict zone might be partially accounted for by the recent signing of the cease-fire accord, which contributed to a general feeling of guarded hopefulness throughout the region.¹⁵

Table 5.3 Economic situation in comparison to parents

| | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------|------------|--------------|
| Better | 215 | 62.1 |
| Worse | 50 | 14.5 |
| The same | 45 | 13.0 |
| Don't know | 36 | 10.4 |
| Total | 346 | 100.0 |

Table 5.4 Economic situation in comparison to parents *conflict/non-conflict cross-tabulation

| | Conflict | Non-conflict |
|--------------|------------|--------------|
| Better | 67 | 60 |
| Worse | 7 | 17.4 |
| The same | 18 | 11 |
| Don't know | 8 | 11.4 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

¹⁵ The cease-fire was signed a year before the PYS field work commenced.

5.2 The Income Dimension

The survey enquired how much, in monetary terms, young people believe is the minimum amount a four-member family requires to be above poverty. The responses, as can be observed in Table 5.5, covered a very broad range, with a minimum of Rs.350 and a maximum of Rs. 50,000. The median hovered around Rs. 7,000.

Table 5.5 Minimum income per month for a four-member household to be above poverty

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------|-----------|------------|
| 350-2000 | 26 | 7.5 |
| 2001-4000 | 59 | 17.1 |
| 4001-6000 | 113 | 32.7 |
| 6001-8000 | 54 | 15.6 |
| 8001-10000 | 45 | 13.0 |
| 10001-12000 | 8 | 2.3 |
| 12001-14000 | 4 | 1.2 |
| 14001-16000 | 24 | 6.9 |
| 16001-25000 | 4 | 1.2 |
| 25000-50000 | 4 | 1.2 |
| Missing | 5 | 1.4 |
| Total | 346 | 100 |

When transformed into income ranges, almost one third of young people interviewed considered that a minimum salary between Rs.4,000 and 6,000 is sufficient to sustain a family of four above poverty. A minority of just over 10% indicated a salary above Rs14,000 as necessary, and only 1.2% vouched for the highest bracket of Rs.25,000 to 50,000.

Expectedly, as educational qualifications increase, the income considered to be adequate for a family to move out of poverty also rises. This is true regardless of gender and geographical location. As can be seen in Figure 4.1, both men and women reported a higher required income at the lower levels of education (below primary). However, after secondary level this trend is reversed and for levels of education higher than secondary, the income cited rises markedly for both men and women, albeit much more steeply for men. The largest gap between men and women comes at O/L, where men said that on average Rs 8,000 per month is needed to be above poverty whereas women cite just over Rs 6,000. At A/L, the gap is still substantial but less so than at O/L.. A test confirmed that there is in fact a statistical difference in the minimum income responses of male and female youth.¹⁶

It was anticipated that in the conflict zone the minimum income deemed to be sufficient for a family to be non-poor would be lower than in the non-conflict zone. It is interesting to note that at lower levels of education young people in both regions have almost identical opinions. As observed in Figure 4.2, in the conflict zone with improved education and up to O/L, the minimum incomes dropped slightly instead of climbing. After O/L, however, they rose steeply.

¹⁶ Refer to Annex 3.

Nonetheless, minimum incomes reported by young people in the conflict zone stayed well below those from the non-conflict region. The gap in the perceived minimum income needed to be out of poverty in the non-conflict and conflict zone at O/L is roughly Rs2,000. This gap is even wider at A/L where it is closer to Rs3,000.

When comparing the rural and urban responses, it was also observed that those with little education reported mean incomes that were higher than those reported by respondents with secondary level education. Again, the rise after secondary education is sharp with perceived requisite incomes climbing in both urban and rural sectors, but at a much higher rate in the cities.

In sum, it appears that what young people consider to be a sufficient income is heavily influenced by their education and to a lesser extent, by their gender and place of residence. It is striking to note, however, that young people with only primary school or lower qualifications have higher income expectations than those with secondary school qualifications. This could be due to more jobs being readily available for young people with less education. Their perceptions therefore may be affected by being regularly employed whereas youth with secondary education face more difficulties in finding a job.

Figure 4.1

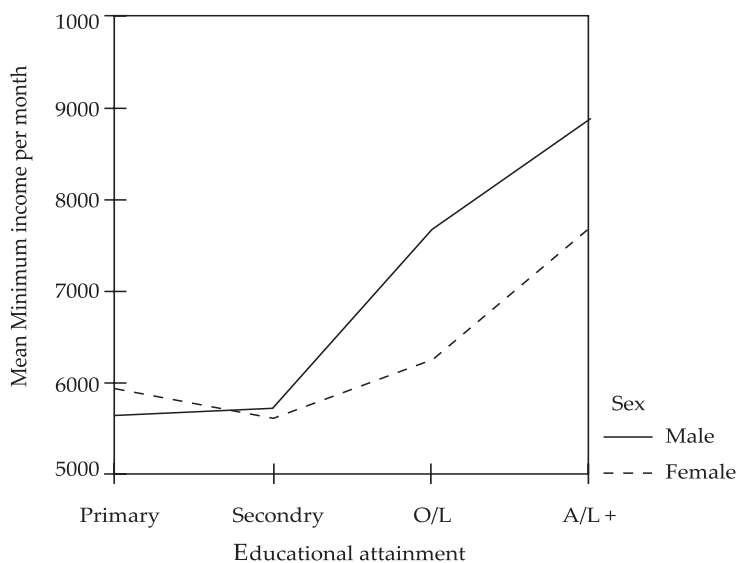


Figure 4.2

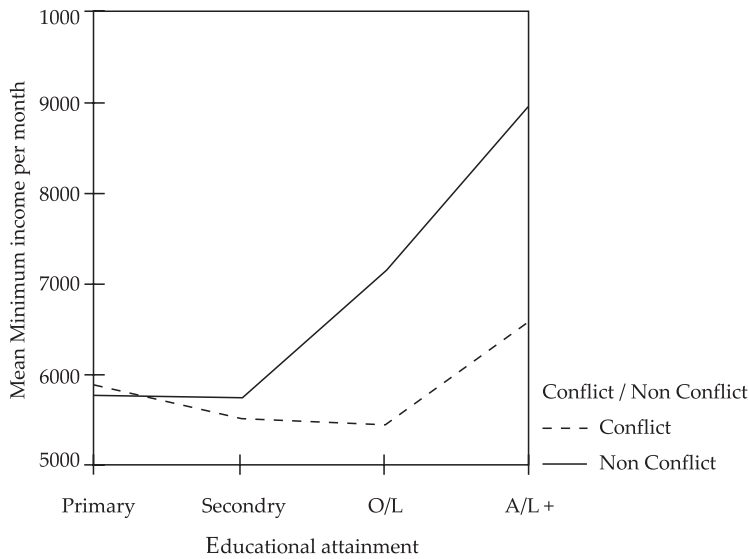
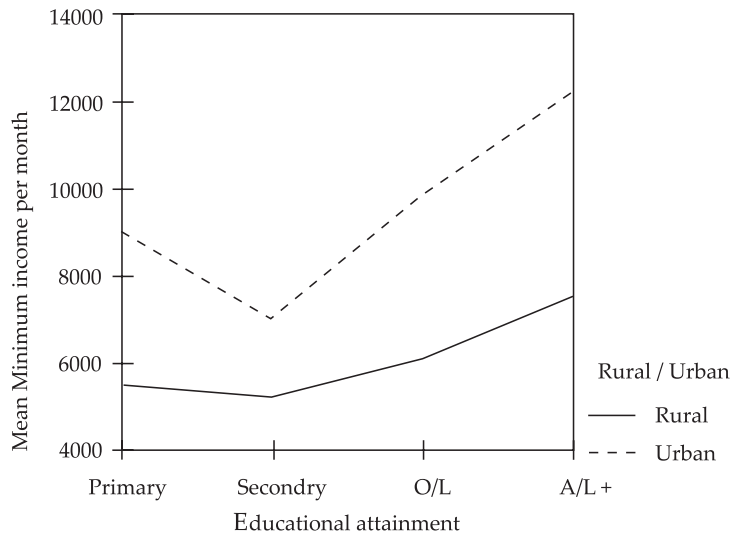


Figure 4.3



5.3 How do Youth Identify a Poor Household?

How do young people characterise and identify “the poor”? A number of survey questions sought to probe into what youth consider the key aspects that categorise a household as poor. Specifically, the aim was to discern whether youth tend to characterise poverty more by: material deprivations, such as a rundown house, no assets, or badly-clothed children; behavioural considerations, such as how they act in society, the way they talk and treat others, or alcoholism; development indicators, such as lack of access to education, and health; or issues of powerlessness.

Interviewees were asked how they would identify a poor household. They were then provided with a list and asked to select the three most important characteristics. Deliberately, the options on the list were mixed in no apparent order so that options relating to, for example, material considerations did not appear in succession.

As can be observed from Table 5.6, the largest number of young people (34.1%) indicated that the unemployment of the head of household was the most accurate means with which to identify a poor household. After this, the most often mentioned options were, 'no house and/or no land' with a little over 19% of responses. Four options: 'children do not go to school,' 'alcoholism of its members,' 'lack of household assets,' and 'malnourishment' had roughly similar response rates ranging from 6 to 10%. The rest of the options had very few advocates.

Table 5.6 How would you identify a poor household?

| | Frequency | Percent |
|---|------------|--------------|
| Head of household is unemployed | 118 | 34.1 |
| No house / no land | 66 | 19.1 |
| Children do not go to school | 37 | 10.7 |
| Alcoholism of its members | 27 | 7.8 |
| Lack of household assets | 26 | 7.5 |
| Malnourishment | 22 | 6.4 |
| Idleness of its members | 17 | 4.9 |
| Structure of the house | 8 | 2.3 |
| Other | 6 | 1.7 |
| Socially or politically discriminated | 5 | 1.4 |
| Persistent illness | 4 | 1.2 |
| Members do not participate in the community | 3 | 0.9 |
| No access to law enforcement | 2 | 0.6 |
| No social connections | 2 | 0.6 |
| Dependent on scarce natural resources | 2 | 0.6 |
| No political connections | 1 | 0.3 |
| Total | 346 | 100.0 |

The majority of young people consider economic shortcomings as the most compelling identifiers of a household's poverty. Three options together 'unemployment,' 'no house or no land' and 'lack of household assets' comprised together over 60% of responses. Nonetheless, behavioural aspects, such as not sending the children to school, with a 10.7% response rate, and alcoholism with 7.8% were the third and fourth most often mentioned response. In contrast, characteristics of poverty related to issues of powerlessness such as not having social and political connections and access to law enforcement, concerns that young people have brought to the forefront repeatedly in the past (Presidential Commission on Youth, 1990, Fernando, 2002), were only mentioned by a handful of respondents. It is conceivable that although young people consider these as obstacles for their own development, and to access different opportunities, such as jobs, they do not associate them with poverty.

When performing a cross-tabulation, the general structure of the responses in the conflict and non-conflict areas was found to be very similar. The first and second most often mentioned characteristics were the same. Alcoholism was seen, in both areas, by around 8% of youngsters, as the defining characteristic of poverty. However, in the conflict areas, the first two options (head of household is unemployed, no house/ no land) concentrated a much larger percentage of the totality, whereas in the non-conflict area there was a wider spread. As can be seen in Table 5.7, 67% of young people in the conflict region considered unemployment and

landlessness as the most conspicuous characteristics of a poor household. In the non-conflict area, on the other hand, these two answers, jointly, reached only 47%. In the non-conflict zone other characteristics such as not sending children to school, and idleness of family members were selected by a relatively larger number of respondents. It is likely that in the conflict zone, years of displacement have disposed people to be more concerned with a proper house and a stable income.

Table 5.7 How would you identify a poor household?* conflict/non-conflict cross-tabulation

| | Conflict | Non-conflict |
|---|------------|--------------|
| Head of household is unemployed | 43 | 30 |
| No house/no land | 24 | 17 |
| Their children do not go to school | 7 | 12 |
| Alcoholism of its members | 8 | 7.7 |
| Lack of household assets | 4 | 8.9 |
| Malnourishment | 5 | 6.9 |
| Idleness of its members | 1 | 6.5 |
| Structure of the household | 1 | 2.8 |
| Other | 2 | 1.6 |
| Socially or politically discriminated | 1 | 1.6 |
| Persistent illness | 1 | 1.2 |
| Members do not participate in the community | - | 1.2 |
| No access to law enforcement | - | 0.8 |
| No social connections | 1 | 0.4 |
| Dependent on scarce natural resources | 1 | 0.4 |
| No political connections | 1 | - |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

The qualitative questionnaire attempted to highlight other aspects that define poverty, apart from those expressly linked with economic considerations.

A large number of young people continued to reiterate that the lack of a periodic and stable income determines, more than any other element, a household's poverty.

"[Low] income is the main cause of poverty. All problems are caused by lack of money." (Male, 23 years, Matara)

Some youngsters pointed to a lack of income as the detonator of a cycle of poverty. Whereas elements such as alcoholism, or not sending children to school, also identify a household as poor, they are but effects, or consequences, of not having enough income.

"The head [of the household] doesn't have a job that generates sufficient income, so they are unable to send the children to school and then further he gets in debt." (Male, 22 years, Colombo)

"The breadwinner has the responsibility to earn for the family. If they fail to do so it may lead to things like alcoholism and not educating the children." (Male, 24 years, Ampara)

“Poverty happens because there is low income. Similarly people don’t have jobs, they take any job they can get and this means a low income. This results in a cycle that means people don’t get an education and they can’t get good jobs etc.” (Male, 24 years, Polonnaruwa)

In contrast, other argued that low income is an outward and evident manifestation of poverty, but the cause of poverty itself is not low income but irresponsible decisions on the part of households such as drinking or mismanaging funds.

“Alcoholism is a big drain on the family finances; they may even be forced to pawn things. Really poor people don’t participate in community activities either, they do not have a sense of community.” (Female, 19 years, Badulla)

“Low income is poverty. But it is the utilisation of income, how it is spent and saved that is important.” (Male, 23 years, Vavuniya)

The previous quotes give testament to the complex nature of poverty and the difficulty of identifying what are its root causes and what are its manifestations. For some young people not having enough money constitutes the source of poverty. The hardships this brings triggers coping mechanisms such as alcoholism, or deciding not to spend on education. However, other youngsters advanced the notion that poverty is not initially linked to low income but to personal decisions. In other words, the origin of poverty can be found in choices made by people. If they decide to squander their money on drink, or misuse their resources, then a probable outcome is the household’s poverty.

5.4 Vulnerable Groups and Poverty in the Locality

The PYS asked young people to assess how serious they considered poverty to be, both at a national and local level. The qualitative questionnaire complemented this with a question asking young people to compare poverty levels in their locality with levels in other parts of the island.

As can be observed in Table 5.8, almost half of the respondents regarded poverty in Sri Lanka to be ‘somewhat serious.’ An overwhelming majority were of the opinion that poverty in the country is either ‘somewhat’ or ‘very serious’.

When asked about the level of poverty in their locality, a slightly higher percentage of youth considered it to be ‘not very serious.’ Similarly, a smaller proportion stated that in their locality poverty was ‘very serious’. When talking about the place where they live, as opposed to the country as a whole, young people adopted a more moderate stance.

Usually it is more proximate situations, instead of abstract cases, which elicit more extreme responses. A possible explanation of these rather surprising results, is that young Sri Lankans are relatively well informed. Exposure to events, and news from the rest of the country is reasonably widespread. Through television and radio young people are kept up to date on the privations of their countrymen in other areas. This might attenuate the sense that their own locality is overly poor. At the same time, informed young people are also aware that Sri Lanka, in global terms, is poor eliciting such a high number of respondents (41%) to consider poverty in Sri Lanka as ‘very serious.’

Table 5.8 Poverty in Sri Lanka is ...?

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------|------------|--------------|
| Not very serious | 26 | 7.5 |
| Somewhat serious | 172 | 49.7 |
| Very serious | 142 | 41.0 |
| Don't know | 6 | 1.7 |
| Total | 346 | 100.0 |

Table 5.9 Poverty in your locality is ...?

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------|------------|--------------|
| Not very serious | 41 | 11.8 |
| Somewhat serious | 188 | 54.3 |
| Very serious | 115 | 33.2 |
| Don't know | 2 | 0.6 |
| Total | 346 | 100.0 |

Young people in the conflict region were more disposed to consider poverty in their vicinity as 'very serious.' In addition, more respondents in the non-conflict than in the conflict region perceived poverty in their locality to be 'not very serious.' This can probably be ascribed to the responses from the urban areas, which are all included within the non-conflict strata. In the urban areas, 18% of the respondents (the highest proportion of any of the geographical areas) considered poverty in their locality to be 'not very serious.'

Table 5.10 Poverty in your locality *conflict/non-conflict cross-tabulation

| | Conflict | Non-conflict |
|------------------|------------|--------------|
| Not very serious | 7 | 13.8 |
| Somewhat serious | 52 | 55.3 |
| Very serious | 39 | 30.9 |
| Don't know | 2 | |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

The qualitative questionnaire invited respondents to give their views on poverty in their region from a comparative perspective. They were asked to reflect on whether the levels of poverty in their immediate area were better or worse than the country as a whole.

Roughly half of the 34 respondents considered that the regions where they lived are at an advantage over other areas. Some of the responses exhibited a high degree of sensitivity and awareness towards difficulties faced by other regions of the country. All the young interviewees from the cities recognised that in urban areas more opportunities are available *vis-à-vis* the rural areas.

"Poverty here is less than other areas. We read about worse situations in the newspaper, where people go without food in some areas and children can't go to school." (Female, 19 years, Badulla)

"In some places people suffer due to lack of water, electricity and transport. In rural areas the prevalence of violence is high. We hear these things on the radio, TV, etc" (Female, 25 years, Colombo)

"In villages, poverty is higher than towns because they are situated in remote areas. There is a lack of facilities. In villages, jobs are not available. Here there is something to do to earn a living." (Male, 26 years, Colombo)

A little less than half of the other 34 respondents considered the poverty level where they live to be comparatively worse. Some felt that in terms of help and attention their area was underserved.

“Here the poverty situation is higher. In the hill country there is spice income. In Kurunegala there is coconut income. Those people have an extra income in addition to farming. Here only if we cultivate we have an income.” (Male, 21 years, Anuradhapura)

“Poverty is more here because there are less development activities than in other parts of the country. In other parts Samurdhi is given. Here there is no Samurdhi, very few receive it.” (Male, 20 years, Matara)

A number of respondents nuanced their response by explaining that their locality was better off than some regions, but worse than others.

“The poverty level here is very serious in comparison to Colombo. However, it is less serious in comparison to the rest of the country. Places such as Anuradhapura, Moneragala are far poorer.” (Male, 21 years, Galle)

“If we compare the towns with our villages then one would say that this is a poor village. But when comparing with rural villages then here there is no poverty because here we have good school and medical facilities.” (Male, 24 years, Ampara)

One interviewee illustrated the link between the years of war, and the poverty of the area.

“Here the effect of war is high compared to the rest of the country. We were displaced several times. What we earn and collect we leave behind when we have to run away when an attack starts.” (Female, 20 years, Vavuniya)

Following from the discussion on comparative levels of poverty, young respondents were then urged to concentrate on their locality and consider if there are particular groups or segments of the population that are more vulnerable to poverty and exclusion. The purpose was to explore whether young people identify vulnerability on the basis of, for example, gender, occupation, ethnicity, caste, or age, or if there are other attributes that, according to them, better define vulnerability.

More than 60% of the total sample expressed affirmatively that some groups are more vulnerable than others. Interestingly, of those that agreed, none of the respondents linked vulnerability with any of the aforementioned categories.¹⁷ The response seem to indicate that young people do not link vulnerability to intrinsic characteristics such as gender, caste or ethnicity, but rather to livelihood activities. The group perceived to be the most vulnerable, by the largest number of respondents, was wage labourers followed by the unemployed.

For young people, having to support a family with an unreliable, intermittent salary immediately categorises an individual — and by extension the family — as vulnerable.

¹⁷ This question was open so there were no previously established options to choose from. See Annex 1 for the full transcript of the questionnaires.

Table 5.11 What are the most vulnerable groups?

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|------------|--------------|
| There are no particularly vulnerable groups | 136 | 39.3 |
| Wage labourers | 68 | 19.7 |
| The unemployed | 32 | 9.2 |
| Those without property | 25 | 7.2 |
| Those with a low income | 24 | 6.9 |
| Female-headed households | 19 | 5.5 |
| Geographically marginalised groups | 16 | 4.6 |
| Other | 10 | 2.9 |
| Big families | 7 | 2.0 |
| War affected groups | 5 | 1.4 |
| Uneducated groups | 4 | 1.2 |
| Total | 346 | 100.0 |

Responses linked directly with income: wage labourers, the unemployed and those with a low income, together make up almost 60% of the total (of those that had previously affirmed that there are certain groups that are more vulnerable). Other non-income related groups were mentioned, such as female-headed households, those without property and the war affected, but they consisted of a minority.

Table 5.12 Who suffers more from poverty? *sex cross-tabulation

| | Male | Female |
|--------------|------------|------------|
| Young men | 15 | 7 |
| Young women | 11 | 20 |
| Both | 70 | 68 |
| Don't know | 4 | 9 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

It appears that most young people in Sri Lanka do not consider gender as a particularly relevant element influencing poverty. When asked if either men or women were more prone to poverty, almost 70% made no distinction, arguing that poverty is a problem found equally in men and women. Similarly, when disaggregating by gender, an almost identical proportion of men and women, (70% for men and 68% for women) considered poverty to be the same for both sexes. As expected, a higher percentage of males (15%) believe poverty affects men more, whereas a higher proportion of women (20%) considered their sex to be more vulnerable.

Mirroring to some extent the answers from the quantitative questionnaire, a majority of respondents for the qualitative interview also indicated that there is no difference between men and women when it comes to poverty. Of the only three responses that stated otherwise, all argued that it is women who are more liable to suffer from poverty. Surprisingly, all three responses came from men.

“Men mostly take alcohol and drugs. The women earn and feed them. Females get beaten up by their husbands. Here many females have to do a job, mostly in garment factories. Even though their income is small they have to give money for the family unlike young boys who keep all they earn for themselves.”
(Male, 26 years, Moratuwa)

5.5 Capabilities, Opportunities and Strategies to Move out of Poverty

This section will look into what opportunities, if any, young people feel are available to them. It will also explore impressions on their own capacities to improve their lives, and inquire into the main agents or actors that encourage and impede their efforts.

5.5.1 What type of life do youth find valuable?

This exploration began by asking youngsters what they would want to achieve in life and what would be necessary to achieve it. The purpose was to assess what type of life youth in Sri Lanka find valuable. Responses did not necessarily have to be linked to economic gains and interviewees were encouraged to talk about different dimensions.

A few young people alluded to individual desires and goals, not necessarily attached to social obligations and responsibilities.

“I want to become a teacher. I am a volunteer teacher now. I have already gone for several interviews. I hope I will get a teaching job very soon.” (Female, 28 years, Ampara)

“I would like to become a successful businessman.” (Female, 19 years, Matara)

The vast majority, however, saw their life inextricably linked to family and social responsibilities, with less of a focus on personal, individual desires.

“Look after my parents, have a good relationship with my relatives, improve my house, establish good social connections, gain good knowledge, collect money to improve the house.” (Female, 22 years, Kandy)

“I want to find a job and look after my parents. I want to settle in life and get married. To achieve this I need a job.” (Female, 28 years, Hambantota)

“To get a job, help with family concerns, help with brothers’ education, settle debts of the household. Getting a job is the most important thing (of the highest priority) and the thing that will help me achieve everything else.” (Female, 19 years, Badulla)

Most young people expressed life expectations in very normal and simple terms such as taking care of families, getting married and having a family of one’s own. Insecurities about being unable to achieve these goals were also evident in the responses. Having a job with a sufficient salary was mentioned, in the vast majority of responses, as indispensable.

When asked about what they want to achieve in life, most young people express it in relation to family and societal responsibilities. This seems to suggest a deeply ingrained sense of socially determined obligations. In a sense, it contradicts the often referred-to notion that youth in Sri Lanka are only preoccupied with their immediate wants and needs.

5.5.2 Is poverty an inescapable condition?

The qualitative questionnaire inquired if poverty was seen as an inescapable condition, or whether youth could find ways to move out of poverty. Interestingly, none of the 34 youngsters interviewed adopted an outright fatalistic standpoint. Every single response expressed that somehow, poverty was escapable. Nonetheless, the specific “how to” of moving out of poverty revealed interesting differences.

For a few, securing a government job was firmly embedded as an indispensable requirement to succeed. From this perspective, moving out of poverty was possible but entirely contingent on obtaining a job. The most important element in this strategy — getting a government job — therefore, remained outside the control of the young person.

*“Yes, youth can find ways to move out of poverty if they are given jobs.”
(Female, 24 years, Matara)*

“If a person gets a job, or if the government gives him a grant, then youth can find a way without anyone’s assistance. Otherwise, for a poverty-stricken person, overcoming poverty is difficult.” (Male, 21 years, Batticaloa)

Most answers, however, did not mention any outside agents. They did not seem to have a clear strategy but did convey a strong certitude that youth only needed to rely on their own effort, determination and hard work.

“It is not inescapable. They must work hard; make an effort to better their situation. Only effort is lacking, nothing else prevents people from moving out of poverty.” (Male, 19 years, Galle)

“Young people just need to make an effort. Education is very important. This is the main thing people can use to get out of poverty.” (Male, 25 years, Colombo)

It is encouraging to note that some appear to be moving beyond the idea that a government job is the sole avenue to overcome poverty.

*“If one has the will then it is possible. Youth should be willing to do anything without looking at the status side of it. This is better than getting educated and staying home. It is better to do what you can find and earn something.”
(Female, 25 years, Colombo)*

“Youth can find ways to move out of poverty. Youth have to put a lot of effort towards self-employment. They should not be dependent on government jobs. They have to apply for private sector jobs too.” (Male, 20 years, Ampara)

The above quotes suggest that youth rely, and place much emphasis, on personal effort as a means of advancement. When asked to assess whether young people (in general) put enough effort to improve their life situation, a majority, (19 out of 34) acknowledged that young people worked hard and tried their best.

“Yes, they try to resolve their own problems, make an effort to develop and improve their future.” (Female, 22 years, Kandy)

A number of respondents (11) adopted a critical view, arguing that their peers' efforts were inadequate.

"No, I have seen many who don't make an effort, aimlessly loafing here and there and getting involved in violence." (Male, 24 years, Ampara)

However, a few agreed that youth expended enough effort but recognised that effort alone is not sufficient to move out of poverty.

"They do, but political factors stand in their way." (Male, 19 years, Galle)

"Yes they are doing enough, struggling to improve their lives. All youth have an ambition, but because of poverty they are unable to reach their ambition." (Female, 16 years, Ampara)

5.5.3 Opportunities to move out of poverty

Respondents were initially asked whether *any* opportunities (it did not specify of what kind) were available in their locality. This filter question was essential before exploring in more detail the nature of these opportunities. As can be observed in Table 5.13 although more youth answered affirmatively, a fairly large proportion (more than 45%) replied that there are no opportunities where they live.

Table 5.13 Are there any local opportunities to overcome poverty?

| | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------|------------|------------|
| Yes | 177 | 51.2 |
| No | 158 | 45.7 |
| Don't know | 11 | 3.2 |
| Total | 346 | 100 |

A common assumption is that having opportunities is strongly linked to place of residence, with young people in cities having, comparatively, a much wider array and number of choices than youngsters in the villages. A statistical test revealed that whether a young person lives in the city or in rural areas does not appear to have a bearing on his/her notion of available opportunities.¹⁸

Table 5.14 Are there any local opportunities to overcome poverty * rural/urban cross-tabulation

| | Rural | Urban |
|--------------|------------|------------|
| Yes | 51.6 | 49.1 |
| No | 46.7 | 42.6 |
| Don't know | 1.8 | 8.2 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

¹⁸ Please refer to Annex 3.

Contrary to what might be expected, a slightly higher percentage of young people in the rural areas believed that local opportunities exist. Surprisingly, more than 8% of respondents in the cities simply did not know whether opportunities existed.

For those young people that answered affirmatively that opportunities exist, the next line of inquiry probed on the nature of these opportunities. To this end, no predetermined choices were offered and youngsters were invited to come up with concrete examples of locally accessible opportunities to move out of poverty.

Table 5.15 Examples of local opportunities available for youth to overcome poverty

| | Frequency | Percent |
|-------------------------------------|------------|------------|
| Farming / animal husbandry /fishing | 38 | 21.2 |
| Self –employment opportunities | 36 | 20 |
| Industry | 30 | 16.7 |
| Employment opportunities | 26 | 14.5 |
| Wage labour/estate worker | 17 | 9.4 |
| Vocational training | 10 | 5.5 |
| NGO/ Small societies | 10 | 5.5 |
| Education facility | 6 | 3.3 |
| Other | 6 | 3.3 |
| Total | 179 | 100 |

It is interesting to note that the majority of young people defined opportunities as livelihood options. The three highest responses, ‘farming, animal husbandry or fishing’ with 21.2%, ‘self- employment’ with 20% and ‘industry’ with 16.7%, refer to opportunities for employment in different sectors.¹⁹ The high number of responses linked to livelihood options, rather than educational or institutional aspects, can perhaps be attributed to the manner the question was formulated. The question asked explicitly for opportunities to move “out of poverty” instead of life opportunities in general. As exemplified in previous sections, the majority of young people associate poverty as a state of income deprivation or unemployment. It follows, therefore, that poverty is perceived as a situation of income scarcity or job instability and consequently opportunities to overcome poverty are invariably linked to employment opportunities.

5.5.4 Perspective on personal capabilities to move out of poverty

A crucial area of inquiry was on how young people rated their own personal capacities to improve their life situation. As opposed to the previous question, which referred to explicit opportunities to move out of poverty, in this case youth were asked to comment on their personal ability to improve their life in the future.

A majority of the youngsters that responded to this question tended to be positive in terms of their capabilities, motivation and skills. A few respondents alluded directly to specific skills, which points to a sense of confidence about their capacities. However, many also added that they were hampered by financial constraints.

¹⁹ Percentages are not from the total sample but from those that responded affirmatively to the previous question on the existence of local opportunities.

"I hope to build a prosperous future. I know dressmaking, bridal dressing, flower making. So I hope to start a self-employment venture. Right now I don't have the capital. So I hope to go to the Middle East and earn some money. Since my husband is a tailor, I help him." (Female, 20 years, Vauniya)

"I am happy about my capabilities but I don't have the financial means." (Male, 22 years, Colombo)

"Quite good. I passed my A/Ls and I am repeating them to get better results. I also have other skills such as artistic abilities. These will help to improve my situation." (Female, 19 years, Badulla)

"It is good. I'm interested in electronics and want to develop this into a career. I'm already doing a training course." (Male, 17 years, Galle)

A few expressed ambivalent feelings about their capacities to improve their life situation.

"I am an undergraduate. I should be given a job by the government. Otherwise who will give me a job? I was totally involved in education. So I have no experience to do other jobs. I am studying arts subjects and with this education I can't do business. This involves a memorising exercise." (Male, 24, years, Ampara)

An important number of interviewees argued that they had the capacities and skills, but this was insufficient to improve one's life.

"Well, I'm very pessimistic. I have the capacity but how can I use it? What are the opportunities?" (Female, 16 years, Kandy)

"I have the capability to improve, but very few opportunities in the area." (Male, 19 years, Galle)

5.5.5 Attempts and strategies to improve their economic condition

What options and strategies do young Sri Lankans consider to be the most effective to improve their economic situation? What attempts have they already put into practice?

As can be seen in Table 5.16 working hard is seen, by far, as the best strategy young people have at their disposal. Getting a good education comes close behind with a bit over 20% of responses. Interestingly the third response 'getting a job' was not an option in the questionnaire but many chose 'other' and specified that this was the best method available for moving out of poverty.

Previous studies have addressed the degree to which young people condemn the practice of obtaining jobs and a vast array of goods and services through social and political connections (Presidential Commission on Youth 1990), but less than 1% mentioned this as an important strategy to be pursued to move out of poverty.

Table 5.16 What is the best strategy youth can use to move out of poverty?

| | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------------------|------------|--------------|
| Work hard | 108 | 31.2 |
| Get a good education | 73 | 21.1 |
| Getting a job | 67 | 19.4 |
| Start a small enterprise | 52 | 15.0 |
| Other, specify | 39 | 11.3 |
| Have right connections | 3 | 0.9 |
| Marry well | 2 | 0.6 |
| Migrate | 2 | 0.6 |
| Total | 346 | 100.0 |

What have been the strategies that young people have already put into practice to improve their economic condition? Almost two-thirds said that they had, in fact, done something concrete. When disaggregated by region it was found that youth in the conflict zone were considerably more liable to have made attempts at improving their economic condition. Similarly, the proportion of men that declared making attempts at betterment was considerably higher than for women.

Table 5.17 Have you made attempts at improving your economic condition? * sex cross-tabulation

| | Male | Female |
|--------------|------------|------------|
| Yes | 76.6 | 50 |
| No | 23.4 | 50 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

Table 5.18 Have you made attempts at improving your economic condition? *conflict /non-conflict cross-tabulation

| | Conflict | Non-conflict |
|--------------|------------|--------------|
| Yes | 71 | 57.6 |
| No | 29 | 42.4 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

As seen in Table 5.19²⁰ the most common means, with 22% of responses, to improve their situation was by starting a business or self-employment. A roughly similar number had concentrated on their studies as a strategy. Additionally 10% also mentioned vocational training, a type of study, as an attempt to progress. A relatively high number of respondents (18.2%) simply stated that to improve their situation they had obtained a job.

The possible strategies that young people have used to improve their situation are restricted solely to either education, or employment. Other options such as saving were mentioned by a very small minority.

Only 0.6% of respondents mentioned migration as the best strategy for youth to move out of poverty (Table 5.16). Similarly just 3.8% cited that they had migrated in an attempt to improve their economic condition (Table 5.19). When asked if they considered it an acceptable strategy for the future a little more than half answered affirmatively. There were big differences, however, among men and women. Whereas three-quarters of men said they would be willing to migrate only 33% of women answered likewise. This is in contrast with reality, where

²⁰ The previous question was open-ended, respondents could offer any response. The responses were combined at the data entry stage.

women also migrate in large numbers. Whereas for men there might be an element of ‘adventure’ it is clear that most young women find migration distasteful and probably see it as a last resort.

Table 5.19 What attempts have you made to improve your economic condition?

| | Frequency | Percent |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Business or self-employment | 46 | 22 |
| Education / studying hard | 41 | 19.7 |
| Got a job | 38 | 18.2 |
| Farming / animal husbandry | 29 | 13.9 |
| Followed a vocational training course | 21 | 10 |
| Hard work | 10 | 4.8 |
| Foreign employment | 8 | 3.8 |
| Assist husband or father | 8 | 3.8 |
| Saved money | 4 | 1.9 |
| Other | 4 | 1.9 |

Table 5.20 Would you consider migrating to another country?

| | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------|------------|--------------|
| Yes | 177 | 51.2 |
| No | 161 | 46.5 |
| Not sure | 8 | 2.3 |
| Total | 346 | 100.0 |

Table 5.21 Would you consider migrating to another country? * sex cross-tabulation

| | Men | Women |
|--------------|------------|------------|
| Yes | 73.3 | 33.7 |
| No | 24.7 | 63.2 |
| Not sure | 2 | 3 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

The qualitative questionnaire probed deeper on how young people feel about foreign migration. Of the 32 respondents, a majority indicated that they personally would not like to migrate. A minority expressed that they are either planning to go, or would be amenable to the idea.

Some of those opposed to migrating argued that opportunities exist in Sri Lanka and young people should try to look for them. Others expressed aversion on the grounds that migration negatively affects families. Yet other pointed to the negative effects this had on the country in terms of brain drain.

“I don’t see a need to migrate. There are so many things to do here if you have the will and the effort.” (Female, 16 years, Kandy)

“People shouldn’t migrate Families are fragmented. There are a lot of problems because of this.” (Female 22 years, Polonnaruwa)

“If the educated migrate then this is a loss for the country.” (Male, 24 years, Ampara)

Those in favour commented that migration was a potential means of advancement both personally and for Sri Lanka in the form of foreign exchange.

“It is better to go out and earn. Many of those who went out are better off than those who are here. I would also like to go to earn better and improve my life.”
(Male 26 years, Colombo)

“It’s good to go to a foreign country. Here if they go for a garment factory job they get a very low pay but if they go to a foreign country they earn better. Our country also earns foreign exchange. I would like to go to a foreign country as a driver.” (Male, 21 years, Anuradhapura)

5.5.6 Moving out of poverty: examples of success

A majority of respondents to the quantitative questionnaire indicated that they, personally, knew of at least one specific case of a young person who had been able to move out of poverty through their own means.

Table 5.22 Do you know of any young person who successfully moved out of poverty?

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------|-----------|------------|
| Yes | 228 | 65.9 |
| No | 118 | 34.1 |
| Total | 346 | 100.0 |

The qualitative questionnaire attempted to obtain a more detailed impression of what young people considered and defined to be “success”.

The stories recounted by interviewees revolved mostly around examples of youngsters who had established flourishing self-employment ventures. This might suggest that for younger generations entrepreneurship is becoming not only acceptable but also admired, whereas before, only white-collar government jobs elicited respect.

“Yes, a young person started a small hardware shop and built it up to be a successful business.” (Male, 19 years, Galle)

“He used to live in a cadjan hut. He provided transport to market tea. He started off with a push cycle and now he owns trucks and tractors, and he is one of the richest persons in the area.” (Male, 21 years, Galle)

“There was a labourer nearby who started a small poultry project which he developed into a farm and is now quite prosperous.” (Male, 23 years, Matara)

“A friend’s brother did his O/Ls and worked as a mason at the same time. Then he did his A/Ls and still worked. From the money he saved, he opened a shop and with that money he bought a three-wheeler, which he gave to his brother to run. With all this money he built a house.” (Female, 25 years, Colombo)

Considering the importance that has been traditionally assigned to education it is striking that only a few success stories were linked with studies.

“Yes, he studied hard and became a doctor and improved his life. His parents used to make string hoppers, now they have a better life. His parents educated him with many difficulties. Now he can look after his parents.” (Female, 20 years, Vavuniya)

5.6 Who Helps and Who Obstructs Young People’s Development?

The previous sections focused on young people’s own attempts and strategies to move out of poverty or improve their economic situation. The PYS also explored if youth believed anyone else was also responsible in helping young people overcome poverty. More than a quarter of respondents indicated that if a young person is poor it is himself/herself who should be responsible for their improvement. As expected, however, it is government/politicians who were singled out by the largest number of respondents as the main actor accountable in the fight against youth poverty.

Table 5.23 If a youth is poor, who is the main actor responsible to help him/her?

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------------------|------------|--------------|
| Government / politicians | 116 | 33.5 |
| Himself/herself | 90 | 26.0 |
| Nuclear family | 60 | 17.3 |
| Other 34 | 9.8 | |
| Extended family | 23 | 6.6 |
| Community | 12 | 3.5 |
| NGO’s | 7 | 2.0 |
| Private sector | 4 | 1.2 |
| Total | 346 | 100.0 |

From the qualitative questionnaire it was learned, however, that it is also the government/politicians who are seen by most young people as the main roadblock for youth’s development.

“Politicians who use their influence to favour their own people, deny other young people opportunities.” (Male, 19 years, Galle)

“If you support the party that is in power you are alright, if not your development is obstructed.” (Male 21 years, Galle)

“For job interviews those who come with the influence of politicians were taken first for the interview, so they are likely to get the job. In provision of state sector jobs political influence is very high.” (Male 21 years, Anuradhapura)

Quite a number of responses touched on how society and its expectations can act as a hindrance for young people to get ahead.

“The political system but also the social perceptions. These prevent people from moving up and improving their living standards. People are forced to live according to society’s views and as a result sacrifice how they want to live.” (Female, 19 years, Colombo)

When asked what, in particular, should be the government’s role in helping youth the overwhelming majority brought up the issue of job creation.

“The government must help to find jobs. Either give state sector jobs or help them get private sector jobs.” (Male 21 years, Batticaloa)

“They should provide employment opportunities not just with people with influence or connections.” (Male 19 years Galle)

6. Employment and Education

6.1 Education Perspective

From independence onwards, successive governments in Sri Lanka have made it a priority to offer universal free education. Young people in rural areas were able to access basic and secondary education, which up until then, had been exclusive to the urban or high-income groups. Most of these newly educated rural masses were accommodated within the state apparatus. Working within the government sector offered prestige and upward mobility. However, the need for a constant expansion of this bureaucracy, to keep pace with the numbers of educated youth entering the labour force, became unsustainable (Ibarguen 2004). Today, the employment safety valve, through government expansion of posts, is proving to be inadequate.

The most frequently mentioned sentiment of young people interviewed for this survey was apprehension on the scarcity of jobs, and the difficulty of securing one. Apprehension has turned to frustration amongst many youngsters, particularly in the rural areas, who have not been able to avail the opportunities that they believe, their education should have produced.

6.1.1 Reasons for terminating studies

In relation to education, the survey attempted to determine why, if education is supposedly given such a high prominence in Sri Lankan society, young people choose to discontinue their studies.

Table 6.1 Why did you not complete your "A" levels?

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------------------|------------|--------------|
| Completed A levels / still studying | 182 | 52.6 |
| Economic problems | 54 | 15.6 |
| Failure to pass examinations | 42 | 12.1 |
| Other | 23 | 6.6 |
| Did not want to continue studying | 18 | 5.2 |
| got married | 13 | 3.8 |
| Got a job | 8 | 2.3 |
| Sickness | 3 | 0.9 |
| Lack of access to quality education | 2 | 0.6 |
| Discrimination in school | 1 | 0.3 |
| Total | 346 | 100.0 |

Today, having a high educational attainment implies having at least an A/L qualification. What types of obstacles impede young people from reaching this level? From the sample, 52% said they had finished their A/L or they were still studying. This leaves 44% of respondents not having completed this level. When asked to cite the reason, most respondents mentioned economic problems within the household, followed closely behind by a failure to pass examinations. Only a few accepted that they did not want to pursue more studies. The majority of those who did not finish their A/Ls did not do so due to a lack of desire. Interestingly, problems of access to quality education were hardly mentioned, even though failure rates in passing examinations was notable and suggests that quality of instruction is a problem.

Economic pressures seem to be the main cause for not pursuing an education amongst male youth who pointed to their responsibilities in economic provision. For women, the inability to pass examinations was cited most frequently.

The qualitative interviews explored what young people believed to be the educational requirements youth need in contemporary society, to earn an adequate living. The results confirmed the notion that youth in Sri Lanka have high educational expectations. All of the respondents, except for one, argued that it is indispensable to have at least O/L qualifications. Almost half of the respondents indicated A/Ls as the minimum requirement. Although no comparative data are readily available, it seems that these expectations are above a global median.

“Youth today should complete their education at least until O/Ls, because the minimum requirement for a job these days is O/Ls with English language knowledge.” (Male, 25 years, Matara)

6.1.2 The role of the education system in preparing youth for employment

Although most young people interviewed endorse many years of educational preparation, queried on how the educational system is preparing young people for employment, the majority of responses tended to be negative.

More than half of those interviewed with the qualitative instrument (19) expressed dissatisfaction with the education system. The reasons most often advanced were the low quality of the teachers and the insufficient training in English and other important subjects. A popular perception is that the education system is not suitable and does not prepare youth to enter the job market nor to undertake self-employment. Some suggested that educational curricula become more practical-oriented rather than solely theoretical.

“I don’t think the education system prepares you for a job. It should make you proficient in English and train you in specific areas.” (Male, 21 years, Galle)

“It varies from school to school, it is not a consistent system and needs to change. Rural schools are especially disadvantaged.” (Male, 19 years, Galle)

In addition, it was suggested that youth need to supplement their primary and secondary formal education with either a university education or technical training. In this sense there is an emphasis on both earning the paper qualification as well as the real-life skills that equip youth to meet the existing demands by prospective employees.

“With formal education one cannot get a job, either that person should get a university education or after A/L they should follow a technical, computer, or English course.” (Male, 20 years, Ampara)

Of the 34 respondents, 15 expressed a positive opinion on how education had prepared them for employment. Although in the minority, this is still relatively high considering that the education system is often singled out as one of the main culprits of young peoples’ inability to secure employment. It is encouraging to note that some recent educational reforms already seem to be having a desired effect.

"Quite good I think. The new reforms were good. The assignment-based assessments gave us practical knowledge." (Female, 16 years, Galle)

"Yes it is preparing youth to find employment. Now they have included life skills and agriculture. So if he cannot reach his ambition he can do farming or some industry. Or if they do not find any work they can become self-employed." (Female, 16 years, Ampara)

It is disturbing that two respondents referred directly to the practice of bribing public servants to secure a job. In both cases, education was considered to be of secondary importance and bribing was explained as a normal avenue for securing employment.

"If one has studied up to O/L one can get a job. But you must have enough money to bribe a minister's assistant. If I had Rs50,000 I could get a job in a bank." (Female, 20 years, Vavuniya)

One answer in particular stood out, as it can be seen as representative of the ills of the education system. The respondent argued that Arts subjects only revolve around theory, with no practical components. Therefore, the only job an Arts graduate is qualified to do is to teach. If this is so, then it is easy to see why an impractical education gets reproduced. Those that are teaching can only impart knowledge that they themselves learned which, according to the young man, is abstract and immaterial for securing a job.

"In the case of Arts it is just theory. So with Arts education we can teach but we can't use if for anything else." (Male, 24 years, Ampara)

6.2 Employment Perspective

6.2.1 Youth attitudes towards employment

The qualitative interviews explored general attitudes towards employment by inquiring on two dimensions: whether they would be willing to take a job that does not meet their qualifications, and the characteristics of a good job.

The majority argued that they would opt to take on employment that was below their qualifications, instead of being unemployed. This appears to contradict the traditional allegation that Sri Lankan youth are exceedingly cautious, and prefer to remain unemployed rather than take on a job "below them." It might be the case that the economic situation is changing this attitude, and young people are finding themselves more and more obliged to take up any form of employment to contribute to family income.

"If you can't find a job you like, you cannot be idle, one must be willing to do anything, even if it doesn't suit your qualifications." (Female, 22 years, Kandy)

"I don't expect a job to suit my qualification. If I get a job that pays me for my hard work, I'll be satisfied." (Male, 21 years, Anuradhapura)

In fact, economic constraints were mentioned most often as the reason that young people will take jobs that do not meet their qualifications.

“Those from very poor families will take up any kind of job irrespective of their qualifications but they will end up being unhappy. But the ones who are okay will not like to do a job below their qualifications.” (Male, 21 years, Batticaloa)

“Many educated young people are unwilling to take jobs below their qualifications but are forced to because otherwise they cannot survive.” (Female, 24 years, Galle)

Yet the willingness to engage in any form of employment was not overly predominant. Some youth responded that they would choose to be unemployed rather than engage in a job that does not suit their qualifications. Responses point that there is still a fair degree of unmovable expectations, with young people reluctant to engage in a job they consider unsuitable. A number of responses hint that some youngsters have an exaggerated perception of what they can expect from the education they received. The attitude is that a paper certificate should automatically entitle them to a certain type of job.

“People with a lot of qualifications feel it’s demeaning to take on a job that requires lesser qualifications. This could be a shortcoming in the educational system.” (Male, 21 years, Galle)

“Yes, they do think certain jobs are too low. Because they are qualified, they don’t want to take jobs that are beneath them.” (Male, 17 years, Galle)

“Educated people don’t do small jobs because they feel it belittles them.” (Female, 25 years, Colombo)

The willingness on the part of some youth to engage in employment that does not meet their qualifications is significant because it shows an attitude that moves away from overblown expectations and instead indicates feelings that they are willing to consider other options.

In terms of the desirable attributes of a job, only four respondents touched on the need for it to be personally interesting and/or enjoyable.

“One must have job satisfaction.” (Male, 26 years, Colombo)

Sufficient pay was mentioned as a primary characteristic in order to meet basic needs and the demands of the current cost of living. In addition, an organised work schedule with acceptable hours and benefits was stressed.

“One that provides a high salary and good working hours.” (Female, 24 years, Matara)

“Work within a time schedule, they should give proper leave, good salary.” (Female, 19 years, Matara)

Status issues such as attire and working conditions were also mentioned. Loan facilities and pension schemes, like those offered by state sector jobs, was seen as desirable.

“Good social recognition, good pay, like in a government job.” (Female, 22 years, Kandy district)

“A pension. Those who have state sector jobs are respected in the village. Respect is not based on wealth here but on the job one holds.” (Male, 24 years, Ampara)

It appears that young people in Sri Lanka have very ingrained notions of responsibility, and more individual considerations such as personal satisfaction are not seen as relevant.

When asked what one must do as a young person today to find employment, the answers varied from personal efforts, to the need to have personal contacts and acquiring alternative skills and educational qualifications.

In terms of personal expectations, youth in the qualitative sample mentioned that if they are to find suitable employment they must work hard and be committed. In addition, obtaining a good education helps in securing employment in the private sector or in venturing into self-employment rather than making them dependent on state sector employment. This reiterates the view that such sectors offer better opportunities and open up better avenues for development and improvement in economic terms.

“One must get a good education, make an effort and have ambition.” (Female, 16 years, Galle)

“One must not dawdle, but must look for jobs and apply, or join the army, or work in garment factories. One must make an effort to get any job or engage in self-employment.” (Female, 22 years, Kandy)

The need for establishing personal contacts to help in securing employment was also mentioned. Some youth felt that as long as one has sufficient contacts with influential people, then securing employment is not difficult. Personal contacts were sometimes viewed as more important than qualifications, and even individual ability. The quotes, in this regard, are testament to the frustration this system breeds in young people.

“If they treat the politician right, then they can find a good job. We know this girl who is a graduate but still without a job. On the other hand, others with a level of education below hers have good jobs because they know politicians.” (Female, 24 years, Matara)

“One must get a good education and hence jobs are mainly given through the ministers. One has to help the minister during election time and also pay money to the minister to get a job.” (Male, 20 years, Ampara district)

“We must go through politicians or a well-known person, without their support it is difficult to get a job.” (Male, 26 years, Colombo)

"We have to have good connections and the ability as well but the former is more important." (Female, 25 years, Colombo)

Acquiring alternative education in the form of vocational and technical education was also mentioned as an avenue to secure employment.

"For those who can't get into university there should be alternatives in the vocational field, or they should get other training, such as in computers." (Male, 24 years, Polonnaruwa)

"A formal education though essential is insufficient. Today, most employers look for practical training and other skills such as knowledge of English and computers. A young person today should look for opportunities to expose himself to this." (Male 21 years, Galle)

The inability of the existing education system to prepare youth to apply their theoretical knowledge when seeking employment was a key disadvantage that youth face, which is compounded by the lack of facilities in schools, especially in rural and conflict-affected areas. This is followed by a sense of exasperation, that even gaining these skills would not help youth because of the high unemployment rates in the country and the need to have contacts.

Encouragingly, some youth feel that one can move away from structural difficulties by improving one's own skills and acquiring skills that are currently in demand. Youth need to be able to use these to distance themselves from the dependency on politicians or influential people to gain employment.

6.2.2 Employment perspectives in comparison

An important factor influencing youth's confidence about their future is the degree to which they feel that their lives, and future employment prospects will be better than those of their parents. At the same time, expressing this same belief *vis-a-vis* their peers is an even more powerful expression of the belief in a positive opportunity structure.

A larger proportion of young people interviewed felt that their prospects for employment in the future were much better than those of other young people. A lesser, but still substantial number, considered that their prospects were the same, whereas a minority (18%) were of the idea that they are worse. These results indicate that young people in Sri Lanka have some degree of self-assurance and optimism about their future.

Interestingly, there is a slightly higher optimism amongst rural youth on employment prospects than among their urban brethren. This could be indicative of the high rate of competition that exists in urban areas when trying to secure employment.

It is striking that feelings of optimism are not really similar across the board. Optimism is more pronounced amongst male than female youth. This might be a fair reflection of the actual situation. Historically, unemployment rates for young women have been at least double those for men (Ibarguen 2004).

Table 6.2 Opportunities for employment in comparison to other youth

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------|------------|--------------|
| Better | 150 | 43.4 |
| The same | 115 | 33.2 |
| Worse ⁶³ | 18.2 | |
| Don't know | 18 | 5.2 |
| Total | 346 | 100.0 |

Table 6.3 Opportunities for employment in comparison to other youth rural/urban cross-tabulation

| | Rural | Urban |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Better | 44.4 | 39.3 |
| The same | 33.8 | 31.1 |
| Worse ¹⁷ | 24.6 | |
| Don't know | 4.9 | 5 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 |

When asked to compare with parents, instead of peers, not surprisingly an even larger proportion felt that prospects for them are better than that of their parents. There were no appreciable differences between young people in the conflict and non-conflict areas or among youth in the cities and countryside. In all geographic sectors close to 70% expressed that they had better opportunities than their elders. Furthermore, in contrast with the above example, women also exhibited almost identical levels of optimism than men when asked to compare themselves with their parents.

6.2.3 Sectoral preferences for employment

The government sector is at the top of young people's preferences for employment. Overall, more than 40% expressed a preference for government employment, followed by the private sector and self-employment, both with almost one quarter of responses each. These numbers seem to corroborate the commonly held and disseminated argument that young people in Sri Lanka overwhelmingly favour the bureaucracy for jobs and careers. This is most often explained with three interrelated arguments: first, as a result of societal pressure; second, as an effect of economic calculations and third, as a consequence of the education system (Ibarguen 2004). Young people, it is reasoned, go for jobs in the state sector because in their communities, particularly in rural areas, these are the jobs that carry respect. In addition, government jobs have pensions and offer much sought-after security, not always found in the private sector.

Table 6.4 In which sector would you most prefer a job?

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------|------------|--------------|
| Government sector | 150 | 43.4 |
| Private sector | 82 | 23.7 |
| Self-employment | 81 | 23.4 |
| Free trade zone | 14 | 4.0 |
| Other | 18 | 5.2 |
| Total | 345 | 100.0 |

Table 6.5 In which sector would you most prefer a job? conflict/non-conflict cross-tabulation

| | Conflict | Non-conflict |
|-------------------|------------|--------------|
| Government sector | 60 | 36.7 |
| Private sector | 10 | 29.4 |
| Self-employment | 20 | 24.9 |
| Free trade zone | 5 | 3.6 |
| Other | 5 | 5.3 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

Disaggregating the result by gender, and place of residence, yields noteworthy distinctions. As indicated above, although government is the number one employment preference in both the conflict and non-conflict areas, the differences between the two regions is considerable as

well as statistically significant.²¹ Whereas in the non-conflict zone only 36.7% expressed this preference, in the conflict zone it rises to 60%. Similarly, almost 30% of respondents in the non-conflict area favoured the private sector, but only 10% in the Northeast.

In a similar vein, but not as marked, rural youth are more inclined to express a preference for employment in the government, when compared to young people in urban areas. Preference for work in the private sector was, however, not manifestly different, with 23.1% and 26.6% in the rural and urban areas respectively. Tests revealed the statistical insignificance of this variance.²² The popularity of private sector employment and self-employment among youth in non-conflict regions could be a manifestation of tangible and more readily available opportunities. In contrast, in the Northeast, employment options outside of the government are severely restricted.

In terms of gender the differences were not particularly large except in the case of a higher preference for work in the private sector by males.

Table 6.6 In what sector would you most prefer a job? * rural/urban cross-tabulation

| | Rural | Urban |
|-------------------|------------|------------|
| Government sector | 45.9 | 31.6 |
| Private sector | 23.1 | 26.6 |
| Self-employment | 22.4 | 28.3 |
| Free trade zone | 3.1 | 8.3 |
| Other | 5.2 | 5 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

Table 6.7 In what sector would you most prefer a job? * sex cross-tabulation

| | Male | Female |
|-------------------|------------|------------|
| Government sector | 42.6 | 44.1 |
| Private sector | 28 | 20.5 |
| Self-employment | 22.6 | 24.1 |
| Free trade zone | 1.3 | 6.1 |
| Other 5.3 | 15.1 | |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

Previous studies including the NYS have found that the preference for the government sector is even more marked among those young people with relatively more education. Those that have at least an A/L are aware that they are among the educated in the country and assume this entitles them to receive a job in the bureaucracy. As can be observed in Table 6.8, PYS respondents with more education were also more liable to prefer the government. Whereas those with only primary, the majority (42.1%) prefer self-employment this is reversed at A/L were more than half indicated that they prefer the government, and only a minority of 13.3% favour self-employment.

Table 6.8 In what sector most prefer to have a job * educational attainment cross-tabulation

| | Primary | Secondary | O/L | A/L + |
|-------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Government sector | 26.3 | 35. | 42.5 | 50.4 |
| Private sector | 15.8 | 15.8 | 21.6 | 30.3 |
| Self-employment | 42.1 | 35 | 26 | 13.3 |
| Free trade zone | 0 | 12.3 | 4.5 | 0.7 |
| Other 15.8 | 1.7 | 5.2 | 5.1 | |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

²¹ Please refer to Annex 3

²² Please refer to Annex 3

In the qualitative questionnaire, respondents were asked to elaborate on their stated employment sector preferences. Expectedly, and echoing what has been put forward by previous studies, the principal reasons advanced for the preference in this sector revolved around status, its perceived lighter workload, longer-term security and, to a lesser degree, the possibility of serving one's country.

"I prefer the government sector because in the private sector they kill the employees with the load of work." (Female, 24 years, Matara)

"I prefer a job in the government sector because such jobs are stable. In the private sector you have to search for new jobs every few years." (Female, 26 years, Batticaloa)

"I prefer a government job. When there is an accident or anything happens they give money for the family, and there is a pension." (Female, 28 years, Ampara)

"You can serve the country if you are in the government service." (Female, 16 years, Galle)

"I prefer the government sector because in the government sector you get benefits such as job security and cost of living allowances. The chances of being fired are much less in the government sector." (Female, 19 years, Colombo)

Quite a number of respondents, however, also shared their reservations and displeasure with the government sector. The main grievance was the prevalent fraud and corruption involved in job dispensation. Others confirmed the increasing scarcity of new government posts. Still others explained that they did not consider government the ideal place to develop their talents and skills.

"In today's situation, government jobs don't offer good prospects, there are no promotions." (Female, 16 years, Kandy)

"The government sector is useless. There is nothing that the government sector can do. You have to know someone to get in." (Male, 24 years, Polonnaruwa)

"There is too much of interference and influence and you need to have connections in the government sector. The private sector on the other hand is relatively hassle-free." (Female, 29 years, Galle)

Those that preferred private sector employment considered it to be a better option for employment because it is more financially attractive. It is also viewed as a sector where connections are not as important to gain access.

"In the private sector, it is easier to advance, get promoted and you get a better income, and [getting a job] doesn't depend on connections or influence. The promotions are merit-based." (Male, 19 years, Galle)

A minority of respondents indicated that self-employment is superior to both state and private sector because of its flexibility, and the control one has over work.

“If you have your own job you have control and you can improve it or leave it when you want.” (Male, 23 years, Matara)

“ [I prefer] self-employment because it would mean you could improve yourself. You get stuck in the government sector and you need connections to advance. Self-employment is more risky, it is less stable, but it depends on your own effort as well.” (Female, 24 years, Galle)

The high preference for government employment indicates that a majority of youth still consider this sector as the most appealing choice. In it they see stability and an improved social standing. Unfortunately, the current situation shows that such expectations continue to burden a bureaucracy that is already over-stretched. The number of young people that expressed a willingness to work in the private sector and in self-employment is encouraging and suggest that there is a growing realisation amongst youth that the state sector cannot fulfil all employment expectations, and that other options need to be explored. Nonetheless, it is important to highlight that many young people, particularly in rural enclaves, are averse to the private sector as it is seen as overly rapacious.

6.2.4 What jobs do Sri Lankan youth want?

In terms of sectoral preference for employment, the results from the PYS appear to confirm the assertion that youth in Sri Lanka clearly prefer government employment. However, in an open question, following the question on what employment sector they would prefer, youth were asked: “If you could have any job you wanted, what would it be?” Interestingly, the results seem to challenge previously held assumptions as well as the results shown above. As can be observed in Table 6.9, only 2.9% of respondents claimed the job they would most desire (if they could choose anything) is a government job. The most preferred option was self-employment or business with 27.7%, followed by teachers.

Table 6.9 If you could have any job you wanted what would it be?

| | Frequency | Percent |
|---|------------|--------------|
| Self-employment / Business | 96 | 27.7 |
| Teachers | 55 | 15.9 |
| Professional / Manager / Executive | 52 | 15.0 |
| Other 39 | 11.3 | |
| Clerical work /admin /service | 27 | 7.8 |
| Do not want to do a job | 14 | 4.0 |
| State sector job | 10 | 2.9 |
| Private sector | 9 | 2.6 |
| Security forces | 9 | 2.6 |
| Computer field | 8 | 2.3 |
| Any job | 8 | 2.3 |
| Good job / good salary | 8 | 2.3 |
| Wage labour /farmer /labourer | 7 | 2.0 |
| Suitable job according to qualification | 4 | 1.2 |
| Total | 346 | 100.0 |

A possible interpretation of these seemingly contradictory results is that youth desire government jobs as a response to family and societal pressures, but if they were given complete liberty they would much rather want to be self-employed or have a business.

Also remarkable, considering the results in Table 6.5, which showed that 60% of youth in the conflict zone would prefer a government sector job, is that when asked if they could have any job, only a small minority selected a government job. There were almost no differences in responses from youth in the two areas. Only 3% in the conflict zone, and 2.8% in the non-conflict area, mentioned a preference for a government job. Nonetheless, in the conflict zone, there was an appreciably higher number of respondents who mentioned teaching as their most desired job. Teaching is usually considered a government job so this might partially explain the inconsistency. Self-employment or business ranked very high in both zones, being the most desired job in the non-conflict zone by a large margin. In contrast, agriculture was one of the least sought after jobs in both areas. In the non-conflict zone it ranked as the most undesirable with a mere 1.2%. There was a low preference for agriculture in the conflict zone as well with only 4% of respondents opting for it.

In policy terms, these results indicate the appeal of alternative options of employment. This is an area that the private sector and non-governmental organisations can encourage in terms of providing the necessary infrastructure and capital. There is also interest amongst youth to enter teaching vocations and professional, managerial or executive level employment.

Clearly, the aspiration to enter high profile employment is a preoccupation mostly with urban youth, with rural youth preferring to engage in the teaching profession or in self-employment. This is linked to the fact that in rural areas teaching is seen as a vocation that improves the social standing of an individual in the community. A preference for agricultural work to earn a living hardly factors in the discussion. This corroborates the notion that agriculture is no longer considered by youth as an attractive vocation. In this regard, if the agricultural sector is to be considered an appealing means for income generation, and if the state is to encourage rural development, related economic factors should be addressed.

**Table 6.10 If you could have any job you wanted what would it be?
*conflict/non-conflict cross-tabulation**

| | Conflict | Non-conflict |
|---|------------|--------------|
| Teachers | 27 | 11.3 |
| Self-employment / Business | 19 | 31.3 |
| Professional / Manager / Executive | 14 | 15.4 |
| Other | 13 | 10.6 |
| Clerical work /admin /service | 10 | 7 |
| Do not want to do a job | 5 | 3.6 |
| Wage labour /farmer /labourer | 4 | 1.2 |
| State sector job | 3 | 2.8 |
| Good job / good salary | 2 | 2.4 |
| Suitable job according to qualification | 1 | 1.2 |
| Security forces | 1 | 3.2 |
| Any job | 1 | 2.8 |
| Private sector | | 3.6 |
| Computer field | | 3.2 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

7. Perceptions on Politics and War

In Sri Lanka's recent history, participation by youth in politics has often been characterised by their involvement in civil unrest and uprisings, the most prominent being the JVP insurgency in the 1970s and 1990s. While much of the writings and research has been focused on such issues of violence, less is known on young people's political expectations and their involvement in more mundane formal and informal political processes.

7.1 Participation in the Community

Young people's first experiences with the public sphere are, on many occasions, mediated through local youth and community organisations. It has been found that involvement in these local organisations can prove valuable in developing confidence in group dynamics and community involvement (Kuruppu and Renganathan, 2005). This might later be transferred to how young people perceive and relate on a wider political scale.

The PYS set out to find young people's participation in the most common community groups. They were asked if they were active members of any of the following: youth organisation, school club, micro-finance group, community-based organisation (CBO), political party, women's organisation, or other.

In general, participation of young people in community organisations was found to be low. It was foreseen that involvement in youth clubs would be among the highest. Even though it was, indeed, the type organisation with the largest proportion of involvement, it was still fairly low at 33.8%. In this case, involvement was found to be predominantly amongst younger members within the 15-17 year and 18-24 year age groups and more common in rural rather than urban youth. Young women's larger share of household chores, and stricter parental supervision explains, at least partly, why almost double the number of men than women said they participate in youth clubs/organisations.

Table 7.1 Are you an active member of a youth club? * sex cross-tabulation

| | Male | Female |
|--------------|------------|------------|
| Yes | 46.7 | 24 |
| No | 53.3 | 76 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

For other community organisations, participation was found to be even lower. Only 11% of youth in the PYS sample said they were involved in micro-finance groups. Not surprisingly, those involved are youth in the older age group in rural areas. Similarly, participation in CBOs was also very low (13.3%) and mainly found among male village youth in the 25-30 age group.

The qualitative questionnaire sought to get a more detailed sense of why young people decide to participate, or not, in community organisations. The low level of involvement among respondents was attributed, most often, to the non-existence of such organisations. In the case

of women, they tend to distance themselves from youth organisations once they get married. School-going youth expressed frequently that participation in community organizations impinges on the time they have to spend on studies, especially if they are concentrating on O/ and A/Level exams.

"I don't participate now because I'm married. I also stopped before because I got a job in the garment factory." (Female, 24 years, Matara)

"There aren't many organisations, and the existing ones are not properly organised." (Female, 29 years, Galle)

"I don't participate in the youth clubs activities because I will be sitting for the O/L and I don't have the time to get involved." (Female, 16 years, Kandy)

Apart from the above views, some youngsters also expressed the opinion that such organisations would serve no purpose either for them personally, or in the betterment of the community.

"There is no youth organisation in the village. At the same time I don't think they would be of any use to me." (Male 24 years, Polonnaruwa)

A good number of respondents did, however, indicate that they are actively involved in community organisations. Some of the most common activities described by respondents were: *Shramadaanas*²³ to build housing for the poor, rehabilitate and clear roads, and clean public areas; cultural and religious events held during Sinhala and Tamil New Year; recreational and entertainment activities such as musical shows, sports meets, cricket matches, and cycle races; helping farmers during the paddy harvesting season; and assisting during weddings and funerals.

The most common notion about youth organisations was that they are largely a male-dominated and male-driven although a number of respondents felt that both males and females participate in youth organisations equally. The low participation of women was attributed to their responsibilities in the home front and social constraints that insist on maintaining the separation of the sexes when they are young. Respondents felt that their involvement also depends on type of activities that the organisations undertake; if the organisation is involved mainly in sports activities then membership will be predominantly male.

"No, we don't participate. Our society thinks that boys and girls should not participate together, if they participate and spend time together, the community looks down upon this. In our village, if men do any wrong it is not a problem, but if a woman makes a mistake they will completely isolate her." (Female, 16 years, Ampara)

"Only young men [are active] as there are more male activities. People don't mix too much, and are not very social, it is quite a traditional village. There is not much interaction between young men and women." (Male, 19 years, Galle)

²³ Shrama-labour, daana-alms, free. Free contribution of labour for a common cause.

7.2 Involvement in Politics

From voting to actually running for public office, young people can participate in the formal political front in a number of ways. The PYS asked respondents if they were members of any political party. Only a small minority, of 5.5%, admitted to membership in a party. In conflict areas, young people generally abstain from formal membership. Only 2% of respondents in this area confirmed formal partisanship, whereas in the non-conflict area it was slightly higher at 7%. More men than women are active in political parties. Only 2% of women in the sample confirmed their membership, as opposed to 10% of young men.

Low involvement in formal political entities could be attributed to a deep-seated mistrust that youth have towards the political system and politicians. It might also be a conscious choice by youth who prefer keeping a low profile as a result of previous implications brought on by the JVP insurgency. Similarly, in the North and Northeast, youth have learned that visible political activism can bring about undesired consequences. Finally, the low levels of active membership might also suggest that parties are not succeeding in attracting the younger constituency.

7.2.1 Voting

Of those that were eligible, more than three quarters acknowledged voting in the general election of 2001. Women exhibited only a slightly lower percentage of participation in the election. Youth in villages were also somewhat less likely to have voted than young people in -cities.

Voting is a formal political activity where a majority of young people Sri Lankans, if they have reached voting age, will participate.

Table 7.2 Did you vote in the last election?

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------|------------|------------|
| Yes | 171 | 75.7 |
| No | 55 | 24.3 |
| Total (eligible) | 226 | 100 |

Table 7.3 Did you vote in the last election?* sex cross-tabulation

| | Male | Female |
|-------------------------|------------|------------|
| Yes | 78.7 | 73.2 |
| No | 21.2 | 26.8 |
| Total (eligible) | 100 | 100 |

7.2.2 Opportunities to influence politics

The PYS set out to discern if young people believed they have channels, apart from voting, to present their demands to the government and influence decisions that have a bearing on their lives. Not surprisingly, a majority of respondents were pessimistic on this query. Nonetheless, although still in the minority, a considerable 40% of those interviewed, conceded that youth did, indeed, have effective political means to direct their demands. Interestingly, more young people in the conflict areas claimed to have chances to present their demands to the government.

To complement the responses from the quantitative questionnaire, the qualitative questionnaire explored in more detail if, and how, young people perceive they can influence politics. Related to this, it asked for a description of the type of options young people have for political influence and participation.

Table 7.4 Are there avenues for youth to present demands to the government?

| | Frequency | Percent |
|------------|-----------|---------|
| Yes | 136 | 39.3 |
| No | 194 | 56.1 |
| Don't Know | 16 | 4.6 |
| Total | 346 | 100 |

Table 7.5 Are there avenues for youth to present demands to the government? conflict/non-conflict cross-tabulation

| | Conflict | Non-conflict |
|------------|----------|--------------|
| Yes | 47 | 36.2 |
| No | 46 | 60.1 |
| Don't know | 7 | 3.7 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

Opinions on youth's opportunities to influence politics were varied. Most respondents were doubtful or outright unconvinced that opportunities exist. Quite a number argued that their involvement is only sought during election time, when local politicians need to amass votes. Young people may willingly subject themselves to this manipulation because they believe it is a way to secure employment. This type of political involvement: restricted to election times, and steered on the side of politicians with the aim of gathering more votes, and on the part of youngsters to secure a job, has contributed to a deep sense of cynicism about the political system.

"Politicians create opportunities that are beneficial to them. Youth get involved in canvassing for votes because of the lure of promised jobs but they never materialise." (Male, 21 years, Galle)

"In reality youth are always cheated. During elections politicians make youth a puppet to gain their vote after the election they are forgotten." (Female, 29 years, Vavuniya)

"Youth have an opportunity during elections but after elections are over they do not have an opportunity to influence politics." (Female, 28 years, Hambantota)

Although in the minority, some expressed that there are, in fact, prospects for influence, mainly in the form of lobbying, media and election campaigns, through which they can shape manifestos and policies to be implemented by politicians.

"Yes, there are a lot of opportunities for youth to get involved and influence the process; for instance through poster campaigns and protests." (Female, 19 years, Colombo)

"Yes they do, by joining committees, using the media to air their views etc." (Female, 22 years, Kandy)

Some youngsters expressed that they feel sidelined from any type of real influence by elders and politicians. This is translated to distrust of the entire system.

"There are no opportunities to influence the political system, because if youth speak against the politicians then they are discriminated against, left out and cornered." (Female, 24 years, Matara)

"No, youth don't have opportunities. They are discouraged because of favouritism and biases." (Female, 16 years, Galle)

“Politics in Sri Lanka is focused on older people, politics is not receptive to young people. It is important that they get involved but the system also has to change to allow their views to be heard and influence political action.”
(Female, 24 years, Galle)

A few responses suggested that the lack of outlets for political expression carry the implicit risk of young people adopting more radical postures. A number of responses, in fact, suggest that the JVP and the LTTE are still seen as the only alternatives for young people to participate.

“No, they do not have good opportunities, and as a result most of the youth are joining the LTTE.” (Female, 24 years, Batticaloa)

“They don’t have the opportunities unless they join the JVP. They have no influence. Many young people are unemployed and discontented.” (Female, 24 years, Galle)

“The only party with a branch office in the area is the JVP. They are very active and many young people are involved.” (Male, 17 years, Galle)

In addition to these issues, the introspective view that youth lack unity as a group was also mentioned. In this regard it was suggested that steps need to be taken to encourage youth to take on issues that affect their position in society. They should be regarded as a group that needs to participate in the process and not as mere spectators.

“Yes, if we are united we can influence.” (Male, 21 years, Anuradhapura)

“If all the youth get together then we can [change things], but a single person cannot do this.” (Male, 22 years, Colombo)

The perception of a number of respondents was that youth involvement in politics is of utmost importance for the betterment of youth as a group, the community, as well as the country as a whole. It was felt that youth should be given more responsibility at the local level of governance to influence policies and engage in activities that would improve their conditions. This also opens the prospects for capable youth to emerge and take on more responsibilities.

“Youth should be provided with more chances as members of provincial councils and the like.” (Female, 28 years, Hambantota)

“Politics in Sri Lanka is focused on older people, politics is not receptive to young people. It is important that they get involved, but the system also has to change to allow their views to be heard and to influence political action.”
(Female, 24 years, Galle)

“Youth can express their aspirations then politicians will be able to identify their problems and provide solutions.” (Male, 26 years, Colombo)

In contrast, other respondents disparaged against involvement in politics, arguing that it is irrelevant, and a waste of time for youth

"I think youth are better off doing something more productive. There are no personal benefits for them and nor are there benefits for the village." (Female, 22 years, Polonnaruwa)

"I don't think it's very important in the present context where the system is corrupt and filled with false promises." (Male, 21 years, Galle)

There is a fairly widespread attitude that the political structures of the country need to be reformed. More than 65% of youngsters in the sample agreed with this statement. This point of view was quite constant among youth in the conflict and non-conflict areas and men and women. Although not statistically significant, youth in villages were, comparatively, more inclined than their urban peers to believe that political structures need to be reformed.

Table 7.6 Is there a need for change in the political structures in Sri Lanka?

| | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------|------------|--------------|
| Yes | 226 | 65.3 |
| No | 83 | 24.0 |
| Don't know | 37 | 10.7 |
| Total | 346 | 100.0 |

Table 7.7 Is there a need for change in the political structures in Sri Lanka * rural/urban cross-tabulation

| | Rural | Urban |
|--------------|------------|------------|
| Yes | 67.3 | 55.8 |
| No | 23.2 | 27.9 |
| Don't know | 9.5 | 16.3 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

7.3 Perceptions on War and Violence

7.3.1 Violence

A component of the PYS was to study the perceptions of young people on war and violence, and their link to poverty. It began by attempting to identify the most common instances of violence youth face in their day-to-day lives. Most respondents (35.5%) answered that there is no violence where they live. However, 20% acknowledged that violence related to alcohol consumptions is common in their locality. Domestic violence was mentioned by 6.6%, and violence against women and political/electoral violence both had a bit more than 5% of responses.

The PYS attempted to understand if there are certain conditions under which young people consider a resort to violence as justified. As can be observed in Table 7.8, when asked whether extreme injustice justifies violence, almost half of all respondents agreed. When asked whether extreme poverty validated turning to violence, a much smaller number of slightly less than a quarter responded in the affirmative. Although open to interpretation, the numbers of young people willing to consider violence as an option raises cause for alarm.

Table 7.8 Is violence justified in cases of extreme injustice?

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------|------------|--------------|
| Yes | 162 | 46.8 |
| No | 177 | 51.2 |
| Don't know | 7 | 2.0 |
| Total | 346 | 100.0 |

Table 7.9 Is violence justified in cases of extreme poverty?

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------|------------|--------------|
| Yes | 84 | 24.3 |
| No | 260 | 75.1 |
| Don't know | 2 | 0.6 |
| Total | 346 | 100.0 |

It has often been argued that the dissatisfaction deriving from the failure to secure the type of job they want make educated youth more prone to champion the cause of violence. This was not unequivocally shown by the PYS results. More young people with A/L indicated that injustices warranted violence than those with only primary. But those with only secondary (in relative terms less educated) were the ones with the highest proportion of those favouring violence. In addition, when focusing on poverty those respondents with A/L and those with only primary had almost identical response structures.

Table 7.10 Is violence justified in cases of extreme injustice? * educational attainment cross-tabulation

| | Primary | Secondary | O/L | A/L + |
|--------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Yes | 36.8 | 61.4 | 46.6 | 42.2 |
| No | 63.2 | 33.3 | 51.1 | 57. |
| Don't know | 0 | 5.2 | 2.2 | 0.7 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Table 7.11 Is violence justified in cases of extreme poverty? * educational attainment cross-tabulation

| | Primary | Secondary | O/L | A/L + |
|--------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Yes | 21 | 38.6 | 22.9 | 20 |
| No | 79 | 61.4 | 75.5 | 80 |
| Don't know | 0 | 0 | 1.4 | 0 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

It is interesting to contrast these responses from a similar question included in the National Youth Survey of 2000. In the NYS the question posed was: Is struggle leading to violence a proper or not proper method for fulfilling people's demands? In that case, around a third of youth in the sample considered violence a proper method. Both Tamil and Sinhalese youth had very similar response patterns, with around 34% in favour of violence against injustices. Muslim youth exhibited less acceptance of violence with only 20% in agreement. In the PYS, when cross tabulating by ethnicity it was found that youth from the three main ethnic backgrounds had very similar responses. In the PYS, Muslims did not have a lower threshold of tolerance to violence. However, it is important to point out that the total sample of Muslim youth was too small to adequately compare with the other two groups.

Table 7.12 Is violence justified in cases of extreme injustice? * ethnicity cross-tabulation

| | Sinhalese | Tamil | Muslim |
|--------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Yes | 47.6 | 43 | 48.3 |
| No | 50 | 57 | 48.3 |
| Don't know | 2.4 | | 3.2 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 |

The qualitative questionnaire explored in greater detail in which instances, if any, it might be acceptable to resort to violence. Of the total of 34 responses, 24 argued that violence was acceptable and 10 that it was unacceptable, regardless of the circumstances.

The most often sought out justification, with 11 of the total number of responses, was that violence was justified when there were “injustices.” The examples below indicate that injustice is often equated with a political system that is corrupt and non-responsive.

“When injustice is shown to the people, the use of violence is acceptable. For instance, when an accident occurs and the police does not take any action, then it is acceptable to use violence against the police.” (Female, 28 years, Ampara)

“When politicians promise poor people things and nothing amounts from those promises then I think it is justified.” (Male, 25 years, Matara)

“[Violence is justified when there is] extreme injustice, when law and order is not carried out properly.” (Male, 26 years, Colombo)

“Yes, [violence] it is acceptable. When ministers fail to fulfil people’s wishes, considering they went into parliament using our votes.” (Male, 24 years, Ampara)

Other justifications for violence also mentioned were related to poverty, land issues, self-defence, personal insult, and labour disputes.

“Now Samurdhi is being cut even from the poorest families. At this time I think people should get together and fight.” (Female, 19 years, Matara)

“Joblessness, this causes a lot of discontent and may lead to violence. This is acceptable.” (Female 24 years, Galle)

“Strikes and labour disputes. When something wrong is happening to the country, using violence is justified.” (Female 22 years, Kandy)

The majority considered that violence, as a response to poverty is not warranted.

“No, poverty is a problem for the poor family, they should try to solve it by themselves, they should not harm other people or their assets because at the end of it they don’t benefit from any of it.” (Female, 16 years, Ampara)

“Violence will not help people overcome poverty. This is not justified.” (Male, 24 years, Galle)

Although in the minority, some young people declared that violence is never justified.

“Violence is never justified. It results in loss of life and property. Using it is not useful.” (Male, 24 years, Polonnaruwa)

“There is law in this country. So needn’t use violence under any circumstances.” (Male, 21 years, Anuradhapura)

7.3.2 War

The PYS was conducted a little over a year after the signing of the cease-fire. Enough time had elapsed for young people to form an opinion on the possibility and repercussions of a

permanent end to hostilities. The last question explored this topic. It asked: If the war in the Northeast comes to an end, how do you think this will affect young people in your locality?

The vast majority of the responses were positive and touched on the advantages at both local and national level. Some referred to the economic benefits while others, particularly from the Northeast, emphasised increased mobility.

“Youth will be able to start travelling to the North and trading.” (Male, 16 years, Hambantota)

“We prefer peace because youth have more freedom to move around.” (Female, 26 years Batticaloa)

“Youth can travel anywhere in the country without fear. We can go to places we have not previously been in the country.” (Male, 20 years, Ampara)

However, other young people expressed concern, particularly for families in the South, which have relied on the salary and the social recognition of their young men in the armed forces.

“In this area there are many people in the Army. They might lose their jobs; people would get paid off and made redundant. The people in the Army wouldn't get as much social recognition as they did during war time.” (Female, 22 years, Kandy)

8. Conclusions

The intention of the PYS was to explore how young people perceive various aspects related to poverty, employment and political participation. The first section of the conclusions will discuss and contrast the picture that emerged from the PYS with findings from earlier studies. It will address questions such as: To what extent does the PYS corroborate previously held assumptions regarding youth? Which notions does it appear to contest? The second part of the conclusions will explore some results from the PYS and review the most salient differences between youth in urban and rural environments; youth in the conflict and non-conflict zones; and young men and women. Armed with the results from the PYS, the final part of the conclusions will point out a few policy areas that will require more attention in the near future.

8.1 PYS Findings in Comparison

Youth unemployment has been explained with three interrelated arguments. First, that the skills young people are receiving from school are not what the market needs. Second, that new entrants to the labour force are just too many for the economy to absorb and third, that youth, particularly educated youth, have immobile expectations so they prefer to be unemployed or underemployed before taking a job that is perceived to be beneath them.

This last argument is linked with the notion that unemployment is fundamentally a problem among the more educated groups. A few scholars have disagreed with this thesis but by and large it is acknowledged that youth unemployment in Sri Lanka is more widespread among the more educated groups. Although not categorical, findings emerging from the PYS also point in this direction. More educated young people reported that their main activity currently was searching for a job. In contrast, no PYS interviewees with primary education said they were unemployed. When discussing problems, 37% of those with a primary education mentioned lack of job opportunities as the most pressing concern, whereas for A/L graduates it was considerably higher at 63%.

Why do educated young people appear to face more unemployment? Without a doubt, the inability of the Sri Lankan economy to grow, and the limitations of the education system play a large part. However, entrenched expectations by society of what constitutes a “proper” job still has much weight and influence on young people’s decisions. Decades of socialist policies in which the government dispensed jobs to graduates created an ingrained mentality that education should automatically result in the government “giving” a job. Furthermore, this job should be non-manual and therefore carry a certain status and prestige. Even though it has been many years that the government’s ability to continue increasing the bureaucracy stopped, societal expectations of what is correct and expected have been much slower to change.

Therefore, the type of jobs desired and sought by the educated are increasingly scarce and contested but the pressures to secure a “proper job” have not abated. Findings from the PYS reveal that young people are still very solidly moved by a sense of their obligations and of doing what is expected of them. Given the pressures young people still face from society,

coupled with the dwindling pool of available jobs for the educated, the strategies for securing a job can easily turn aggressive and even fraudulent. Young people complain about the corruption surrounding the allotment of jobs but with so much at stake the PYS found that many, if given the chance, will not shy away from using these methods.

A related argument is that young people in Sri Lanka have a clear preference for government employment resulting primarily from societal pressures, and economic calculations. Is it true that young people still unequivocally favour state sector jobs? The National Youth Survey found that overall, 50% of respondents preferred government jobs. Similarly, the majority (43%) of PYS respondents also indicated that they preferred the government sector above all others. As in the NYS, in the PYS this inclination was much more distinct in the Northeast and in the rural areas. The reasons for this preference found in the PYS were in line with those that have been discussed before, such as security, stability, pension, and status. The NYS found a clear aversion of young people to the private sector considering its hiring practices as discriminatory. In the PYS this did not emerge as clearly. Criticism against the private sector were basically levelled at its instability. Favouritism, patronage and lack of transparency regarding hiring practices were seen primarily as a problem in the government sector.

The PYS went one step further to explore the career desires of young people. Trying to isolate the aspirations from the obligations, respondents were asked if they could choose any job, what would it be. When the question was asked differently, only a very small proportion (2.9%) reiterated that they would want a government job. The majority said they would see themselves in business or self-employment. These results suggest that young people are conditioned to prefer certain types of jobs in order to comply with expectations that are put on them, but when they are presented with a hypothetical situation in which they could choose, the government is not considered as a stimulating employment goal. It is probable that in the coming years the preference for state sector employment will decline. Society will have to relax its set concepts and expectations and young people will be more willing and eager to look at other options and employment avenues.

How do young people view their opportunities for development? Much of the literature contends that young people in Sri Lanka have been habituated to a system that excludes them as active participants in their development. That is, youth are involved merely as spectators or receivers. In addition, the Sri Lankan system has been characterised by a paternalistic bent that relies on handouts to reach people. Youth are not approached to be more actively involved and they have grown up in a society where government is expected to give and provide (most notably jobs). Therefore, it is argued, it is not surprising that young people wait hoping for opportunities to be offered to them rather than willingly become actively involved to create opportunities on their own. (Mayer 2002) Was this the attitude that emerged from the PYS? As with many questions that focus on social actors a response cannot be simple or straightforward. Some of the PYS findings point that young people still expect the government to fulfil certain obligations. For example some respondents were optimistic about their development provided that the government "gave" them a job. From this perspective their development is contingent on the government and outside of their control. However, other results from the PYS offer evidence that young people admire those with drive and personal determination. The examples of young people that moved out of poverty were only

about individuals who had achieved their goals by setting up businesses or studying hard. None argued that improving their economic situation had been achieved by government largesse. It is possible that the mentality of entitlement (I can develop and improve only if the government gives me what I am entitled to) is in a slow process of change.

On the topic of political participation the National Youth Survey had revealed two general trends. On the one hand a sense of political apathy among young people, and second alarmingly high levels of distrust in political institutions. This sense of distrust was also distilled in the PYS. A very clear majority expressed that they thought the political structures in Sri Lanka needed to change.

The literature on youth has established how the political game relies on gaining electoral power bases. This has encouraged politicians to seek out the youth vote. Since politicians need their vote, this might appear to put Sri Lankan youth in a position in which they can influence decisions and have their voice heard. In reality, politicians have played youth against each other promising dividends to supporters and excluding opponents. Youth must then barter their support and hope that they are in the winning camp to benefit (mostly through jobs). The frustration with this arrangement came out clearly in the PYS. Young people perceive the political rules as illegitimate and corrupt. Respondents explained how young people are only used during electoral times to capture votes. If a youngster supports the wrong candidate their opportunities diminish drastically. The clear sense of disgust with this system went along with a sense of resignation that this is the way it is done, and that youth have to play by those rules if they want to get ahead.

Political participation for young people in Sri Lanka is basically circumscribed to election times and even then it is seen as a method of manipulation, and not as a genuine avenue for political involvement. Other forms of participation in the public domain, apart from voting, are almost non-existent. It will be difficult for young people to have a larger role in politics if participation at lower levels, for example in youth organisations, is not better accepted and promoted. Studies have found youth organisations to be crucial in instilling young people with confidence in their ability to participate, and contributing to a healthy process of socialisation (Kuruppu and Renganathan). The PYS found participation in youth organisations low. Young people don't see these organisations as particularly relevant, they simply do not have the time or they are afraid of having a high profile.

It has often been argued that youth in Sri Lanka are prone to acquiesce with violent methods. The NYS found a relatively large acceptance of violence, with 31% agreeing that struggle leading to violence is a proper method of achieving demands. Similarly, in the PYS almost half, (46.8%) of all respondents indicated that violence is justified in cases of injustices, and 24% that it is justified in case of poverty.

Previous discussions have attempted to ascertain why so many young people condone violence and are even ready to become involved in violent rebellion. The answers in the literature have focused on expectations (of all types) that are continuously dashed against the reality of a very restricted opportunity environment. It has been said that in Sri Lanka violent responses have not been propelled by issues of basic survival but of unrealisable aspirations. Instead of actual deprivation it is deprivation relative to one's expectations. (Fernando 2002) Findings from the

PYS coincide that, to some degree, this volatility is the result of young people not being able to achieve what they thought they would. But the PYS also points that violence is seen as valid by young people, fundamentally, when faced with an arbitrary system. When youth feel they are being cheated of reaching their objectives, this is where they draw the line. It is perhaps not only dashed expectations that feed the acceptance of violence, but dashed expectations due to a system that is abusive and corrupt.

8.2 Differences among Sri Lankan Youth

The PYS sought to explore the viewpoints from Sri Lankan youth while recognising that such an undertaking necessarily simplifies what is a very complex picture. Youth are not a monolithic entity. They cannot be characterised by a single unit of values, attitudes or behaviours. In this sense the PYS sought, when relevant, to highlight differences among young people in different locales, with different educational levels, and among men and women. In fact, the PYS was methodologically constructed so that comparisons among youth living in conflict and non-conflict areas was easier to carry out.²⁴

One of the most important points that emerged from the PYS is the overwhelming importance placed on employment. Insecurities about not being able to secure a job came out repeatedly throughout the survey. This anxiety was found across the board. When asked what is the most important problem faced by young people, the most common response, by far, was 'lack of job opportunities.' This was practically the same in the conflict and non-conflict region. In relative terms, however, the concern was even more acute amongst the better educated. This, as discussed above, gives some credence to the thesis that it is educated youth who face a more competitive and hostile employment picture.

The preference for state sector employment was evident throughout the country. However this was much more intense in the conflict area, and to a lesser degree in the rural areas. It is possible that the view common in society that government employment is to be preferred and is more prestigious than a job in other sectors is still much more deep-rooted in village society. Whereas in the cities the process of modernisation has fostered a change in what is seen as desirable this is still in evidence in rural settings.

The PYS was interested in understanding how young people characterise poverty. What elements, according to them, define poverty? By and large, PYS respondents conceived poverty as a state of unemployment or job instability. Similarly, groups vulnerable to poverty were defined essentially as those who are either unemployed or are wage earners. Women were not seen as particularly more vulnerable than men. And more importantly, this assessment came also from young women themselves. In sum, for young people, joblessness, more than anything else (including gender, not having connections, caste, or ethnicity), determines poverty. Having a job is such an overriding concern that it appears other life opportunities are contingent on successfully securing a job. Not having a job, therefore, negatively affects the possibility to achieve the things that, as defined by the capability approach, young people have a reason to value.

²⁴ Please refer to Section 1.3: Methodology.

The perception of local opportunities to move out of poverty was almost identical in conflict and non-conflict areas but different in urban and rural areas. More young people in villages considered that opportunities to move out of poverty were readily available to them whereas in the cities the outlook was more negative. One manner to improve one's situation is to migrate. Likewise on this issue, young people in rural, urban, the South and North have similar views of it. The important discrepancy was among men and women, with many more men being amenable to the idea of migrating abroad. It is possible that women have become more sensitised to the drawbacks of migration particularly in terms of family unity.

The notion that avenues exist for young people to present their demands to the government was equivalent among the rural and urban divide. However, young people in the conflict zone were comparatively less convinced that they have ways to present their demands. This is not surprising as for Tamil youth the government is an entity that is not only physically far away but also Sinhala controlled.

The acceptance of violence in cases of injustice was high at 46% Young people, irrespective of where they live or what ethnicity they are have very similar viewpoints. Among men and women differences were found, with men being slightly more open to justifying violence.

Overall, differences between youth based on place of residence were less evident than what was expected. With a few exceptions, most notably government preference for jobs and avenues to present demands to the government, the response structures were quite similar among young people irrespective of whether they live in the conflict or non-conflict area. Likewise, in terms of the rural/ urban divide differences were not as readily apparent, although in general young people in cities are more pessimistic in terms of their job future and on the local opportunities available to move out of poverty. This might appear contradictory given that cities are usually seen as concentrating a majority of opportunities but young people seem to define opportunities as livelihood options and in this regard the rural area was considered to be more diversified.

8.3 Areas for Policy Focus

The findings from the PYS indicated a few areas that may be ripe for change and where policies could have more impact in the near future.

In terms of employment a trend that surfaced is that many young people see self-employment as a means of improving their economic situation. Young people appear to be disposed to see options, apart from government, as desirable. Entrepreneurship was perceived in a very positive light. Youth policies need to take advantage of this attitude. This entails a more determined drive to support young people's self-employment and business ventures. This should include, of course, opportunities for loans but also trainings that focus on helping young people succeed as entrepreneurs, with courses on administration, accounting, and leadership.

Young people's political involvement is basically restricted to election times. Having such a short window of opportunity to make themselves heard, contributes to a deep sense of malaise

and distrust. In addition the lack of outlets for political expression carry the implicit risk of young people adopting more radical postures. Young people need to be more thoroughly incorporated to decision-making structures at all moments to counter this and contribute to a healthier outlook on the political system and political participation. One manner to more naturally incorporate young people to politics is to give them the opportunities to participate in other forms of civic involvement such as youth organisations. Having this experience could make young people more ready and confident of their abilities to contribute to decision-making. It is therefore important that the National Youth Services Council continues to strongly support youth organisations throughout the country.

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Annex 1: Poverty and Youth Survey Questionnaires

Quantitative Questionnaire

1. Identification

- 1.1 Name of the Interviewer
- 1.2 Date of Interview
- 1.3 Name of Village or Town
- 1.4 D.S Division
- 1.5 District
- 1.6 Household composition *Clearly mark who is the respondent with an arrow*

| Relation to head of household | Age | Sex | In or out of school | Educational Attainment | Primary occupation |
|-------------------------------|-----|-----|---------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |

| | |
|--|-----------------------------|
| <p>1.7 What is the material of the walls?</p> <p>1 Mud</p> <p>2 Bricks/Cement Bricks</p> <p>3 Wood</p> <p>4 Cadjans</p> <p>5 Asbestos/Tiles</p> <p>6 Other</p> | <p>Do not ask, observe.</p> |
|--|-----------------------------|

| | |
|---|-----------------------------|
| <p>1.8 What is the material of the roof?</p> <p>1 Cadjans</p> <p>2 Tiles</p> <p>3 Asbestos</p> <p>4 Tin</p> <p>5 Other Do not ask observe</p> | <p>Do not ask, observe.</p> |
|---|-----------------------------|

| | |
|---|-----------------------------|
| <p>1.9 What is the material of the floor?</p> <p>1 Mud</p> <p>2 Cement</p> <p>3 Tiles</p> <p>4 Other Do not ask observe</p> | <p>Do not ask, observe.</p> |
|---|-----------------------------|

| | | |
|------|----------------------------------|--|
| 1.10 | Does your home have electricity? | |
| 1 | Yes | |
| 2 | No | |

| | | |
|------|------------------------------------|--|
| 1.11 | Is your family receiving Samurdhi? | |
| 1 | Yes | |
| 2 | No | |

2. Respondents Background

| | | |
|-----|------------------------------|---|
| 2.1 | What is your marital status? | If respondent is in school mark "Never married" do not ask. |
| 1 | Never married | |
| 2 | Currently married | |
| 3 | Divorced / separated | |
| 4 | Other | |

| | | |
|-----|-------------------------|--|
| 2.2 | What is your ethnicity? | |
| 1 | Sinhalese | |
| 2 | Sri Lankan Tamil | |
| 3 | Indian Tamil | |
| 4 | Muslim | |
| 5 | Burgher | |
| 6 | Malay | |
| 7 | Other, specify..... | |

| | | |
|-----|--|--|
| 2.3 | How long have you been staying at your present place of residence (years)? | |
| 1 | Less than 1 | |
| 2 | 1-4 | |
| 3 | 5-9 | |
| 4 | 10+ | |
| 5 | Same place all of my life | |

| | | |
|-----|--|---|
| 2.4 | What was your childhood residence? (Where did you live for the longest period when you were less than 15 years)? | If the person had more than one place of residence ask in which one they lived for the longest time. Large city: only metropolitan areas of Colombo, Kandy and Galle, |
| 1 | Large city | |
| 2 | Town | |
| 3 | Village | |
| 4 | Estate | |

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>2.5 What is your main activity currently? (What were you doing in the past two weeks)?</p> <p>1 Studying full time</p> <p>2 Working full time</p> <p>3 Studying part time</p> <p>4 Working part time</p> <p>5 Studying and Working</p> <p>6 Unemployed / waiting for a job</p> <p>7 Household work</p> <p>8 Other, specify.....</p> | <p>Do not prompt, do not read out the answers</p> |
|--|---|

3. Perceptions about Youth

I will now ask you some questions about youth in general

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>3.1 What is the age group you consider to be "youth"?</p> | <p>.....</p> |
| <p>3.2 In your opinion do you think Sri Lankan youth face problems?</p> <p>1 Yes</p> <p>2 No</p> | |
| <p>3.3 In your opinion do you think young women and young men face different problems?</p> <p>1 Yes</p> <p>2 No</p> <p>3 Don't Know</p> | |
| <p>3.4 How do you feel about your future?</p> <p>1 Optimistic</p> <p>2 Pessimistic</p> <p>3 Not sure</p> | |
| <p>3.5 Rank in order of importance the three most serious problems faced by youth</p> <p>1 Drinking</p> <p>2 Lack of Job Opportunities</p> <p>3 Deteriorating Moral Values</p> <p>4 Smoking</p> <p>5 Violence</p> <p>6 Lack of Mobility</p> <p>7 Poverty</p> <p>8 Lack of Educational opportunities</p> <p>9 Drugs</p> <p>10 Lack of dowry</p> <p>11 Corruption</p> <p>12 Ethnic related violence</p> <p>13 Other, specify.....</p> | <p>Let the respondent read the list from the card and choose the three he/she considers most important.</p> |

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>3.6 What do you think: Are young people doing enough on their own to overcome their problems?</p> <p>1 Yes 2 No 3 Don't Know</p> | |
|---|--|

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>3.7 What type of violence is most prevalent in your locality?</p> <p>1 Domestic violence 2 Violence against women 3 Youth unrest violence 4 Political / electoral violence 5 Ethnic related violence 6 Ragging 7 Land dispute violence 8 Gang violence 9 Interfamily violence 10 Other specify</p> | <p>11 There is no violence in my locality</p> <p>Only one should be selected. Do not read the list nor prompt, wait for response and then mark if one from the list was mentioned if not write in the other column and put "10"</p> |
|---|---|

4. Self- Perceptions on Poverty

The following questions will be on how you perceive poverty.

| | |
|--|----------------------|
| <p>4.1 What do you think is the minimum income per month that a four-member household needs to have to be above poverty?</p> | <p>In Rs. Amount</p> |
|--|----------------------|

| | |
|---|------------------------------|
| <p>4.2 In your opinion poverty in Sri Lanka is?</p> <p>1 Not serious 2 Somewhat serious 3 Very serious 4 Don't Know</p> | <p>Read out the options.</p> |
|---|------------------------------|

| | |
|---|------------------------------|
| <p>4.3 In your opinion poverty in your locality is?</p> <p>1 Not serious 2 Somewhat serious 3 Very serious 4 Don't Know</p> | <p>Read out the options.</p> |
|---|------------------------------|

| | |
|---|------------------------------|
| <p>4.4 Who do you think suffers more from poverty in your locality?</p> <p>1 Young Men 2 Young Women 3 Both suffer equally 4 Don't Know</p> | <p>Read out the options.</p> |
|---|------------------------------|

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>4.5 Are there any particular groups in your locality who suffer more from poverty?</p> <p>1 Yes 2 No 3 Don't Know</p> | <p>If answer is "No" or "Don't Know" skip to question 4.7</p> |
| <p>4.6 If yes, what particular groups do you think suffer more?</p> | <p>Groups not names of villages or localities are desired</p> <p>1..... 2.....</p> |
| <p>4.7 Currently are you dependent on others for your basic material needs?</p> <p>1 Yes 2 No</p> | |
| <p>4.8 Does anyone depend on you?</p> <p>1 Yes 2 No</p> | |
| <p>4.9 What is your assessment of your households' economic condition.</p> <p>1 High 2 Average 3 Low 4 Very Low</p> | |
| <p>4.10 During the last five years has the economic condition in your household,</p> <p>1 Improved 2 Worsened 3 Remained the same</p> | <p>Read out the options</p> |
| <p>4.11 In comparison to your parents do you think that your future economic condition will be,</p> <p>1 Better 2 Worse 3 The same 4 Don't know</p> | |
| <p>4.12 Have <u>you</u> made any attempts to improve your economic condition?</p> <p>1 Yes 2 No</p> | <p>If the answer is "No" skip to question 4.14</p> |
| <p>4.13 If yes, what have been these attempts? List a maximum of 3</p> | <p>1..... 2..... 3.....</p> |

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>4.14 Have you ever taken a loan?</p> <p>1 Yes</p> <p>2 No</p> | <p>If answer is “No” skip to question 4.16</p> |
| <p>4.15 If yes what did you use the money for?</p> <p>1 For education</p> <p>2 To pay off debts</p> <p>3 To start a small enterprise</p> <p>4 For consumption</p> <p>5 Other, Specify</p> | <p>Check as many as apply</p> |

5. Perceptions on Youth and Poverty

I will now ask you some questions on your general ideas regarding youth and poverty

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>5.1 If a youth is poor, rank the two main actors that are responsible to help uplift him/her out of poverty.</p> <p>1 Extended family</p> <p>2 Nuclear family</p> <p>3 Government / Politicians</p> <p>4 Private sector</p> <p>5 NGO's</p> <p>6 Himself / herself</p> <p>7 Community</p> <p>8 Other, specify,</p> | <p>Do not prompt, do not read out the options</p> |
| <p>5.2 Do you think poor youth themselves are doing enough to improve their living standards?</p> <p>1 Yes</p> <p>2 No</p> <p>3 Don't Know</p> <p>4 To some extent</p> | <p>Do not prompt, do not read out the options</p> |
| <p>5.3 Do you know of any young people that have successfully moved out of poverty through their own efforts?</p> <p>1 Yes</p> <p>2 No</p> | |
| <p>5.4 In your locality are there opportunities for youth to overcome poverty?</p> <p>1 Yes</p> <p>2 No</p> <p>3 Don't Know</p> | <p>If the answer is “No”, or “Don't Know” skip to question 5.8</p> |

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>5.5 If yes, can you give examples of these opportunities available for youth to overcome poverty?</p> | <p>List a maximum of 3 1..... 2..... 3.....</p> |
| <p>5.6 Have you been able to use any of these opportunities? 1 Yes 2 No</p> | |
| <p>5.7 What is the best strategy youth can use to move out of poverty? 1 Get a good education 2 Marry well 3 Have the right connections 4 Work hard 5 Start a small enterprise 6 Go out and protest 7 Migrate 8 Other, specify.....</p> | <p>Do not prompt do not read out the options.</p> |
| <p>5.8 Would you considered migrating to another part of Sri Lanka if there seemed to be better opportunities? 1 Yes 2 No 3 Not sure</p> | |
| <p>5.9 Would you consider migrating to another country if there seemed to be better opportunities? 1 Yes 2 No 3 Not sure</p> | |

6. Education and Employment

The following questions have to do with employment and educational opportunities.

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>6.1 Did you complete you're "A" levels? 1 Yes 2 No 3 Still studying</p> | <p>If answer is "Yes" or "still studying" skip to question 6.3</p> |
|---|--|

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>6.2 Why did you not continue studying?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Economic problems 2 Did not want to continue studying 3 Sickness 4 Got a job 5 Got married 6 Lack of access to quality education 7 Failure to pass examinations 8 Discrimination in school. 9 Other specify, | <p>Do not prompt; do not read out the options.</p> |
| <p>6.3 In comparison to other young people your age in your locality do you think your opportunities for employment in the future are,</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Better 2 Worse 3 The same 4 Don't know | |
| <p>6.4 In comparison to the opportunities your parents had do you think your opportunities for employment in the future will be,</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Better 2 Worse 3 The same 4 Don't know | |
| <p>6.5 In which two sectors would you most prefer to have a job?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Government Sector 2 Private Sector 3 Self- Employment 4 Free trade Zone 5 Other specify..... | <p>Read out the optionsAsk them to rank their first and second choice.</p> |
| <p>6.6 Have you considered engaging in self-employment?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Yes 2 No 3 I am self employed already | |
| <p>6.7 If you could have any job you wanted what would it be?</p> | <p>.....</p> |

7. Youth, Politics and Public Participation

The following questions deal with your ideas on politics and public participation

| | |
|---|----------------------|
| <p>7.1 Are you an active member of:</p> <p>1 Youth club/youth organisation</p> <p>2 School Club</p> <p>3 Microfinance group (Seeds, Sarvodaya, Sanasa, Samurdhi)</p> <p>4 Sittu Group</p> <p>5 Community Based Organisation (Farming, fishing funeral)</p> <p>6 Political party</p> <p>7 Women's Group</p> <p>8 Other, Specify.....</p> | <p>Yes</p> <p>No</p> |
| <p>7.2 Did you vote in the last general election of 2001?</p> <p>1 Yes</p> <p>2 No</p> <p>3 Was not eligible</p> | |
| <p>7.3 Do you think youth have proper avenues through which they can present their demands to the government?</p> <p>1 Yes</p> <p>2 No</p> <p>3 Don't Know</p> | |
| <p>7.4 In cases of extreme injustice do you think violent struggle is justified?</p> <p>1 Yes</p> <p>2 No</p> <p>3 Don't Know</p> | |
| <p>7.5 In cases of extreme poverty do you think violent struggle is justified?</p> <p>1 Yes</p> <p>2 No</p> <p>3 Don't Know</p> | |
| <p>7.6 What is your assessment of the law and order situation in your locality?</p> <p>1 Good</p> <p>2 Satisfactory</p> <p>3 Poor</p> | |
| <p>7.7 Do you think there is a need for a change of the political structures in Sri Lanka?</p> <p>1 Yes</p> <p>2 No</p> <p>3 Don't know</p> | |

Qualitative Questionnaire

Name of the Interviewer

Date of Interview

Name of Village or Town

D.S Division

District

Sex of respondent.....

Age of respondent.....

1. Perceptions on Youth

- 1.1 If someone is married do you still consider him/her a youth? Is it different for women and men?
- 1.2 In what household decisions do you participate? In what household decisions do you not participate?
- 1.3 In question 3.5 you chose three serious problems faced by youth. Why do you consider these to be serious?
- 1.4 Do you think there are problems specific only to young women and problems specific only to young men? If yes which ones?
- 1.5 What would you like to achieve in life? Which circumstances would be necessary to achieve it?

2. Perceptions of Poverty

- 2.1 Do you think poverty is a condition that is inescapable or can youth find ways to move out of poverty? Explain your answer.
- 2.2 In question 4.3 you said that the level of seriousness of poverty in your locality is Why do you think this is so?
- 2.3 Comparing your locality to the rest of the country do you think the level of poverty is more or less than in other parts of Sri Lanka? Why?
- 2.4 In reference to question 4.4, if you said that either young men or young women suffer more from poverty, why do you think so?

- 2.5 How would you know (how would you identify) when a family is poor?
- 2.6 Many people see low income as the main cause of poverty. What do you think, are there other causes that make a family poor? Which ones?
- 2.7 In general in Sri Lanka what or whom, if anything, do you think obstructs young people from overcoming their poverty?
- 2.8 Do you know of any institutions, organisation or persons working for the interests of young people? If yes, which ones and what do you think of them?
- 2.9 What is the role of government/politicians in working for the interests of young people?
- 2.10 What do you think of young people that migrate to other countries searching for work? Would you be willing to migrate to another country for work? Why or why not.
- 2.11 Do you think young people put enough effort into improving their life situation? Why or why not?
- 2.12 How would you rate your personal capacity to improve your life situation in the future?
- 2.13 In relation to question 5.4, if you do know of any examples of young people that moved out of poverty through their own efforts, can you tell us: What did they do and how did they do it? What do you think of them?

3. Employment and Education

- 3.1 What is the minimum educational attainment a young person needs to make a decent living?
- 3.2 What do you think of the educational system in preparing youth to find employment in the job market today?
- 3.3 Given the choice do you think youth prefer to be unemployed or take a job that is below their qualifications?
- 3.4 What do you think are the characteristics of a good job?
- 3.5 In question 6.5 you mentioned you would prefer employment in the sector. Why would you prefer employment in this sector? Would you consider employment in other sectors? If yes, which ones and why?
- 3.6 What must one do as a young person today to find employment?

4. Civic and Political Participation

- 4.1 In reference to question 7.1, if you are engaged in any of the community organisations please explain what kind of activities your organisation does and what is your personal involvement.
- 4.2 If you are not a member of any community organisations or are not actively involved in any of their activities. Why not?
- 4.3 In your locality what are the reasons that young people come together and do something as a group?
- 4.4 In these organisations do both young women and young men participate. If not why do you think so?
- 4.5 How do you think youth could be more active in assisting other members of their community? How?
- 4.6 Do you think young people today have good opportunities to have an influence on politics? Why or why not?
- 4.7 How important do you think it is for youth to be involved in politics?
- 4.8 Describe the type of options youth in your locality have for political participation.

5. War and Violence

- 5.1 In what cases, if any, do you think it might be acceptable to use violence?
- 5.2 Are there cases when violence resulting from extreme poverty is justified? If yes what cases and why?
- 5.3 Have you ever witnessed cases of violence that you think could be related to poverty? Please explain.
- 5.4 If the war in the North East comes to an end do you think this will affect young people in your locality? How?

Annex 2: Location of Sampled Census Blocks

| District | DS Division | GN Division |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Non-Conflict Region | | |
| Colombo | Colombo | Grandpass South |
| Colombo | Colombo | Grandpass South |
| Colombo | Moratuwa | Egoda Uyana North |
| Colombo | Moratuwa | Egoda Uyana North |
| Colombo | Dehiwela-Mt. Lavinia | Ward No. 04 Kalubovila |
| Colombo | Dehiwela-Mt. Lavinia | Ward No. 04 Kalubovila |
| Matara | Thihagoda | Komangoda 2 |
| Matara | Thihagoda | Komangoda 2 |
| Hambantota | Weeraketiya | Muruthawela Pahala |
| Hambantota | Weeraketiya | Muruthawela Pahala |
| Badulla | Haldummulla | Moraketiya |
| Badulla | Haldummulla | Moraketiya |
| Galle | Bentota | Gonagalapura |
| Galle | Bentota | Gonagalapura |
| Galle | Nagoda | Udugama South |
| Galle | Nagoda | Udugama South |
| Anuradhapura | Kekirawa | Pothanegama |
| Anuradhapura | Kekirawa | Pothanegama |
| Gampaha | Kelaniya | Kiribathgoda |
| Gampaha | Kelaniya | Kiribathgoda |
| Matara | Pasgoda | Ginnaliya South |
| Matara | Pasgoda | Ginnaliya South |
| Kandy | Yatinuwara | Haliyadda |
| Kandy | Yatinuwara | Haliyadda |
| Conflict Region | | |
| Vavuniya | Vavuniya | Pattanichchippuliyankulam |
| Vavuniya | Vavuniya | Pattanichchippuliyankulam |
| Ampara | Dehiattakandiya | Selasumgama |
| Ampara | Dehiattakandiya | Selasumgama |
| Ampara | Kalmunai | Senaikudiyiruppu 01 |
| Ampara | Kalmunai | Senaikudiyiruppu 01 |
| Batticaloa | Manmunai South and Eruvilpattu | Eruvil South |
| Batticaloa | Manmunai South and Eruvilpattu | Eruvil South |
| Batticaloa | Koralai Pattu North | Punaanai East |
| Batticaloa | Koralai Pattu North | Punaanai East |

Annex 3: Statistical Tests

Statistical techniques are used to analyse data. Certain techniques allow for the exploration of the relationship among variables. Others permit to explore differences among groups. Which one is used depends on the type of research questions, and the nature of the data itself. What are known as non-parametric statistical techniques are more suited for the PYS purposes. (Pallant 2001).

1. Non-parametric techniques

These tests do not have as stringent assumptions as parametric statistics. They are also less powerful and might fail to detect differences between groups, that actually do exist. Non-parametric techniques are ideal when most of the data is measured in categorical or rank scales. They are also advisable with small samples and when you do not know whether the population follows a normal distribution. (Pallant 2001). Within non parametric techniques the most useful for our purposes are the Mann Whitney Test and the Chi square for Independence.

2. Mann Whitney U Test.

This technique allows to explore differences between two independent groups on a continuous measure. The Mann Whitney test compares medians. It converts the scores on the continuous variable to ranks across the two groups. It then evaluates whether the ranks for the two groups differ significantly. For this test two variables are needed: one categorical, and one continuous.

Research Question 1

Do young people in cities and urban areas differ in terms of their educational levels?

| | Education continuous |
|--|----------------------|
| Mann-Whitney U | 8047.000 |
| Wilcoxon W | 9938.000 |
| Z | -.874 |
| Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) (probability value) | .382 |

a Grouping Variable: Rural/Urban

- Null hypothesis: There will be no difference in the educational level of youngsters in cities or rural areas.
- Alternative hypothesis: There will be a difference in the educational level of youngsters in cities or rural areas.

The null hypothesis is accepted if the probability value p is not less than or equal to .05.

In this case $.382 > .05$ so the null hypothesis is accepted.

In other words, there is no statistically significant difference in education level scores of young people in urban and rural areas.

Research Question 2

Do men and women differ in terms of their perceptions on the minimum income required by a family of 4 to be above poverty?

| Minimum income per month | |
|---------------------------------|-----------|
| Mann-Whitney U | 12223.000 |
| Wilcoxon W | 30751.000 |
| Z | -2.316 |
| Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) | .021 |

a Grouping Variable: Sex

- Null hypothesis: There will be no difference in the perceived minimum income to be above poverty between men and women.
- Alternative hypothesis: There will be a difference in the perceived minimum income to be above poverty between men and women.

In this case $.021 < .05$ so the null hypothesis is rejected.

There is a statistically significant difference between men and women on their perceptions of the required income for a family to be above poverty.

Research Question 3

Do youth in the conflict and non-conflict areas differ in terms of their perceptions on the minimum income required by a family of 4 to be above poverty?

| Minimum income per month | |
|---------------------------------|-----------|
| Mann-Whitney U | 10014.000 |
| Wilcoxon W | 15064.000 |
| Z | -2.469 |
| Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) | .014 |

a Grouping Variable: Conflict/Non Conflict

- Null hypothesis: There will be no difference in the perceived minimum income to be above poverty between young people in the conflict and non-conflict areas.
- Alternative hypothesis: There will be a difference in the perceived minimum income to be above poverty between young people in the conflict and non-conflict areas.

In this case $.014 < .05$ so the null hypothesis is rejected.

There is a statistically significant difference between young people in the conflict and non-conflict areas on their perceptions of the required income for a family to be above poverty.

Research Question 4

Do youth in the rural and urban areas differ in terms of their perceptions on the minimum income required by a family of 4 to be above poverty?

| Minimum income per month | |
|--------------------------|-----------|
| Mann-Whitney U | 5030.500 |
| Wilcoxon W | 44370.500 |
| Z | -5.055 |
| Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 |

a Grouping Variable: Rural/Urban

- Null hypothesis: There will be no difference in the perceived minimum income to be above poverty between young people in the rural and urban areas.
- Alternative hypothesis: There will be a difference in the perceived minimum income to be above poverty between young people in rural and urban areas.

In this case $.00 < .05$ so the null hypothesis is rejected.

There is a statistically significant difference between young people in the urban and rural areas on their perceptions of the required income for a family to be above poverty.

3. Chi Square Test.

Chi square allows to explore relationships among variables.

In chi square test a “null hypothesis” is established and the test informs whether to reject it or accept it. The null hypothesis says that there is no relationship between the variables (i.e., that they are statistically independent) and that any difference is just due to random sampling error. If we reject the null hypothesis, then there is support to the hypothesis that there is a real relationship between the variables. For this test you need two categorical variables with two or more categories in each.

The main values of interest from the chi square tables is the Pearson chi square value. To be significant this value needs to be $.05$ or smaller. When it is $.05$ or smaller it recommends rejecting the null hypothesis (that there is no relationship among the variables.)

Research Question 5

Is there a relationship between place of residence (rural/urban) and perceptions on availability of opportunities for youth?

| | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|------------------------------|-------|----|-----------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 7.451 | 2 | .024 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 5.672 | 2 | .059 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 1.273 | 1 | .259 |
| N of Valid Cases | 346 | | |

a 1 cells (16.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.76.

The Pearson chi square value is .024 which is smaller than .05. Therefore we can establish that the proportion of youth in the urban area that say that there are no opportunities is significantly different from the proportion of youth that say that there are no opportunities in the rural area.

| | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|------------------------------|-------|----|-----------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 1.832 | 2 | .400 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 2.214 | 2 | .331 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | .636 | 1 | .425 |
| N of Valid Cases | 346 | | |

a 1 cells (16.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.89.

Research Question 6

Is there a relationship between place of residence (conflict/ non-conflict) and perceptions on availability of opportunities for youth?

The Pearson value is larger than the alpha value of .05. This implies that there is no relationship among residence in the conflict or non-conflict area and perceptions of opportunities.

| | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|------------------------------|--------|----|-----------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 21.118 | 4 | .000 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 22.617 | 4 | .000 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 3.804 | 1 | .051 |
| N of Valid Cases | 345 | | |

a 1 cells (10.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.06.

Research Question 7

Is there a relationship between place of residence in conflict or non-conflict areas and expressed preference for sector of employment?

The Pearson chi square value is .000 which is smaller than .05. Therefore we can establish that the proportion of youth in conflict and non-conflict areas that express an employment preference for the government sector is significantly different.

Research Question 8

Is there a relationship between place of residence in rural or urban areas and expressed preference for sector of employment?

| | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|------------------------------|-------|----|-----------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 6.595 | 4 | .159 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 6.157 | 4 | .188 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 3.362 | 1 | .067 |
| N of Valid Cases | 345 | | |

a. 2 cells (20.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.43.

The Pearson chi square value is .159, which is larger than .05. Therefore we can establish that the proportion of youth in rural and urban areas that express an employment preference for the government sector is not significantly different.